Language Teacher Candidates' Self-Assessment Process for Teaching to Young Learners in EFL Classes

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ABSTRACT

Teaching a foreign language to young learners have some differences from teaching adults. Young children have concentration problems and they tend to change their mood every ten minutes and need more creative activities than adults. Therefore, foreign language teachers have to choose interesting activities for them and foreign language teacher candidates should learn the correct methods and techniques during their training period. Although some teacher candidates think the solution for training is simply to get all theoretical knowledge, some of them think that solution lies in encouraging the teacher candidates to create their own activities. This descriptive action research paper arises of a quantitative study the purpose of which is to seek the process of ELT students' development and reflection on teaching English to children. In order to find out language teacher candidates' ideas about how they improve themselves, five-point Likert scale was prepared. Data collection was achieved by giving the same questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the term at One State University, ELT students in the academic year 2015–2016. 16 male and 32 female students answered the questionnaire. The data were analysed using factor analyses and Levene Test. Findings were examined and some suggestions that focused on language teacher training candidates were put forward.

Key Words: ELT, self-assessment, reflection, teaching English to young learners.

1. Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language has gained a great importance in not only primary school but also pre-school settings. The expansion of language teaching has caused foreign language teachers to prepare a new curriculum and materials and they start asking the question how they can teach better for young learners. Before defining the best methods and techniques and proving different examples of how it can be, it looks important to explain some principles of young learners' language learning and what kind of activities may be effective for them in EFL settings.

Language teaching at early ages involves a lot of problems such as unconscious parents, insufficiently trained language teachers and unsuitable classroom atmosphere, as a result, degeneration of language system and high level of failure due to the lack of material may occur easily. (Kholowa& Rose, 2007). Studies in many countries show that qualified early age institutions, structures and processes on cognitive and social development may enhance the children's language awareness. (Arnett, 1989).

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Some psychologists and linguists such as Piaget (1955), Vygotsky (1962) and Krashen (1981) declare that children can learn better when they are involved in the activities and they prefer being active participants rather than passive language learners. They always learn by touching, doing group works and interacting with their friends. Bruner (1983) discusses good scaffolding in EFL classes and thinks that by the help of their parents children can transfer what they had learnt into the class and these routines may enhance their meaningful language development. Linfors (1987) accepts this idea and thinks that not only language learning but also language acquisition contain the cognitive work of creation and need different methods to activate them in terms of the classroom context. Scott &Ytreberg (2010, p.2) explain the general characteristics of young learners and imply that they can understand new items by using body language, playing with their friends and their ardour leads them into active participants.Nunan (1989) indicates that young learners need more task-based and communicative activities. Pinter (2009) points out that young learners try to discover everything around them and they do not want to get involved in activities when they arebored. On the other hand, their language learning environment should be familiar and enjoyable for them. Different kinds of posters, animal pictures, maps and pupils' drawings should be on the language classroom's walls. Roth (1988) supports this idea and declares that action games, songs and visual materials are crucial factors for young learners. Game is a natural way of learning a foreign language and contributes to their cognitive development. Game which is a motivating and challenging tool in EFL classes provides real communication and gives a chance to practice in all four skills. (Ersöz, 2000, Kim, 1995). Doff (1993) mentions the importance of visual aids in EFL classes and implies that teachers should try to use new and effective techniques. Moon (2000) accepts this idea and thinks that children can learn by repeating, interacting with each other and joining the activities. Wright et al (2007) emphasize the role of activities for children and tell that games create real atmosphere and provide repeated actions which make the language learning funnier. Foreign language teachers usually face the problems of how they motivate their students and which method can be better in EFL classes. Teachers of English invest many hours in preparing different materials, yet it is one of the areas that most teachers hesitate to select the proper ones.

Young learners may develop their ears by listening to songs and working with rhymes. Vale &Feuntueun (2002, p.21) accept the importance of surroundings for language learning and explain that comfortable and lovely learning environment supports easy language learning and lowers the high effective filter. Furthermore, the language learners, especially shy children, share their ideas with their friend in this lively atmosphere. Cameron (2009), Rixon (2001) describe the children as active learners and say that they only want to be involved the action games, tasks and communicative activities which involve learning, producing, interacting and understanding of the target language. Pinter (2006) suggests more informal contexts for young learners because they can learn in an informal environment by doing group work and peer group correction. Harmer (1988), Klein (1993) note that young learners have concentration problems and they can change their mood every ten minutes so they need extremely vivid atmosphere which makes them feel curiosity and enthusiasm for learning a foreign language. McKay (2008) and Pye (1988) explain the individual differences of young learners and add that every child has their own interests, likes and dislikes so language teachers should organize their activities according to the students' features. They should choose effective tasks which bring the real world into the class and develop young learners' social, emotional and cognitive parts. When young learners are learning a foreign language, they face problems such as de- motivation and not being able to understand the strict grammar rules. Moreover, some children suffer from an

