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Impact of a PhD ELT program on academic development of students at a Turkish state university

Recep Bilican¹

Aksaray University, Turkey

Abstract

A doctoral program is a lengthy process lasting at least four years which requires students having a great deal of commitment and perseverance to acquire the intended and unintended learning outcomes for the sake of being competent researchers. However, there has not been any attempt as a scientific inquiry into evaluation of any ELT PhD program in Turkish context. To fill this research gap, the present study was conducted to evaluate the ELT PhD program at a Turkish state university with an explicit focus on its learning outcomes. To do so, a questionnaire was administrated to 24 students and a focus group interview was conducted by 7 students. According to the results of the study, the program was perceived to be successful in developing analytical and critical thinking skills in conducting research. It was also found out that more comprehensive course materials, and more timely and intensive feedback should be provided by the course instructors for the improvement of the program.

Keywords: *Learning outcomes, program evaluation, scientific inquiry, program improvement.*

¹ Instructor of English, Aksaray University, Turkey. **Email:** recbil2000@yahoo.com

Introduction

Doctoral studies can be considered as the last stage of formal education whose primary purpose is to educate future academicians and scientists by providing them opportunities to acquire necessary research skills and theoretical background. Although graduates of PhD programs taking various positions at different universities might be accepted as indicators of success of these programs, there is still need for a systematic and scientific inquiry into the evaluation of the programs. Owen (1999) asserts that we need evaluative inquiry to be able to improve and repeat the success of the program somewhere else.

No matter how established a defined ongoing program is, it may still have weaknesses, in addition to its strengths. The program stakeholders such as students, course instructors, policy makers, beneficiaries, and internal and external evaluators may take direct or indirect evaluative roles in making constructive contributions to the overall impression of an ongoing program. For example, students receive the curriculum of a program and they may have various impacts on it. The feedback from students may give some ideas to the teachers about how the content and the instruction of the content should be changed (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2007).

When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that there is a number of program evaluation studies in Turkish context, but these studies focus on the curriculum and curriculum changes of English Language Teaching programs (Coşkun & Daloğlu, 2010; Karataş & Fer, 2009; Topkaya & Küçük, 2010; Yavuz & Topkaya, 2013). The number of studies regarding evaluations of post-graduate ELT programs is limited. The doctoral study done by Kırmızı (2011) focuses on evaluations of MA ELT programs in Turkey. In another study, Kanatlar (1996) measured the success of MA TEFL program at Bilkent University. Up to now, evaluation of ELT PhD programs has not been researched satisfactorily from any perspective.

The constituents of a PhD program are description, content, instruction and resources as well as staff. Whether the program outcomes stated in program descriptions are achieved or not can be identified systematically through a monitoring analysis or/and an impact analysis. Owen (1999) clarifies that whether the delivery of articulated program plans are on-track or not can be checked with monitoring evaluation. Impact evaluation focuses on both the outcome and implementation elements of the program.

Literature review

In this part, operational definitions of the constructs used in the study will be clarified. As Nunan and Bailey (2009) assert, doing literature review can provide clear operational definitions of key terms and appropriate ways to operationalize constructs important in a study. Moreover, the previous studies are included to identify the research gaps. The first sub-heading is curriculum due to the fact that the core component of an educational program is its curriculum and a change in a program usually starts with inclusion or exclusion of some courses to that program.

Curriculum and curriculum evaluation

A curriculum is one of the core components of an educational program. Baskan and Özcan (2011) define curriculum as a hilltop since it gives various necessary information such as the subjects to be taught, the sequence of topics, objectives for the students, the materials, and the assessment. Curriculum also refers to an overall plan or design for a course (Richards, 2010). Fraser and Bosanquet (2007) put curriculum into four categories. In the first category, curriculum is conceptualised as a product that can be defined and then recorded on paper. In another category, it is evaluated as a process. The last category views it as a dynamic and collaborative process.

Levine (2002) bases his explanations of curriculum on different paradigms which provides us with understanding the concept of curriculum from various perspectives. A curriculum is considered as a fixed product in positivism. In this sense, students and teachers are to follow the pre-selected programs that are regulated into a rigid and explicit structure. Constructivism conceptualizes curriculum as a dynamic and creative process in which the curriculum is designed situationally. When the curriculum is depended on the social constructivist view, it is seen as an evolving process that provides teachers and students with an opportunity of personal and cultural growth (Levine, 2002).

There are three main dimensions in construction of a curriculum as follows: input, process, and output. The linguistic content of a course constitutes input which is later on transformed into a syllabus, teachable and learnable units. Process is related to consideration of how a syllabus is put into practice in terms of learning activities, teachers' techniques, teaching principles, designing of the activities in the textbooks. So, the process focuses on methodology. Lastly, output of a curriculum refers to learning outcomes that learners are expected to do as a result of input and process (Richards, 2010).

Curriculum evaluation might be basically seen as a process of determination of achievement of curriculum objectives. However, evaluation also relates to other curricular components such as instructional materials, sequence of content, students' needs, and variety of teachers' instructions. The ideal, the planned, and the taught, and the tested curriculums are compared during the evaluation process. When there is a high degree of coincidence between the official written curriculum and the experienced one, it can be claimed that the curriculum has high quality (Levine, 2002).

Components of a curriculum and curriculum evaluation have been explained so far as the basis for understanding 'program' as an encapsulating term. The next part deals with drawing the scope of program and program evaluation as a promising research area.

Program and program evaluation

A program refers to a series of courses integrated to produce common goals. A language education program offers a set of lessons designed to prepare students for some language-related situations. The intended aim for the participants of a program might be to pass an exam, or to gain an entrance to another program of study (Lynch, 1996). Each

program promises to have its followers gain some skills and qualifications. To be able to accomplish the stated common goal or goals, the whole process is broken into related small steps that are to be taken in different courses by a number of teachers. A commission is needed to design the framework of the program. Preliminary stages such as needs analysis and context analysis are vital for comprehensiveness, appropriateness and effectiveness of a program. For the maintenance and continuation of a program, it needs to be evaluated in a systematic way.

