

English language testing and evaluation course through the lens of EFL student teachers

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Abstract

Researchers have promulgated the idea that the rapid and continuous changes in foreign language teaching environment put new demands on language teacher education programs. Accordingly, recent debates have centered on fundamental issues: testing, evaluation and assessment and have been investigated by a burgeoning number of studies at tertiary level. Thus, the current study aimed at revealing EFL student teachers' perceptions of assessment and evaluation, touching upon their expectations for better assessment, and scrutinizing their needs of assessment. A total of 39 senior students in Ondokuz Mayıs University at the English Language Teaching (ELT) program participated in the study. The research adopted a qualitative research design. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, and analyzed using selective coding. The findings indicated that student teachers perceived a great need of training in English language assessment, and lack of deep insights into testing and evaluation process. Another noteworthy finding was the majority of the participants agree that "English Language Testing and Evaluation" (henceforth ELTE) course should be offered just before graduation in language education program. Further, it was ascertained that almost all student teachers remarked the contribution of ELTE course for their own future careers and they put suggestions about the content of the course by listing three topics to be taught in the ELTE course. Lastly, the study offered suggestions for pre-service language teacher education programs on English language assessment and evaluation in Turkish higher education setting.

Keywords: Testing, evaluation, foreign language

İngilizce öğretmenliđi adaylarının gözünden İngilizce ölçme ve deđerlendirme dersi

Öz

Arařtırmacılar, yabancı dil öğretim ortamındaki hızlı ve sürekli deđişikliklerin dil öğretmeni eğitimi programına yeni talepler getirdiđi fikrini ortaya koymaktadırlar. Bu nedenle, son tartışmalar ölçme ve deđerlendirme gibi temel konulara odaklanmış ve yükseköğretim düzeyindeki çok sayıda çalışma ile arařtırılmıştır. Nitekim bu çalışma İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının İngilizce ölçme ve deđerlendirme algılarını ortaya koymayı, daha iyi deđerlendirme için beklentilerine deđinmeyi, onların ihtiyaçlarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmaya Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi, İngilizce öğretmenliđi programında öğrenim görmekte olan 39 son sınıf öğrencisi katılmıştır. Arařtırma, nitel bir arařtırma tasarımı benimsemiştir. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve seçici kodlama kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, öğretmen adaylarının İngilizce öğretiminde ölçme konusunda büyük bir eğitim gereksinimi algıladıklarını ve

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İngilizce ölçme ve değerlendirme sürecine ilişkin derin içgörülerinin olmadığını göstermiştir. Dikkat çeken bir diğer bulgu, katılımcıların çoğunluğu İngilizce ölçme ve değerlendirme dersinin mezun olmadan hemen önce verilmesi gerektiği konusunda hemfikirdir. Ayrıca, hemen hemen tüm öğretmen adayları bu dersin gelecekteki kariyerleri açısından katkısına dikkat çekmişler ve derste öğretilmesini istedikleri üç konuyu listeleterek ders içeriği hakkında önerilerde bulunmuşlardır. Son olarak, Türkiye'deki yükseköğretim ortamında hizmet öncesi öğretmen eğitimi programları için İngilizce ölçme ve değerlendirme dersine yönelik öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ölçme, değerlendirme, yabancı dil