unnatural surrounding. As a language teacher, it is easy to find an effective way to help the young learners overcome these problems by using visual aids, illustrations and authentic materials. Visual aids also offer the young learners unfamiliar cultural aspects. The language teachers can be called as the adult learners at the same time so they need motivational strategies in different class atmosphere. Mckay& Tom (2005, p.2) indicate that adults bring their background knowledge and experience into the class; therefore, before motivating young language learners, young adult language teachers should be ready, enthusiastic and goal-oriented for better teaching. Considering the needs of the adult language learners, it seems clear that language teacher candidates will need much encouragement to prepare the tasks, to create real atmosphere, to make good relationships with young learners and to establish confidence in using the various activities in EFL classes. They also need a professional hand if they are to make better leadership during class period. Randall & Thornton (2001, p.63) argue that the lecturers studying at teacher training departments should emerge the language teacher candidates as an autonomous professional at the end of a training programme. They should also help their students discover, explore and present various ideas in order to create vivid atmosphere in the class.Mckay& Tom (2007, p.4) indicate that adult learners need special effort in order to be successful.If the lecturers in EFL classes provide a supportive teaching atmosphere and give them regular feedback, they can develop new teaching startegies.

2. Method

This descriptive action research paper arises of a quantitative study the purpose of which is to seek the process of ELT students' development and reflection on teaching English to children course. The main aim is to understand what the language teacher candidates think about their improvement and teaching for children. This study is an example of one group pre-test, post-test design. As Nunan (2005) mentions, this design is suitable for classroom teaching procedures. The following research question was posed by the researcher;

- What are the contributions of' Teaching English to Young Learners' course to language teacher candidates?

  The research question was formulated as three research questions;

- Is there a significant difference between their ideas before and after the course implementations?

- Is there a significant difference of language teacher candidates' knowledge of methods and techniques about young learners before and after the course implementations?

- Is there a significant difference of language teacher candidates' ideas about young learners needs before and after the implementation?

2.1. Data Collection

In order to find out language teacher candidates' ideas about how they improve themselves, a five – point Likert scale was prepared in this study. It was labelled 'agree strongly, agree somewhat, neutral, disagree somewhat and disagree strongly' It contained 15 questions. The questions were given to the students who were getting 'teaching English to young learner' lessons as a pre test. After the factor analysis, questions 11 and 13 were elected. The variance ratio was 63. After the first application, the questions were categorised as follows for the purpose of the study. Questions 1,2,3,4,5,14 were categorised for cognitive level development and the reliability of these questions was .59, questions 6, 7 for young learners' needs, and the reliability of them was .77, questions 8,9,10 for methods and techniques and the reliability was .58. 12, 15 questions for methods and techniques and the reliability of them was .48.

2.2. Data Analysis

The original questionnaire was composed of 15 items and 4 items were selected after the factor analyses. For the quantitative analysis of the present study Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 13.0 was used. Data collection was achieved by giving the same questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the term at One State University, ELT Department in the academic year 2015–2016. 16 male and 32 female students answered the questionnaire because ELT Departments usually have female students; most of the participants were female. They got 'teaching English to young learners' lesson for four hours in a week. They were trained to be language teachers for very young learners. The 'before 'and 'after 'data were taken from the same students taking the mentioned course which lasted for 4 months. During four months period, activities, songs, games, various presentations and task-based approach were given as homework and they presented them in the class. After the application, the questionnaire was administered to the same participants whether there had been any changes of their ideas about teaching improvement. The data were analysed using Levene Test. It was used to test if samples have equal variance. The scale of the study was examined both its reliability and validity. After the factor analysis, it was found that the variance for these scores were 63 and reliability was .7366. According to Hair et al (1988, p.99), if the measure of sampling adequacy level is 80, it can be accepted as very good, if it is over 70, it can be accepted as good and over 60, it can be accepted as partly good so this score can be accepted as statistically.

3. Findings

The problem of the study is whether there is a significant difference between the pre-questionnaire and post –questionnaire for ELT students. Thus, at the beginning of the training program, a questionnaire was given to the 3rd grade students groups in order to analyse the questionnaire's items. First, factor analysis was used in order to investigate the factor structure of the data. The questionnaire was factor analysed using the Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. After Varimax rotation, the Eigen values were 28.193, 21.409, 13.482 and the factors accounted for 63.083 of the variance. As it can be seen in Table 1, items loading were divided into three groups. Items loading on factor 1 defined cognitive improvement of the teacher candidates, factor 2 defined methods and techniques of teaching English for young learners and factor 3 defined student-centre activities.

Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix of the Items: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

	Component		
	1	2	3
Question 1	,849		
Question 2	,768		
Question 3	,747		
Question 4	,702		
Question 5	,549		
Question 14	,545		
Question 9		,857	
Question 10		,749	
Question 8		,742	
Question 6			,815
Question 7			,714

The questionnaire was also submitted to reliability test. Total reliabilities for the items loading on 3 factors were .7366. 1st factor reliability was .5925, 2nd factor was .7764 and 3rd factor was .5839. After the factor analysis, teaching period started. Language teacher candidates were trained for four months in English language classes for young learners which included student-centre activities, different methods and techniques related to language teaching for young learners, task –based activities, variety of games and songs which aimed to teach language. Finally, the questionnaire included 11 statements were given to the same students as a post-questionnaire. Pre-test and Post-test statistical results were calculated by the application of "Levene -Test". In order to find out whether there was a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test, the "paired samples t-test" was done.

The results of the first statements which contain that they can demonstrate their talents during their teaching period, they can demonstrate their individual performance, they can communicate well as a language teacher candidate, they can show tolerance and flexibility, they can learn from their students and they need to learn a lot of things about how to teach children. Scores belonging to both pre-test and post-test are shown in Table 2.

Research Question 1: Is there a statistically significant difference between their ideas before and after the course implementation?

Table 2: First group statements' paired sample test results

Test	Mean	SD	df	t	P*
Pre-test	3.04	.49	47	-12.923	.000
Post-test	4.14	.36			

*p<0.05

As can be observed from the Table 2, which shows the pre and post-test results, there is a significant difference between two tests.

Table 3 shows the results of the second statement groups test scores which include the statements that they understand the differences of children's learning styles easily, they can demonstrate a willingness to create different activities for children and they know the techniques which can be used in language classrooms.

Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant difference of language teacher candidates' knowledge of methods and techniques about how young language learners learn better before and after the course implementation?

Table 3: Second group statements' paired sample test results

Test	Mean	SD	df	t	P*
Pre-test	3.27	.64	47	-9.641	.000
Post-test	4.38	.47			

*p<0.05

The scores in Table 3 show that there is a significant difference between the pre and post- tests scores.

As demonstrated in Table 3, language teacher candidates learned methods and techniques for language teaching.

Table 4 illustrates the results of third statement groups test scores which involve that they know the needs of the children very well and they are critical and analytical teacher candidate so they solve all language problems of the children

Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant difference of language teacher candidates' ideas about young language learners 'needs before and after the course implementation.

Table 4: Third group questions' paired sample test results

Test	Mean	SD	df	t	P*
Pre-test	2.96	.51	47	-8.088	.000
Post-test	4.00	.65			

*p<0.05

Table 4 explains that there is a significant difference between pre and post tests.

Table 5 presents the summary of the scores on pre and post-tests and answers the main research question.

Main Research Question: What are the contributions of' Teaching English to Young Learners' course to language teacher candidates?

Table 5: Total score results of pre and post- test.

Test	Mean	SD	df	t	P*
Pre-test	3.09	.41	47	-13.958	.000
Post-test	4.18	.37			

*p<0.05

As can be seen from Table 5, the total statistical analysis of the mean score shows that there is a significant difference between pre and post tests totally.

To sum up all the research questions, it can be seen that language teacher candidates have improved their teaching skills, learned new methods and techniques for them during 'Teaching English to Young Learners' course. Paired sample test used in this study analysed the situation before the study and the changes after the study clearly (Creswell, 2012).Language teacher candidates evaluated themselves and it helped them realize their abilities.Dickinson (1987) explains the importance of self-assesment as a good guidance O'Malley &Chamot (1990) add that self-assesment can also support language teacher candidates' future learning and teaching.

4. Conclusion

Results obtained from the questionnaire indicated that using different kinds of methods, activities, creating materials in class enabled language teacher candidates to be more independent, to evaluate their own improvement.1st group statements revealed that language teacher candidates improved their cognitive level which focuses on thoughts, expectations and exploring the world. 2nd group

statements explained that they had limited knowledge of teaching English to young learners at the beginning period and then they learned the methods and techniques which are related to teaching English for young learners better and 3rd group statements clarified that language teacher candidates had gained sufficient knowledge about children's psychology, needs and student-centre activities.

Moreover, the results showed that the participants felt more confident in teaching English to young learners when they had enough knowledge. They also learned their capability, talent, and increased their tolerance, teaching awareness and flexibility as a young language teacher candidates. It should be born in mind that language teaching is an active and living process so the language teacher candidates need to have more information about the students' interests and try to develop better programs which suit the needs of the young learners.

In conclusion, it can be stated that language teacher educators at ELT departments should help their students be equipped with the knowledge of methods, integrated skills, children's needs and psychology. In addition, language teacher educators should try to teach not only new techniques but they should try to understand how their students feel, they also should allow language teacher candidates to become more responsible for their own improvement. It can be said that various implementations, activities, tasks and games which the language teacher candidates may benefit should be added to the program.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the results of the study are limited to the data collected due to a questionnaire designed by the researcher. Thus, further studies may contain more questions to find out better scores. In spite of its limitation, this research study makes contribution to ELT departments' program development in general.

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