Evaluation means producing knowledge based on systematic inquiry to assist in making decisions about a program (Owen, 1999). Evaluation is also a judgemental activity which is done systematically through gathering information from a wide range of sources (Lynch, 1996). It is clear here that at the end of evaluation, there will be a decision or decisions about the object evaluated. It can be argued that evaluation of an educational program or a project is such a process that causes some kind of challenges and responsibilities and require a considerable amount of expertise and systematic planning (Cranton & Legge, 1978). On the other hand, Beretta (1986) draws our attention to the realities of classroom life for evaluation. He claims that evaluation is applied research which is done in the classroom with students and must confront the real world conditions. It means that evaluation is a phenomenon that are to be done to monitor what is really happening in the classroom in terms of teaching and learning activities.

Patton (1997, cited in Watanabe & Pang, 2007) defines program evaluation as the systematic collection of information about characteristics and end products of programs to improve effectiveness and inform decisions about future programming. Stufflebeam (2003, p. 31) draws another framework for evaluation based on his model CIPP as follows:

Evaluation is the process of delineating, obtaining, providing, and applying descriptive and judgemental information about the merit and worth of some object's goals, design, implementation, and outcomes to guide improvement decisions, provide accountability reports, inform institutionalisation/ dissemination decisions, and improve understanding of the involved phenomena.

It can be concluded that there is a consensus on the characteristics of program evaluation. It must be judgemental, systematic, and based on data collection through different sources, to make decisions on components of the program for increasing its effectiveness. Another point to take into account is how to approach evaluation.

There are obviously two types of evaluation. Formative evaluation is conducted during the operation of a program or project in order to assist in its development and improvement (Cranton & Legge, 1978). Bits of information are collected through different data collection methods. The aim is to get instant and immediate feedback from learners, teachers and managers during the process about the quality of the program that will result in cumulative information for the improvement of the program. Summative evaluation is conducted at the end of a program for the express of judging its worth or effectiveness for

potential users (Cranton & Legge, 1978). It is a kind of review of the program after the users attain an overall impression that includes recommendations for future users.

Theoretical knowledge and conceptualisation on program and program evaluation were the focus of this part. However, how different researchers evaluated different programs can give us an idea about how to put theoretical knowledge into practice in the research world. Therefore, the following part presents a number of previous studies on program evaluation.

Studies on program evaluation

There are several research studies on foreign language program evaluation in Turkish context. Most of them focus on evaluation of English language teacher education program at universities which were restructured by HEC (Higher Education Committee) twice in recent years (1998 and 2006). On the other hand, some researchers conducted program evaluations with small scales and they tried to investigate the effectiveness of newly-introduced programs and their effects on the participants of the program.

Karataş and Fer (2009) evaluated the curriculum of English at Yıldız Technical University quantitatively. The results revealed a necessity for a wider range of audio-visual materials to be used in English classes. In their study, Coşkun and Daloğlu (2010) drew attention to the need of improvement and maintenance of the pre-service English teacher education program components through program evaluations. Zehir-Topkaya and Küçük (2010) investigated 4th and 5th grade English language teaching program. Although the participants expressed positive opinions on general characteristics, outcomes, and content of the program, they thought that there were some weak points to be improved.

Yavuz and Zehir-Topkaya (2013) researched the changes made in the English language teacher education program in 2006 by HEC. The findings of the study suggest that the decision of removal, sequence, content, and structure of the courses lacked reasoning and rationale. Fer (2004) conducted a qualitative evaluation of an Emotional Intelligence in-service program he himself prepared and applied for secondary school teachers. Her major finding is that almost all the participants interviewed regarded the use of EQ activities as being necessary not only for their classroom, but also for their own private and daily life. Çetinavcı and Zehir-Topkaya (2012) made a contrastive evaluation of two different grammar programs at the school of foreign languages. The major finding of this study suggests that the implementation of the new program with the integration of grammar into main course is a positive step forward for the school.

Studies on evaluation of post-graduate studies

So far, there have been a few studies on program evaluation of post-graduate studies in Turkey. One was conducted by Kırmızı (2011) in ELT department at Hacettepe University. The aim of the study was to measure the effectiveness of the ELT MA programs in Turkey. It is a comprehensive research study written as a doctoral dissertation evaluating ELT MA programs from a broad point of view. Program components such as content,

description, and resources, and the curriculum were examined from the students' and post-graduates' perceptions. More importantly, the researcher presents a suggested syllabus depending on the findings.

In another study, Kanatlar (1996) evaluated MA TEFL program at Bilkent University. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative instruments to collect data. The program evaluated was found to be successful in achieving its objectives and making positive contributions to the students' intellectuality. The participants were of the opinions that the program should continue with some changes.

There is a growing number of people who want to pursue their post-graduate education through MA and PhD programs. In similar to the top down approach adopted in developing programs for undergraduate programs, MA and PhD programs are also constructed by HEC in a prescriptive way that results in a fixed curriculum for teachers to follow. Therefore, post-graduate programs need to be examined thoroughly for quality check. Evaluation of post-graduate programs seems to yield valuable implications for the stakeholders in terms of monitoring what is done, what needs to be done, and what strengths and weaknesses the programs have. However, there has not been any attempt as a scientific inquiry into evaluation of any PhD ELT program in Turkish context. The present study aims to fill this research gap. It was conducted to investigate effectiveness of a PhD ELT program with an explicit focus on its learning outcomes. The desire for a scientific contribution to the restructuring of the program for its current and future audience drove the researcher to do this research. Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (COMU) was chosen as the research site because of the convenience of the participants and the researcher's prolonged engagement with the ELT Department. The following research questions have been formed to be answered in the study:

1. What are the opinions of the students and the graduates on the outcomes of the PhD ELT program?
2. What are the opinions of the students and the graduates on the program content and the program instruction in relation to the program outcomes?
3. What is the contribution of the courses to the outcomes of the program as perceived by the students and graduates?
4. Do the students and the graduates think that the PhD ELT program at ÇOMU needs any improvement? If yes, why? In what respects?

Methodology

This part covers the significant steps taken while the research study was being planned. The methodological design, background information about setting and participants, the instruments, data collection and analysis procedures were explained in detailed below.

Setting and participants

The study was conducted in the ELT department at the Faculty of Education at COMU. It offers BA, MA and PhD programs in ELT. The participants of the study were 15 students and 9 graduates of the ELT PhD program with a total number of 24. All the students of the PhD program have MA degrees in mostly ELT and some other programs related to English as a focus of study. The age of the participants ranged from 24 to 56. Seven of the participants were female and seventeen of them were male. A purposeful selection of participants was applied and it also depended on willingness and convenience of them. The detailed information about the participants and the offered courses and qualifications of instructors is given in the following tables.