Introduction

With the blossoming of the new trends in language teaching, testing and assessment have long been hot issues in English language teaching. One fact acknowledged widely in the globalization of the education system is that learner-oriented approach has altered the parameters of language learning and the needs of assessing as an outcome of language learning. To put it another way, the promotion of learner-centered understanding leads to considerable amount of increase in popularity of assessment and evaluation as research foci. It is an undeniable fact that three commonly voiced major issues in various educational contexts, which are still fluid and open to debate, are testing, assessment and evaluation. Assessment and testing are valuable milestones on the road to a well-qualified education system, and form the pivotal facets of the evaluation process. For Kunnan (2004), the concept of assessment refers to practical procedures and theoretical assumptions to testing and evaluation in pedagogical settings. Assessment is employed to determine the student's knowledge and performance (Iseni, 2011), and requires measuring the progress of the learners, diagnosing the difficulties they struggle with and providing necessary feedback (Harris & McCann, 1994). Apparently, assessment is extremely valuable resource of information to obtain data to make decision regarding learning process (Thomas, Allman & Beech, 2004). In contrast, evaluation is used to determine the worth or value of a course or program (Iseni, 2011) with the effects of a number of factors as follows: syllabus objectives, course design, materials, methodology, teacher performance and assessment (Harris & McCann, 1994). Additionally, evaluation not only measures how well we are doing, but also helps us to be more effective. In that sense, evaluation has two main purposes: for learning and development (Iseni, 2011). With a sense of appreciation for the connection between assessment and testing, Brown (2004) asserts that tests are administrative process followed in certain times in any curriculum to know how learners become proficient in their skills or abilities whereas assessment is a continuous and broader procedure. As O'Loughlin (2006, p. 72) put it, pendulum has shifted from "testing" to the more comprehensive concept "assessment" in language teaching settings. The main aims of assessment are stated as "observation of process and products", "giving feedback and judgement" and "questioning" (Torrance & Pryor, 2001, p. 624), "selection", "increasing the teachers' effectiveness" and "increasing the students' benefits" (Heaton, 1988, p. 136).

Literature review

It seems to be necessary to give priority to evaluation of the outputs of investments and programs in teaching English language. For Brown (2004), main purposes of assessment are to develop both instruction and learning, provide students taking responsibility of their own learning and responsibility of educational institutions and teachers. It is noteworthy that the relation between assessment and learning is presented by Brindley (2001) as teachers perceive assessment as an activity

integrated into the curriculum to improve learning. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to study on either testing or teaching without referring to the other (Heaton, 1988). The recent focus on the professionalization of EFL teachers in pre-service teacher education necessitates the critical understanding of assessment, testing and evaluation concepts. Thus, Shohamy (2005) argues that teachers are to be trained in testing and assessment processes and outputs of the tests. Echoing Shohamy, Brindley (2001) holds that professional teacher development programs should 1) pay attention curriculum-related assessment; 2) make use of teachers' background knowledge; and 3) be flexible enough to address different types of needs. O'Loughlin (2006) pointed out that assessment is a process which entails growing body of knowledge about abstract notions and theoretical assumptions integrated with each other to develop and implement assessment tools. It is not a far-fetched idea that teachers are provided with the sufficient training in teacher education programme to be assessment literate in typical classroom praxes (Jeong, 2013). Teachers of assessment courses should promote awareness and reach the collective insight of assessment literacy on the grounds that assessment literacy necessitates making use of practical knowledge and knowledge of theoretical background properly (Tylor, 2009). To this end, the study conducted by Öz and Atay (2017) aims at figuring out Turkish EFL instructors' attitudes to language assessment and direct reflections on the language classes. The findings revealed that most EFL teachers were familiar with basic classroom assessment literacy. However, there exists a large mismatch between assessment literacy and classroom reflections. As Taylor (2009) affirms that literacy level may differ from context to context. Further, Özdemir-Yılmaz and Özkan (2017) aimed to unearth the classroom assessment praxis of instructors in terms of the aim, methods, and assessment process, and compared state universities to private universities. As a result, it was observed the uniformity about classroom assessment practices of the instructors. Again, Ölmezer-Öztürk and Aydın (2019) investigated the opinions of EFL teachers working at different universities in Turkish higher education setting about their language assessment knowledge and define their general and skill-based needs. The research findings showed that EFL teachers appear to be completely bereft of training in language assessment knowledge.

Current literature indicates the paucity of research studies on language assessment course. Hence, this study attempts to unfold via the lens of ELTE course that represents language assessment and evaluation as a field of study. Early mention of assessment course was made by Bailey and Brown (1996). They searched the instructors' profiles, the subject matter included, and their students' particular perceptions toward assessment courses. Once again, in the later years, Bailey and Brown (2008) searched the lecturers teaching language testing and assessment courses to know and determine their views about the students' attitudes towards language testing course. Actually, they did not mainly searched the thoughts or needs of the students. Accordingly, the researchers gave advice for future studies to use a needs analysis method to identify language curriculum from the teachers of language testing courses and their students' viewpoints (Bailey & Brown, 2008). Jin (2010) carried out a study with 86 instructors teaching at various Chinese universities. Results represented that the topics included in the language testing and assessment course are nearly the same topics presented by Brown and Bailey (1996). The results indicated the necessity of the combination of theory with pragmatic facets in the course. Similarly, Mohammadi, Kiany, Samar and Akbari (2015) examined the curriculum of assessment course for senior language students. As a result of this study, it was noticed the serious deficiency in the assessment of higher-order thinking skills in teacher education programs. An alternative evaluation instrument is to be developed to compensate the shortcomings of current assessment procedures. One possible reason for this result might have been due to the fact that the lack of combining theoretical framework with practical skills in teaching language assessment courses. It is urgently needed to integrate abstract theoretical concepts and principles with practical knowledge

(Kleinsasser, 2005). Along with seeking numerous attempts to connect theory with praxis, teachers are noted to redefine their roles in assessment process. Virtually, it is a crystal clear fact that language teachers possess knowledge about how to test or assess their students, the variety of types of assessment used in different skills, necessary background and foundation in language testing and assessment. Also they are required to integrate assessment into instruction effectively. These two concepts encourage and support each other (Malone, 2013). Effective language teachers are apt to combine assessment practices with theoretical approaches and viewpoints of language instruction to enhance the efficacy of teaching. Additionally, as put forward by Herrera and Macías (2015), teachers are supposed to possess knowledge of assessment to promote their training, and also meet the demands of students. Hence, Hatipoğlu (2015) carried out her study on 124 pre-service teachers between the years of 2009 and 2012 in order to examine what ELT teachers know about language testing and also to determine their expectations in their course of English Language Testing and Evaluation. According to results of her study, almost all pre-service ELT teachers expected to evaluate, select and prepare students for the national and international examinations with the knowledge coming from assessment course. It is stated the effects of exam-focused assessment context may remarkably affect the perceptions of senior students at university.

With the advent of 21st century skills in ELT classes, it is needed to reshape the language teacher education programs to gain better and radically different outcomes. A profound understanding in the use of assessment instruments lies in the essence of language program (Jannati, 2015). It has been a great necessity for continuous assessment of language learners as active participants in this new era of dynamic changes. Thus, a wealth of research in language education attempts to define different stakeholders' needs (Richards, 2001). In that sense, evaluation is a fertile ground to search the emergence of needs and views of language learners. According to Tavassoli and Farhady (2018), it is needed to identify the teachers' needs to enhance their knowledge in general and assessment knowledge in particular. Despite the fact that the literature attests to the implementation and integration procedures of the testing or assessment, scant amount of research have explored assessment needs of learners. Needs and expectations of the students in assessment may reflect the changing paradigm in language teaching. Thus, the main aspiration of this study is to provide a lens to students' needs and expectations through their views. ELTE course in question is a compulsory course offered in an undergraduate English language teacher-training program at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Samsun. The ELTE course is offered in the eighth semester with three hours per week over a 14 week term of ELT curriculum.

The current research aimed to ferret out the needs and expectations of Turkish prospective teachers of English about the ELTE course they received and discover their views about testing and assessment.

Method

Research design

The present study adopted a qualitative research model. Data compiled from semi-structured interviews were used to uncover the views of senior students regarding language assessment and identify their needs and expectations from ELTE course. A semi-structured interview method was conducted to provide the deep insights about the participants' views, to obtain richer information when the answers need to be clarified or elaborated on the specific details in the research study (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Participants

A group of 39 senior students enrolled at the ELT department, Ondokuz Mayıs University participated in the study.