Table 1

Demographic information of the participants

		F	%
Gender	Female	7	29, 2
	Male	17	70, 8
Experience	0-5 years	5	20, 8
	6-10 years	9	37, 5
	11-15 years	6	25
	16-20 years	2	8, 3
	over 20 years	2	8, 3
BA	ELT	21	87, 5
	Literature	1	4, 2
	Linguistics	1	4, 2
	Other	1	4, 2
MA	ELT	21	87, 5
	Literature	0	0
	Linguistics	2	8, 3
	Other	1	4, 2

Table 2

The list of courses and qualifications of instructors in the ELT department

Title of the Instructor	Name of the Course
Assistant Prof. Dr.	Intercultural Communication
Associate Prof. Dr.	ESP and EAP in Language Teaching
Prof. Dr.	Field Work in Applied Linguistics
All	Seminar
Associate Prof. Dr.	Diversity in Language Teaching
Associate Prof. Dr.	English Language Teaching Program Evaluation
Associate Prof. Dr.	Fundamental Issues in Foreign Language Teacher Education
Prof. Dr.	The Philosophy of Educational Research
Associate Prof. Dr.	Classroom Research
Associate Prof. Dr.	Current Trends in Second Language Acquisition Research
Associate Prof. Dr.	Discourse Analysis in the Language Classroom

Research design

This is a descriptive and qualitative study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to ensure data triangulation that would support each other. By this way, the discussion of the findings can be based on well-documented data. To be able to do monitor and impact evaluation of the program, students and graduates of the program were invited to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

Lynch (1996) expresses that the most common data methods for data collection in a qualitative program evaluation are observation, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. Interviews, questionnaire and document analysis were decided to be used as appropriate methods to collect data for the present study.

To collect quantitative data, a questionnaire was used due to the fact that questionnaires are time-efficient means of gathering data from a large number of people (Lynch, 1996). The questionnaire was adapted from Kırmızı's (2011) study after the literature was reviewed extensively to get inclinations from other studies (Coşkun & Daloğlu, 2010; Lynch, 1996; Seval & Fer, 2009; Yavuz & Zehir-Topkaya, 2013; Zehir-Topkaya & Küçük, 2010). The revised version of the questionnaire was cross-checked by an expert who had an associate degree in an ELT Department for its credibility. The Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire was .79. The main focus of the questionnaire is on learning outcomes together with the evaluation of program content and program instruction that have direct effects on outcomes of the program. In the following parts, the participants were expected to evaluate the contribution of each course offered in the program to learning outcomes. The final part asks what other courses must be included in the curriculum to enhance the effectiveness of the program in terms of learning outcomes.

A focus group interview with the program students was organized. Patton (1987, cited in Lynch, 1996) classifies qualitative interviews into three: the informal conversation interview, the interview guide, and the standardized open-ended interview. An interview guide including six questions was prepared by the researcher to be used while interviewing the students as the guide allows the interviewer to make efficient use of time and to be systematic and complete across interviews (Lynch, 1996). Program description and content of each course offered in the PhD program was exposed to document analysis to understand the logic of the program.

Data collection procedure

The quantitative data was collected through the questionnaire developed by the researcher. Questionnaires were sent to both students and graduates via emails because it was difficult to gather all the students at the same place and at the same time. Contact addresses of some of the former students were obtained from the teachers. The respondents were free to ask any further questions about the questionnaire through the email address provided in the consent form.

The qualitative data was collected in a focus group interview with the current students in the program. The group consisted of seven students. Post-graduates could not be included in the interview due to lack of time and collaboration. The participants were informed about the time and purpose of the focus group interview and taken their consents two weeks prior to the event. The interview started on the pre-determined time and it lasted 42 minutes. The interview was video recorded and the whole record was transcribed by the researcher for data analysis.

The following table shows the steps of data collection procedure.

Table 3
The Plan of Data Collection

Steps	Procedures	Aims
1	Questionnaire with students	To get evaluation of the program outcomes from the students
2	Focus group interview with students	To understand the perceptions of the students about strengths and weaknesses of the program in relation to the program outcomes
3	Document analysis of program description	To analyze the outcomes of each course and to examine how they are realized in the program

Data analysis

For data collection and analysis processes, Lynch (1996) suggests the following stages: developing a thematic framework, organizing the data, coding the data, reducing the data, and interpreting the data. The same procedure was followed during the data gathering and analysis stages to be more systematic. Quantitative data was calculated through SPSS 20 version. Descriptive analysis was done to get the means and standard deviations of the different parts of the questionnaire. Document analysis of the stated program descriptions, content of courses and program goals was done to identify the logic of the program.

For reliability and validity of data analytical procedures, some of the techniques offered by Guba and Lincoln (1994) were used. First of all, it was ensured that the researcher had a prolonged engagement with the research site which enabled him to establish rapport and trust to understand their perceptions. As a result of prolonged engagement, the researcher could identify the most relevant elements of the evaluation setting. Furthermore, the data were analysed having discussions between the researcher and a disinterested peer concerning the findings and conclusions. Finally, the data were subjected to member checks repeatedly.

An interview guide was developed by the researcher to represent the most significant and relevant questions to be answered in the focus group interview with the students. It was constructed to make the focus interview with the students more effective and systematic. To have more in-depth analysis of the perceptions of the students on the value and the impact of the program, a set of questions were specified to be covered in the interview. The interview guide is presented below in Table 4:

Table 4

The interview guide (key questions)

-
1. What do you think the learning outcomes of this program are?
 2. What academic skills did you improve most during this program?
 3. What academic skills did you improve least during this program?
 4. What are the strong sides of the program in bringing about the learning outcomes?
 5. What are the weak sides of the program in bringing about the learning outcomes?
 6. Do you think that the current program needs to be updated? If yes, in what respects? If no, why?
-

The collected data through interviews, documents, and questionnaires was organized to construct categories. The next stage was coding the data. The data was reduced by identifying the recurring themes.