Data collection and analysis

Necessary data for present study were gathered at the beginning of the first session of the course since it is aimed to obtain pre-service teachers' views and expectations about language assessment and testing course before they were trained. The following four questions were formulated for the interview sessions:

1. There exists one testing and assessment course in the ELT curriculum. Do you consider it is adequate? Why or Why not? Explain your answer?
2. The ELTE course is offered in the 8th term. Do you consider that its place in the curriculum is suitable ? Yes or No? Please explain?
3. Do you consider that receiving a testing and assessment course would helpful for your future career? Yes or No? Please explain?
4. Please list three topics to be offered in that course and indicate how they would support you as a language teacher?

The participants were asked four open-ended opinion questions to gather data. A semi-structured interview was conducted to understand and obtain data about ELT students' perceptions and needs regarding ELTE course in the ELT programme. The interviews were carried out with 39 senior students in Turkish in order to avoid speaking anxiety in English and misunderstanding, provide stress-free atmosphere, and get sincere answers. The researcher transcribed all of the interviews that lasted almost 20 minutes, then translated the extracts into English.

The obtained qualitative data were analysed through content analysis by classification of the responses and selective coding one of the coding types in "Grounded Theory" focusing on "the main analytic idea presented in the research" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 14). The qualitative research approach 'grounded theory' is developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory refers to a method developed inductively from data, and a strategy about data collection and analysis. This approach entails a kind of conceptual thinking to create a theory from research data by gathering and analysing them. Namely, in this approach, the aim is to construct a theory that is grounded in the data (Punch, 1998, p. 163). The researcher may highlight and investigate people's perception about certain phenomenon in a 'grounded theory' approach by gathering qualitative data through interviews. Further, in this research, the recurring themes in the transcribed texts were identified, responses are classified according to the similarities and differences, enumerated, constructed wide categories out of them, and selected extracts that would assist their explanations.

Results

In the first interview question, the participants were asked whether only one ELTE course is enough to train them on language testing and assessment. More than half of the students (N: 25) reported that only one course about testing and evaluation is not adequate. In fact, they generally appreciated the value of receiving that course in their teaching careers. When their responses were analyzed and reviewed extensively, there was an agreement that assessment was required both theory and practical

aspects, and one single assessment course was not sufficient to know how to assess and test all English language skills.

The responses showed that most students agree on much more time to be allocated to the ELTE course in ELT curriculum and elucidate their great need of much more training on language assessment and evaluation. Senior students perceived a need for training in language assessment to gain experience and have deeper insights into process. They commonly stated that the issues of assessment and evaluation should not be restricted to a single course, thereby showed how they ascribed much importance to the course. The students assert that they have not yet achieved a proper level of assessment proficiency, and dynamic process of assessment requires improvement. Some quotes taken from participants' comments are provided below:

"It is not enough to learn necessary knowledge we need to test our students' learning using different techniques objectively. It should be better to extend to two terms. I consider that it is impossible to know how to test or assess the students and practise theoretical knowledge given during the 8th semester. In my opinion, knowledge of theory should be received in the 7th term whereas practising of knowledge in theory should offer in the 8th semester. (S3)

"Certainly not enough to know how to assess my students. Also, I should know how to design test for each skill. After I have possess theory of testing, I need much more practice to internalize what I have learned. I think, it is necessary to combine theory with practise. So, it will be better to place one more ELTE course to the 7th term by accompanying with the school experience course. (S14)

"I think, ELTE course is very important and difficult course. Evaluation is the most important skill to be gained. I should know how to assess or test the students according to which criteria. We all must master enough theoretical knowledge, then we are given enough time to practise what we learned in order to be good English teachers. I do not think that only one ELTE course is enough to learn both theory and practical knowledge. Therefore, I suggest that it is needed to place one more assessment and evaluation course to the previous semester. (S1)

The responses elicited to clarify the second interview question about the place of ELTE course reported that most of the participants considered that the ELTE course's place in the curriculum is correct. 27 pre-service teachers agree that ELTE course should be offered just before graduation. According to the interpretation made, approval of the students is entirely clear in the quotes of the participants as follows:

"Yes. Its place is suitable. As assessment and evaluation course is really important, it is better to receive that course in the 8th semester. Because we have KPSS exam and we will answer questions about testing more than other courses. So, better to have this course just before graduation." (S27)

"Yes. Because, we need time to gain experience and to be competent in ELT. We should know what and how to teach English language then learn how to evaluate what we teach just before graduation. I mean that that course should be offered after the other methodology course such as ELT Methodology, Teaching Language Skills, Teaching English to Young Learners". (S3)

"Yes. We are supposed to be more competent and proficient in English in the 8th semester and this course directly related to teaching praxis. For that reason, it will be better to place it just before graduation". (S22)

"Yes. I think, this situation is justifiable. Referring to the answer of the previous question, this course will be more detailed and kind of a summary of the previous courses in which students dealt with testing matters such as Teaching Language Skills. It will give us opportunity to get a wider perspective towards all the skills and teaching methodology studied before. Thus, we will be able to decide how to test our learners better." (S35)

In contrast, some of pre-service English language teachers stating that the course is not offered in the convenient term. The participants considering that ELTE course should be placed before the 8th semester elicited for themes underlying the issue of time and opportunities to practise the techniques

learnt in this course. Moreover, some others mentioned KPSS and Practicum, receiving similar course in the 6th semester in Turkish in their statements and propose that course should be placed in previous semesters like other methodology courses in an integrative way. The statements below were salient extracts from students' words:

"No. Because, there will be no sufficient time to practice knowledge that we learned in this course. It is too late to practise the theoretical knowledge that we learnt. There is almost no opportunity to use the techniques or tools that we learned. Therefore, it should be better to place in the 5th or 6th semester". (S24)

"No. Because, we have both practicum and also KPSS exam. Therefore, this course should be placed in earlier semesters. The 3rd year is more suitable for this course in order to internalize what we have learned. There is no need to wait until the last semester to be taught to evaluate our future students". (S31)

"No. Although it is very important course, students have a tendency not to appreciate it. Because, we are senior students and we have to study for KPSS. Also, this course should be offered with the integration of some other courses like "Teaching English to Young Learners" and "Teaching Language Skills" in the third year. (S38)

The students were also asked to respond the third question for their thoughts about taking the ELTE course would be helpful for their future career. The responses provided for that interview question were reported that all the participants remarked the contribution of ELTE course for their own future careers and answered "YES". The participants stated their opinions on this issue as follows:

"Yes. Each language skill is tested and evaluated differently. This course will help us to choose the most suitable testing technique matching with the skill, and employ it efficiently" (S1).

"Yes. We should know as a future of English language teacher how to test the students according to learners' proficiency levels. I must know how to prepare grammar question items, vocabulary and also the other skills". (ST11).

"Certainly, yes. Testing is the key factor of language teaching and learning. Therefore, this course would be very helpful and valuable for a prospective teacher of English. It is very important to know how to test language skills because we will tag our students as successful or not after we test them. This process requires hard work and the ability to test. I also need to practise" (ST13)

"Of course, yes. This course will help me to see whether the students have learnt or not after teaching. So, learning about testing will help me to evaluate our learners' learning process in our teaching experiences. I should know which techniques are used to test the learners' success." (ST27)

"Yes. This course will provide me sufficient knowledge about how to prepare good exam, and how to test our students objectively in English. Because, knowledge of testing is necessary to evaluate whether the students learned or not. I should know how to design test or exam in each skill as I need to use in the future. I think, it will better to practise them, as well". (ST33)

Some quotes taken from students' comments illustrate that what is common in the expressions of the preservice teachers is that the students stated the course offered them with the theoretical background and practical opportunities to employ in their future careers. It is clearly evident that all students claim the ELTE course enables them with the most precise characteristics of assessing and evaluating.