As Lynch claims (1996), one useful way of focusing the evaluation is to prepare a thematic framework that represents the most important evaluation questions. This framework was used to categorize the data according to the most frequently used patterns and key concepts. The thematic framework is given below (see Table 5).

Table 5

Thematic framework: ÇOMU department of English language teaching

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1. Students' evaluation of the intended program outcomes
 2. Students' perceptions of the unintended program outcomes
 3. Students' evaluation of the program instruction in relation to the program outcomes
 4. Students' evaluation of the program content in relation to the program outcomes
 5. Students' perceptions of the program in relation to its curriculum
 6. Students' perceptions of the program in relation to necessary improvements
 7. Students' general impression of the program
-

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews with the students was read iteratively for coding stage. The relevant emergent patterns and themes were identified to be coded. The following codes were used to reduce and classify the data. The code system used in this study is presented in the next table:

Table 6
Codes from COMU PhD ELT program evaluation

EIPO: Evaluation of the Intended Program Outcomes
PUPU: Perception of the Unintended Program Outcomes
EIDO: Evaluation of Instruction of Doctoral Program on Outcomes
ECODO: Evaluation of Content of Doctoral Program on Outcomes
ECUDO: Evaluation of Curriculum of Doctoral Program on Outcomes
PNID: Perceptions of Necessary Improvements for Doctoral Program
GIDP: General Impression of Doctoral Program

Findings

The findings of the research were presented according to the thematic framework formed while collecting and analyzing the data. There are five inter-related parts which altogether provide answers for the research questions of the study. The evaluation of courses and necessary improvements for the program were combined under a single title as curriculum evaluation. The outcomes of the PhD ELT program are defined and advertised by the Institute of Educational Sciences at COMU are provided in the following table for a comparative analysis of the findings.

Table 7
Key Learning Outcomes of PhD ELT Program at COMU

Program Requirements	
1	Building upon the competencies acquired in the MA program, PhD candidates will be able to develop advanced level analytical and critical thinking skills combined with research skills and advance their knowledge and expertise in the field to the highest point where they can come up with unique contributions to the discipline.
2	PhD candidates will be able to grasp the relationship between the fields concerned with the discipline of English Language Teaching and produce original and distinctive studies by using their expertise in the analysis, synthesis and critical evaluation of new and complicated ideas and propositions.
3	PhD candidates will be able to evaluate and apply the new knowledge and trends into the ELT field through a systematic approach.
4	PhD candidates will be able to contribute to the progress of an original work which will bring new ideas, methods, design and/or an application or apply the well-known ideas, methods to a novel area individually.

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- 5 PhD candidates will be able to accomplish and evaluate a critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation of new and complicated ideas in the field.
 - 6 PhD candidates will be able to gain high-level skills and strategies in conducting research studies and applying the appropriate research methods in ELT.
 - 7 PhD candidates will be able to produce and present a research article in the field to be published in national/international journals or create an original work contributing to the field.
 - 8 PhD candidates will be able to discuss and lead the issues in the related field and thus find solutions to the problems in the international arena
 - 9 PhD candidates will be able to develop new ideas and methods in the field by using high level mental processes such as creative and critical thinking, problem solving and effective decision-making.
 - 10 PhD candidates will be able to investigate and improve social relations/interactions and the norms of conduct guiding them and manage the actions to change or reconstruct them when necessary.
 - 11 PhD candidates will be able to use English to communicate, discuss and negotiate both in written and oral form with peers/colleagues at an advanced level of proficiency, ideally native-like.
 - 12 Demonstrate functional interaction by using strategic decision making processes in solving problems encountered in the field
 - 13 Contribute to the solution finding process regarding social, scientific, cultural and ethical problems in the ELT field and support the development of these values.
 - 14 Contribute to the transition of the community to an information society and its sustainability process by introducing scientific, technological, social or cultural improvements in the ELT field.
-

Students' perceptions of the intended and unintended program outcomes

Success of a program largely depends on the realization of the stated and unstated learning outcomes satisfactorily. Therefore, the first group of questions in Part B in the questionnaire reflected the students' perceptions on the learning outcomes. The data was analyzed statistically and the results showed that the participants have neither a very positive nor a very negative evaluation of the program outcomes ($M = 3.62$ out of 5; $SD = .86$). The following Table 8 shows clearly numerical data about each statement regarding the opinions of the students about the program outcomes.

Table 8

Perceptions of the participants related to the learning outcomes of ELT PhD at ÇOMU

PART B-1 Program Outcomes		Mean	SD
<i>Total</i>		3, 62	.86
Item No	Statements		
1	The program develops/developed my analytical and critical thinking skills combined with research skills.	4, 25	.89
3	The program enables/enabled me to analyze, synthesise and evaluate new ideas in the field.	4, 08	.50
4	The program promotes/promoted gaining high level skills and strategies in conducting research.	4, 04	.75
5	The program teaches/taught how to apply appropriate research methods in ELT.	4	.72
8	The program makes/made me use English at proficiency level in both spoken and written forms.	3, 91	1, 01
2	The program enables/enabled me to apply new knowledge and trends into ELT field.	3, 70	.80
7	The program promotes/promoted developing new ideas and methods in the field by using high level mental processes.	3, 66	.63
11	The program gives/gave me adequate training in producing distinctive studies with critical analysis and synthesis of new and complicated ideas.	3, 50	.88
12	The program teaches/taught me how to apply a well-known idea or method to a novel area individually.	3, 20	.93
6	The program gives/gave me adequate training in producing and presenting a research article to be published in a national/international journal.	3, 12	1, 07
9	The program teaches/taught me how to use appropriate methods in the process of teaching and testing English.	3, 04	1, 04
10	The program teaches/taught me how to use appropriate materials, resources and technology in the process of teaching and testing English.	3	1, 14

It is clear from Table 8 that the participants have positive perceptions of analytical, critical thinking and research skills as learning outcomes of this program ($Mean = 4.25$; $SD = .89$). In addition, to analyze, synthesize and evaluate new ideas in the field were perceived as achieved and acquired skills by the participants ($M = 4.08$; $SD = .50$). It is also believed that the program promotes using high level skills and strategies in research studies ($M = 4.04$; $SD = .75$).

On the other hand, the findings revealed that the program was not perceived as sufficient by the participants in fostering appropriate methods ($Mean = 3.04$; $SD = 1.04$) and materials and resources ($M = 3$; $SD = 1.14$) to test and teach English. Another negative point identified in the questionnaire is that the participants did not get enough training for presenting and publishing articles in an either national or international magazine ($M = 3.12$; $SD = 1.07$).

So far, the intended program outcomes have been evaluated through the questionnaire from the students' perspectives. However, they may have also their own interpretations of more specific and individual outcomes from the program. To do this, some students were interviewed in a focus group to elicit their opinions about academic skills they acquired or improved as learning outcomes. Table 9 summarizes their perceived outcomes of the program. Participation code refers to the interviewees who took part in the focus group interview.

Table 9

Opinions of the students on learning outcomes in the interview

Theme	Topic	Participation Code
Program outcomes	Some of the learning outcomes are literature review, forming research questions and article analysis.	S1
	Our theoretical knowledge has increased	S1, S7, S6, S5, S4
	We have obtained theoretical knowledge for research.	S7
	We have gained practical skills in research.	S2
	The program increased my literature review skills.	S7
	The program may have positive effects on our presentation skills.	S3
	We have learnt how to write a research article to some extent.	S1, S3
	The learning outcomes of the program are good but could be better.	S1, S3, S7

The interview provided more insights into evaluation of outcomes with the help of open-ended questions. As it is observed from Table 3, the learning outcomes can be said to be more research-based which is in parallel with the results of the questionnaire. Due to the intensive practice in doing research either through tasks or projects, the participants think that they have improved the academic skills at preliminary steps of research such as literature review, article analysis and presentation skills. It was also emphasized by many participants that their theoretical knowledge enhanced. However, the findings revealed that the skills and strategies for bringing a research paper to the level of presentation and publication in terms of training were not dealt with satisfactorily.

Students' evaluation of the program instruction

In order to evaluate the program outcomes more comprehensively, it was necessary to examine how the program was instructed by the teachers during the whole process. In this part, participants were asked to make evaluation on teaching strategies, planning, assessment criteria, quality of instruction, and the interaction between teachers and students. General impression of the participants about program instruction seems to be positive as the mean was 3.84 ($SD = .77$). Much detailed information and analysis is presented below in Table 10.

Table 10
Students' evaluation of program instruction of ELT PhD at ÇOMU

PART B-2 Program Instruction		Mean	SD
Total		3, 84	.77
Item No	Statements		
2	The interaction between instructors and students inside and outside the class is/was positive.	4, 45	.65
4	Teachers' instructions (group discussion, pair work, presentations, moderating sessions) have/had positive impacts on learning outcomes.	4, 33	.48
5	The program allocates/allocated sufficient time for each course.	4, 16	.81
9	Assessment (tasks, term projects, and exams) for the program instruction has/had positive effects on learning outcomes.	3, 86	.69
6	Quality of instruction in my courses is/was satisfactory.	3, 83	.76
1	The instruction of the program is/was planned by the teachers thoroughly.	3, 79	.77
8	Assessment (tasks, term projects, and exams) for the program instruction is/was appropriate.	3, 73	.81
3	I receive/received valuable feedback from my teachers.	3, 41	1, 01
7	Technology is/was used satisfactorily in the courses.	3, 04	.99

The students expressed a great satisfaction for their dialogues with the teachers ($M = 4.45$; $SD = .65$). In addition, the participants hold positive opinions about the teachers' instructions ($M = 4.33$; $SD = .48$) and time allocated for each course ($M = 4.16$; $SD = .81$).

On the other hand, the students do not seem to be sure about the quality of the feedback they receive from the teachers ($M = 3.41$; $SD = 1.01$). They have also slightly negative views about appropriateness of the assessment ($M = 3.73$; $SD = .81$). According to the participants, technology was not used necessarily in the courses ($M = 3.04$; $SD = .99$).

The interview with the participants also yielded complementary results about the program instruction. It is significant to emphasize that 13 topics about program instruction were discussed among the participants which shows that they spent a considerable time of the interview on this aspect of the program. In similar to the questionnaire, they have both positive and negative perceptions. Apart from this, they make some suggestions to increase the quality of instruction from their own perspectives. Table 11 below provides us with a brief summary of the participants' thoughts expressed during the interview.

Table 11

Evaluation of the program instruction by the participants during the interview

Theme	Topic	Participation Code
Negative points on planning	We couldn't get proper feedback.	S3, S7
	Feedback should be more timely and planned.	S5, S1
	We need more comprehensive and more narrow-focused course materials.	S1, S3, S7
	Moderating sessions should be increased and they should be facilitated by the teachers.	S1, S7, S3
Positive points on planning	We are given a course outline and assessment criteria are determined beforehand.	S2
	Assignments and attendance are compulsory.	S1, S2, S3
	I like pair work activities, and the teacher's final summarizing remarks.	S4
	Hands-on experiences in some courses are valuable.	S1, S5
The dialogue between teachers and students	Teachers are humanistic and they consider our needs.	S1, S7, S5, S6, S4, S2
Assessment	There shouldn't be written exams.	S3, S7, S1
	Class participation should be assessed.	S3
	We should get the theoretical knowledge and do research.	S5, S4
	Our tasks should be assessed after a corrective feedback.	S3

As it is clear from Table 5, there are parallel views between the interview and the questionnaire. The hot discussion topic was inadequacy of feedback from the teachers. Some more negative opinions were also about the written examinations at PhD level. However, it can be inferred from the table that the charming of the program lies in the humanistic characteristics of the teachers. Moreover, strict attitudes of the teachers towards submission of assignments and attendance were highly appreciated by the participants.

Students' views on the content of the program

It is accepted that program content has direct or indirect influences on learning outcomes. Therefore, the participants were also asked in the questionnaire to express their perceptions about what was successful and what was not successful regarding the content of the program. Table 12 below gives us item by item analysis of the program content.