In the fourth interview question, the students listed three topics needed to be taught in an ELTE course, and stated how these topics would support them as English teachers. The students explained their views and put suggestions about possible content of the course. Interestingly, 6 students did not state any specific topics, expressed that they had no idea about what might be possible topics of the course. The general topics elicited for the content of ELTE course are observed as follows:

How to test/assess the students (f: 20), Testing language skills (f: 18), Evaluation and evaluation techniques (f: 15), Criteria for designing a good test (f: 11), Individual differences (f: 11), Testing and Testing techniques (f: 10), How to score a test (f: 8), Assessment and types of assessment (f: 5), Technology for testing (f: 1).

When the senior students are asked to indicate their priorities and possible topics that could be covered in an ELTE course, the participants mostly agree that ELTE course should encompass teaching of how to test/assess the students, testing language skills, and evaluation and evaluation techniques highly essential topics. This finding could be due to the fact that the students do not have a profound understanding of how to conduct the assessment on learning. Namely, this could plausibly be justified by the premises that the students have exposed to traditional language teaching method and they are mostly tested by typical standardised test throughout their education. They only ask to know “the general/basics rules of testing” (Hatipoğlu, 2015). Another noteworthy finding is that only five students suggested the assessment and types of assessment types. Furthermore, as voiced by students in this study, technology for testing received no attention. When they were asked to explain how these topics would help them as language teachers, they remarked that these topics would help them to design, administer, score the tests according to the skills and learner differences in different types of test and assessment properly using correct techniques efficiently. The following comments were made:

“We should be taught how to assess the students. Therefore, we have to know assessment types. In addition, as a well-educated EFL teacher we have to assess our students taking into consideration their individual differences. We have to use suitable test types and reliable assessment techniques for our learners”. (ST 5)

“The rules of designing tests in main and sub-skills of English language would be beneficial for my future career. Additionally, I have to know how to assess students properly according to which criteria. Young and adult learners may be assessed in a different ways by using different ways of testing techniques effectively”. (ST 17)

“Testing is an important part of teaching. A good teacher must know how to check his/her students’ knowledge and performance. Besides, it is needed to know what types of assessment tools should be used for which types of learners, for which skills appropriately and fairly”. (ST 22)

Discussion

The first interview question identifies EFL pre-service English language teachers’ views on ELTE course in language teaching program. The findings suggest that the participants mostly consider that only one ELTE course is not adequate to be trained on both formal and practical aspects of assessment process. The participants are not satisfied with the limited number of testing and evaluation courses in pre-service programs. It is suggested to give enough scope in the curriculum to be well-educated on the issues of testing and assessment. In Hatipoğlu (2010)’s study, the students recommended that the foreign language education curriculum should include a series of evaluation courses followed. One plausible explanation for this finding might be the size of the class. The responses to the first question imply that expanding ELTE course’s scope is highly necessary to combine theory with praxis in language teaching process. As discussed by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), it is undeniable that teachers should teach with basic theoretical understanding of a specific domain. There exists only one single language assessment and evaluation course in language teacher education program; however, it seems that there is still room for improvement. The ELTE course requires possessing sound assessment knowledge base and practices or experiences in content by its nature. The students perceive a need for realignment or reviewing extensively both in the content of ELTE course and the

time devoted to the course at question. Language assessment courses are solely assumed to emphasize formal theory and expertise on assessment. Therefore, it is disregarded sociocultural and sociopolitical aspects of assessment in educational settings (Lam, 2015). Another critical point to be considered, herein, is that the academic teaching competency of teacher trainers and educators is of importance in higher education pedagogy. According to the current study, the students' complaints about the lack of time allocated to ELTE course point out a pivotal issue to consider. This finding of the study is consistent with the research in literature (Hatipoęlu, 2015; Herrera & Macias, 2015; Ölmezer-Öztürk & Aydın, 2019) which claimed language assessment is not limited by a single course in pre-service language education. Similarly, Vogt and Tsagari (2014) found that the majority of the language teachers demand more qualified training in assessment of language skills in their pre- or in-service teacher training.