Table 12

Students' opinions regarding the program content of ELT PhD at ÇOMU

PART B-2 Program Content		Mean	SD
<i>Total</i>		3, 75	.81
Item No	Statements		
6	The program content provides/provided me with theoretical knowledge.	4, 37	.49
4	The syllabuses of courses are/were satisfactorily intense and comprehensive.	3, 87	.85
1	The program content is/was relevant to my needs.	3, 79	.88
5	The program has/had good linkage between different courses.	3, 70	.90
2	The program content is/was up-to-date.	3, 70	.99
3	The sequence of courses is/was appropriate.	3, 66	.86
8	The program content gives/gave me adequate training in the needs of the global context.	3, 47	.79
7	The program content gives/gave me adequate training in the needs of the local context (Turkey).	3, 45	.77

According to the results, the participants believe that the program content was effective in increasing the theoretical knowledge of the students ($M = 4.37$; $SD = .49$). On the other hand, it was perceived by the participants that the training for the needs of the local ($M = 3.45$; $SD = .77$) and the global context ($M = 3.47$; $.79$) could not be achieved satisfactorily. The topics of discussion in the focus group interview were the ones that were not really emphasized in the questionnaire. It is also interesting to note down that the participants of the interview had few ideas on program content. The following table reflects the students' concerns about the content of the program.

Table 13

Evaluation of the program content by the students during the Interview

Theme	Topic	Participation Code
Program content	There is a good linkage between the courses in the fall semester	S4, S7, S1
	We should take the research methods in the first semester.	S2
	The program should cover recent research topics.	S1

Three students agreed on the meaningful linkage of the content of the courses in the fall semester. The significance of taking the course of research methods at the outset of the program was underlined by another student for its perceived benefit on the following courses. A participant mentioned about one of his or her needs that had not been addressed through the content of the program. It was expressed that recent research topics should be covered either in a separate course or in the syllabus of any other related course.

Students' evaluation of the curriculum

One of the main focuses of this study was to measure the contribution of courses of the program to learning outcomes. In the light of such an evaluation, it could be determined whether the current curriculum needs to be improved both with exclusion of some current courses and inclusion of some new courses either as compulsory or elective alternatives. Basically, the participants reflected their views on the relevance of the content of each course offered in the program to their needs. Table 14 below is the summary of the views of the participants on the curriculum of the program.

Table 14

Views of the participants on the curriculum of ELT PhD at ÇOMU

PART B-3 Contribution of Courses to Learning Outcomes		Mean	SD
Total		3,68	1,08
Item No	Statements		
10	Current Trends in Second Language Acquisition Research	4,33	.70
7	Fundamental Issues in Foreign Language Teacher Education	4,11	.78
6	English Language Teaching Program Evaluation	4,06	1,22
2	ESP and EAP in Language Teaching	3,94	1,14
5	Diversity in Language Teaching	3,85	1,34
9	Classroom Research	3,72	.95
3	Field Work in Applied Linguistics	3,40	1,04
11	Discourse Analysis in the Language Classroom	3,37	1,40
4	Seminar	3,26	1,16
8	The Philosophy of Educational Research	3,26	1,09
1	Intercultural Communication	3,23	1,14

Students reflected their concerns about the significance of the awareness of recent research topics in the field by putting current trends in SLA research at the top of the list ($M = 4.33$; $SD = .70$). Issues in teacher education were believed to have high contributions to the learning outcomes of the program ($M = 4.11$; $SD = .78$). However, the content of the courses of seminar, the philosophy of education, and the intercultural communication were not perceived respectively relevant to the needs of the participants and as a result, their contributions to the learning outcomes were considered to be not satisfactory in comparison to the other courses. In parallel with the above findings, the participants were also asked to rate a set of alternative courses that must be included in the program. The following table illustrates the participants' opinions on the necessity of each course.

Table 15

Evaluation of alternative courses for the ELT PhD program at ÇOMU

PART B-3 Courses That Must Be Included in the Program Total		Mean	SD
Item No	Statements		
1	Statistical Methods in ELT	4, 83	.48
4	Instructional and Educational Technologies in ELT	4, 30	1, 01
12	Action Research in Teacher Education	4, 27	.70
15	Testing and Evaluation Techniques	4, 21	.99
3	English Language Teaching Curriculum	4, 19	1, 03
11	Issues in Foreign Language Education Planning	4, 04	.82
6	Psycholinguistics	3, 90	.92
5	Materials Evaluation and Development in ELT	3, 90	1, 15
8	Computer-assisted Linguistic Analysis	3, 68	1, 28
2	Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis	3, 47	1, 08
9	Aspects of Bilingualism	3, 36	1, 21
14	Theoretical Linguistics	3, 21	1, 27
10	World Englishes	3, 17	1, 23
13	Teaching Literature in ELT Classes	2, 68	1, 32

It is clear from the Table 15 that statistical methods was evaluated as the most significant course to be included in the program ($M = 4.83$; $SD = .48$). Instructional and educational technologies ($M = 4.30$; $SD = 1.01$) and actions research ($M = 4.27$; $SD = 1.01$) were also selected as favourable alternatives by the students depending on their needs and interests of research areas. If the above table is examined carefully, it can be recognized that more than half of the courses were selected as necessary. This indicates that the participants would like to have a wide range of courses in the curriculum. It was also confirmed with similar opinions of the students who participated in the interview. Table 16 below provides us with some more insights into the needs of the students for new courses.

Table 16

Students' views on the curriculum during the interview

Theme	Topic	Participation Code
Evaluation of current courses	Teacher Education was beneficial.	S3
	Program Evaluation was not a developed area.	S4
	Program Evaluation was a necessary course.	S1, S7
	Intercultural Communication was unnecessary.	S1, S3
Opinions for some new courses	There should be more elective courses.	S1, S3, S4
	Statistical Methods and SLA should be given as compulsory courses.	S1, S7
	Materials Development would be a good option.	S2

While the participants of the interview hold differing opinions on the course of program evaluation, one student found teacher education beneficial. In parallel with the questionnaire results, the course of culture was not thought to be relevant. The main argument put forward by the students was the need for more elective courses. The evaluation of the curriculum in terms of current and alternative courses shows that the program could be improved with some curricular adaptations and modifications.

Students' general impression of the program

The participants evaluated the ELT PhD program from various perspectives, but there was not a separate part in the questionnaire and in the interview for a general overall overview of the program. Still, the interview yielded some meaningful considerations about the present and the future applications and implementation of the program due to the fact that it was done in an open-ended and focus group format. In all three thematic categorisations of the following table, there is a kind of reasoning in terms of explanation of some negative points, acknowledgement of some positive issues of this program in comparison with other programs, and some suggestions for betterment of the program.

Table 17
General impression of the program by the students during the interview

Theme	Topic	Participation Code
General negative issues	The teachers are so loaded with BA courses.	S7
	It is difficult to give feedback to 13 students at PhD level.	S1
	The ELT PhD entrance exam was really objective and challenging.	S5, S1
General positive issues	In many other programs, the aim is to only to get a diploma, but this is not the case here.	S3
	Organization of ELT conferences by the teachers of this program is something positive.	S7, S1
	The qualifying exam here is really challenging.	S3
General new ideas	A departmental meeting with a student representative can be organized once a semester.	S1, S4
	Graduate seminars might be organized.	S7, S1, S5

First of all, contextual constraints such as heavy workload of the instructors were emphasized by the students arguing that it decreased the effectiveness of the instructors as they couldn't provide them with timely feedback and tutorials because of lack of time. It is believed that the entrance and the qualifying exams held in this program indicate its high quality. More importantly, the ELT department at COMU hold two ELT conferences and these events encourage the students of the program to do research and get experience on such platforms by making presentations and meeting new researchers. As a suggestion, a departmental meeting only for post-graduate studies was offered for quality check and coordination of the program teachers. On the other hand, it is the fact that when students finish their courses, they get into a period of isolation and individualisation both for getting

prepared for the qualifying exam and the doctoral dissertation. A graduate seminar could be a good idea to bring all students of the program together to learn about the different studies their peers are undertaking, to encourage to do collaborative research, and to motivate one another.

Discussion

When the overall results of the present study are taken into consideration, it can be inferred that the participants' evaluation of the ELT PhD program at COMU is positive. The participants concluded that the quality of the program is good but should be improved in some respects. A similar finding was found by Kanatlar (1996) who evaluated MA TEFL program at Bilkent University. The participants were of the opinions that the program should continue with some changes. According to Beretta (1986), the primary goal of evaluation is to provide feedback to teachers in the short run. In this regard, the study yielded significant feedback from the students regarding the program content, the program instruction, and the curriculum. For example, the quality of feedback and the appropriateness of assessment were raised as critical issues to be improved by the participants.

Whether the program outcomes stated in program descriptions are achieved or not can be identified systematically through a monitoring analysis or/and an impact analysis. Owen (1999) clarifies that whether the delivery of articulated program plans are on-track or not can be checked with monitoring evaluation. Impact evaluation focuses on both the outcome and implementation elements of the program. In this study, the stated learning outcomes of the program were asked to the participants in the questionnaire and the unintended outcomes were asked in the focus group interview. The results showed that the learning outcomes of the program are more research-based and the obvious outcome is the theoretical knowledge the participants have acquired. On the other hand, the stated outcomes such as using appropriate methods, appropriate materials, resources and technology in the process of teaching and testing English could not be achieved. It can be inferred that the gap between theory and practice should be closed by fostering more classroom-based research studies. Like in the reflective model of teacher education, both received knowledge and experiential knowledge of the students can be improved on balance with some changes in the planning of the program instruction (Wallace, 1991).

Owen (1999) asserts that we need evaluative inquiry to be able to improve and repeat the success of the program somewhere else. The feedback from students may give some ideas to the teachers about how the content and the instruction of the content should be changed (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2007). The present program evaluation also aimed to improve the current state of the program with some probable alterations in its implementation. The findings of the study are ample in the number of the ideas as positive contributions to increase the effectiveness of the program. On the one hand, the participants are happy with the fact that assignments and attendance are compulsory and there are pair work activities, hands-on-experiences, and pre-determined course outline and assessment criteria. On the other hand, the participants agree on the need for more timely and planned feedback, more comprehensive

course materials, more moderating sessions conducted by the teachers, performance-based assessment instead of written exams, and the teachers' concluding remarks.

In their study, Coşkun and Daloğlu (2010) drew attention to the need of improvement and maintenance of the pre-service English teacher education program components through program evaluations. Similarly, the findings of the present study also lead to a need for structuring the ELT PhD program especially for its curriculum. The basic complaint of the students of the program is the lack of a sufficient number of elective courses. The result of the evaluation of alternative courses showed clearly that the participants almost agree on the inclusion of nine courses out of fifteen in the program. In addition, they emphasized that some courses such as intercultural communication and seminar in the current program have not any significant contributions to the learning outcomes. Instead, the courses like statistical methods and second language acquisition were promoted to be included in the curriculum of the program.

There were general issues discussed either as the sources of some problems in the program and the sources of the positive atmosphere in the department. First of all, it is acknowledged that the teachers are busy with really heavy weekly workload as they are teaching BA, MA, and PhD classes at the same time. The problem is doubled when the high population of PhD students is considered. It can be concluded that the program requires recruiting more qualified teachers to increase the quality of instruction. Secondly, it is believed that the challenging nature of the entrance exam and the qualifying exam encourage students to study more and take the post-graduate study more seriously. The fact that the ELT department organizes two ELT conferences yearly is highly appreciated by the students as they are motivated to do research and present their studies in these conferences. The true nature of this motivation is based on the perceived value of the activity. There is a positive correlation between the value that individuals attach to the accomplishment of or involvement in an activity and the motivation and sustained effort put into succeeding in the activity (Williams & Burden, 1997).

Lynch (1996) emphasizes that the motivation for wanting to know how a program works usually stems from a desire to improve it. The driving force of the present program evaluation was to monitor the current state of the program to determine whether it needs any kind of adaptation or modification in terms of its betterment despite the perceived values the students keep in their minds. Therefore, the participants were frequently reminded that the aim of this study was not only identify the lacks of the program but also suggest realist solutions to make up for those lacks. For this reason, the question of what can be done for increasing the quality of the program totally was asked to the participants. In addition to the curricular changes discussed above, one student suggested a departmental meeting for quality check of doctoral program with a student representative once a semester. As put forward by Fraser and Bosanquet (2007), students can find with their teachers areas that suit their needs and motivations. Apart from this, another participant shared an original extracurricular activity which can be called graduate seminar that might increase the collaboration between students and teachers. In this seminar, both graduates and current students together with teachers meet once a semester to present their projects and exchange their ideas for future

research studies with valuable instant feedback from their teachers. In this way, collaborative teacher development can be ensured as teachers voluntarily collaborate with others involved in the teaching process or with university-based researchers in which professional development is a prime purpose (Johnston, 2009).