According to another noteworthy finding, student teachers were aware of the significance and contributions of ELTE course to their teaching careers. Sarıyıldız (2018) revealed that pre-service teachers at ELT department were aware of the critical contributions of assessment course to their professional development and future practices as language teachers. Similarly, Uzun (2016) reported that ELTE course was given the highest marks by the students in his research. ELTE course was touted as having an utmost significant and beneficial role to how to prepare exams, how to develop or design practical materials to use in-class activities. The students appreciated the contribution of ELTE course and stated that they would definitely use what they learned in ELTE course in their professional careers.

This finding provides an additional evidence for critical need of "language assessment literacy" in teaching EFL. A new term "Language Assessment Literacy" (LAL) has flourished in recent years. Inbar-Lourie (2013a) claims that language assessment literacy is a complex phenomenon with its multidimensional components. In line with this advocacy, in Fulcher's broadest definition (2012), LAL means abilities, capacities, beliefs, abstract ideas and general notions in a variety of theoretical systems to know why praxes have emerged, and to understand the effect of testing on educational institutions and learners. Within similar words, O'Loughlin (2013) asserts that LAL is formal knowledge and theories about test preparation, test administration and analysis, and in-class assessment procedures. In this sense, LAL necessitates knowing and judging about teachers own predispositions, and also being acquainted with solid knowledge, applications and values (Scarino, 2013). Well-constructed tests and assessment with proper teaching methods may improve students' learning, and also engage students much more (William, 2011), thereby the improvement of LAL should be a matter of issue in teacher education programs (Siegel & Wissehr, 2011). Language teachers with assessment literacy may integrate their teaching praxis with assessment to fulfill learning goals and objectives (Mertler & Campbell, 2005; Stiggins, 2002).

Language assessment courses are often implied as the most effective way to promote assessment literacy (Jeong, 2013). As put forward by DeLuca and Klinger (2010), teacher education programs performs a vital role in achieving a good assessment literacy level. Based on research in a series of language education, language assessment training has been touted as a critically significant and beneficial for their future careers. Pre-service language assessment training seems to contribute to the development of LAL (Yastıbař & Takkaç, 2018). In contrast, the teachers received no or little pre-service assessment training needs to be questioned (Hatipoęlu, 2015; Öz & Atay, 2017). There has not been much attention paid to train prospective teachers in the field of assessment knowledge, skills, and theories (Lam, 2015). Similarly, López and Bernal (2009) argue that language teaching programs

should provide a quite comprehensive language assessment training to improve themselves and also to create a language assessment culture. Instructors are expected to be qualified for meeting the demands of the students and coping with the challenges of classroom assessment (Stiggins, 2002). In fact, researchers have promulgated the idea that prospective teachers are commonly incompetent to assess the students, and misinterpret assessment by using summative process rather than formative method. Low or limited level of assessment literacy strongly and directly influence assessment practices in language education. As Popham (2010) asserts such “assessment illiteracy” leads to professional suicide.

According to Inbar-Lourie (2013b) LAL has two main components as follows: the first dimension contains the knowledge base of assessment, the second dimension includes the implementation and utilization in assessment. In this regard, the participants of current study as future language assessors and teachers should know three parts of LAL. The first component of this framework is the why of language assessment which enables understanding reason for language assessment as it forms language teachers’ perceptions of assessment and assessment process. Language assessment suggests that teachers should be competent and expertise in language teaching pedagogy to keep up with current theories and developments. Language teachers with assessment literate are required to choose a wide range of assessment procedures and use the most suitable one/s (Inbar-Lourie, 2008).