Conclusion

When the findings of the study are examined, it is easy to conclude that such an evaluation is necessary for the improvement of the program in many aspects. The study was conducted with both graduates and students of the program who have been teaching English for a considerable period of time as practitioners, lecturers and research assistants. So, they have valuable experience in the field of ELT and their feedback in terms of evaluation is of great significance to the restructuring of the program. From the teachers' perspective, the present study might be a valuable and meaningful report that can enable them to reflect on their own practices in their courses.

On the other hand, distinctive applications done in this program might be taken as sample to replicate in other programs at different universities through this study. Apart from this, the probable changes within ELT PhD program with the help of this evaluation might bring about refreshment and recommitment to both instructors and students to do their best to realize the renewed learning outcomes with updated program content and program instruction. Positive influences of this evaluation of ELT PhD program at COMU may be inspirational for some other researchers at different research sites to evaluate ELT PhD programs for getting better results.

The present study does not lack its own limitations. First of all, there was a scarcity of research studies on evaluation of post-graduate studies. Therefore, the study could not follow in the light of pre-existing research findings. In addition, only the students participated in the study and the program was evaluated only from their perceptions and opinions. So, positive and negative sides of the program and probable adaptations and modifications from the teachers' perspectives could not be included in the study. Another limitation is the large scope of the study that requires a considerable time for data collection and analysis.

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APPENDIX I**ELT PHD PROGRAM EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE****PART A- DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Gender: Male / Female

Age:

Years of Experience in Teaching English:

- a. 0-5 years b. 6-10 years c. 11-15 years d. 15-20 years e. over 20 years

University in BA:

Program in BA:

University in MA:

Program in MA:

PART B- COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAM

Dear Participant,

You are given below a number of statements about different aspects of the program in which you are/were a student. After reading each item carefully, put an (X) in the box that shows your rate of agreement.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1. Program Outcomes					
1	The program develops/developed my analytical and critical thinking skills combined with research skills.					
2	The program enables/enabled me to apply new knowledge and trends into ELT field.					
3	The program enables/enabled me to analyze, synthesise and evaluate new ideas in the field.					
4	The program promotes/promoted gaining high level skills and strategies in conducting research.					
5	The program teaches/taught how to apply appropriate research methods in ELT.					
6	The program gives/gave me adequate training in producing and presenting a research article to be published in a national/international journal.					
7	The program promotes/promoted developing new ideas and methods in the field by using high level mental processes.					
8	The program makes/made me use English at proficiency level in both spoken and written forms.					

9	The program teaches/taught me how to use appropriate methods in the process of teaching and testing English.					
10	The program teaches/taught me how to use appropriate materials, resources and technology in the process of teaching and testing English.					
11	The program gives/gave me adequate training in producing distinctive studies with critical analysis and synthesis of new and complicated ideas.					
12	The program teaches/taught me how to apply a well-known idea or method to a novel area individually.					
	Others (please specify and rate your own statements).					
	2. Program Content (Modules such as ESP, Intercultural Communication, Classroom Research and so on.)					
1	The program content is/was relevant to my needs.					
2	The program content is/was up-to-date.					
3	The sequence of courses is/was appropriate.					
4	The syllabuses of courses are/were satisfactorily intense and comprehensive.					
5	The program has/had good linkage between different courses.					
6	The program content provides/provided me with theoretical knowledge.					
7	The program content gives/gave me adequate training in the needs of the local context (Turkey).					
8	The program content gives/gave me adequate training in the needs of the global context.					
	Others please clarify (İçeriğe ilişkin yukarıda öngörülmemiş ancak sizin eklemek istediğiniz noktalar varsa belirtiniz).					
	3. Program Instruction (Planning, Implementation and Assessment)					
1	The instruction of the program is/was planned by the teachers thoroughly.					
2	The interaction between teachers and students inside and outside the class is/was positive.					
3	I receive/received valuable feedback from my teachers.					
4	Teachers' instructions (group discussion, pair work, presentations, moderating sessions) have/had positive impacts on learning outcomes.					
5	The program allocates/allocated sufficient time for each course.					
6	Quality of instruction in my courses is/was satisfactory.					
7	Technology is/was used satisfactorily in the courses.					

8	Assessment (tasks, term projects, and exams) for the program instruction is/was appropriate and has/had positive effects on learning outcomes.					
9	Assessment (tasks, term projects, and exams) for the program instruction has/had positive effects on learning outcomes.					
	Others please clarify (Öğretime ilişkin yukarıda öngörülmemiş ancak sizin eklemek istediğiniz noktalar varsa belirtiniz).					

Dear Participant,

Courses of the program are listed below for you. Considering the courses you have taken, rate the general contribution of each course to the learning outcomes stated in the first group in Part B in the questionnaire from 1 (very low contribution) to 5 (very high contribution).

1 _____ 5

Very low contribution

Very high contribution

4. Evaluation of Courses in Relation to Their Contribution to Learning Outcomes		1	2	3	4	5
1	Intercultural Communication					
2	ESP and EAP in Language Teaching					
3	Field Work in Applied Linguistics					
4	Seminar					
5	Diversity in Language Teaching					
6	English Language Teaching Program Evaluation					
7	Fundamental Issues in Foreign Language Teacher Education					
8	The Philosophy of Educational Research					
9	Classroom Research					
10	Current Trends in Second Language Acquisition Research					
11	Discourse Analysis in the Language Classroom					

Dear Participant,

A set of doctoral courses is listed below for you. Taking into account of the contributions of the courses you have been taught to the learning outcomes, rate the degree of your agreement on the inclusion of the following courses in the program.

5. Courses That Must be Included in a ELT PhD Program		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Statistical Methods in ELT					
2	Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis					
3	English Language Teaching Curriculum					
4	Instructional and Educational Technologies in ELT					
5	Materials Evaluation and Development in ELT					
6	Psycholinguistics					
7	Sociolinguistics					
8	Computer-assisted Linguistic Analysis					
9	Aspects of Bilingualism					
10	World Englishes					
11	Issues in Foreign Language Education Planning					
12	Action Research in Teacher Education					
13	Teaching Literature in ELT Classes					
14	Theoretical Linguistics					
15	Testing and Evaluation Techniques					
	Others (Please specify and rate your own item/items).					