As for the second interview question, in parallel with the previous research finding of the current study, most of the students assert their needs to receive assessment course in the last term of language education programme. It is entirely clear that teacher learning takes time (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The reason may be explained through expectations for being more competent before graduation with solid formal theory and practical knowledge throughout a four-year training. Since, teacher education programme at tertiary level in Turkey encompasses some mandatory courses like Approaches to ELT, ELT Methodology, Teaching English to Young Learners, and Teaching Language Skills providing the knowledge base of teaching and how knowledge in theory embedded in teacher education praxis to be completed in the previous terms. Drawing on this assumption, it might be claimed that participants of the study view the instruction they received by that time as a prerequisite for the ELTE course. As voiced by the students in this study, they probably believe in that they may attain or form the qualifications and competencies required from them in the last term of their education. As Ball and McDiarmid (1989) point out, formal subject matter knowledge is the first step to be taken in teacher education. With this heightened emphasis, for Fenstermacher (1994) practical knowledge refers to teachers’ knowledge gained thanks to their experience.

According to “The General Competencies of Teaching Profession” (2006) in Turkish higher education context, there exists three interconnected competency realms as follows "professional knowledge", "professional skills", and "attitudes and values. The domain of “professional skills” covers the competency of assessment and evaluation. The teacher chooses and employs the methods, techniques, assessment and evaluation instruments suitable for attaining the determined goals. With a reference to this document, the last term of teacher education might be the most convenient time to perform the three major notions teacher learning: “knowledge for practice” (formal knowledge and theory to develop practice), “knowledge in practice” (practical knowledge is taken place in practice and its effect on practice), “knowledge of practice” (knowledge of practice with greater social, cultural, and political themes) (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 2). This could plausibly be justified by the premise that prospective teachers in current research supposed to have "insights, knowledge, abilities, and tendencies” (Reynolds, 1989, p. 138).

Based on the constructs emerged in third interview question, some crucial findings are worthy of discussion. Pre-service English teachers identify or explain their ideas and needs about how to encourage language assessment training for making better. It seems to be plausible that the students asked to know how to construct good test items for each of skill to test their knowledge of English in an exam-oriented culture. It sounds more practical and beneficial in most school contexts at any levels. Thus, participants in the study are likely to follow summative assessment than formative assessment. It is questioned that the possibility of developing critical and deeper competencies after receiving only one ELTE course in their last term of teacher education programme (Lam, 2015). Recent studies in literature offer vital evidence for the role of assessment course in developing pre-service teachers' language assessment literacy . Sarıyıldız (2018) found in her study that nearly half of the students-teachers stated the training on assessment sufficient regarding identifying what they learned, finding out what be learned/taught”, and giving score. The students' qualitative comments indicated a robust cognitive framework necessitated to gain insight into assessment practicals of teacher education programs. In Mertler's (2009) study, in-service teachers assess their students from a different range of aspects, and also their knowledge of assessment terminology improved dramatically. Even student teachers receiving assessment courses make critical decisions about assessment practises matching with the content of the language assessment courses (Jeong, 2013). There has been a take-it-for-granted assumption that language teachers fail to integrate well the theory into practices (Lam, 2015). Similarly, Kleinsasser (2005) stipulated the fact that the biggest challenge in a language assessment course is the issue of the connection of theory with practice.

Under the light of themes appeared in the last interview question, it is maintained that findings of current research are in parallel with previous studies. In their study, Bailey and Brown (2008) aimed to investigate the topics which language assessment course covered, and the students' apparent attitudes toward language assessment courses. Findings showed that testing language skills and classroom-based practicals were higher than general topics. Also, question item writing for English language skills was covered in 90% or more of the courses. Only three students stated computer-based testing and 'technology in language assessment', one each remarked the topics as follows: assessing younger learners, individual learner differences (p. 366). Similarly, in this study, only one student mentioned topic of technology although McMillan (2000) stated good assessment appropriately incorporates technology. Furthermore, in Jeong's (2013) research, instructors identified two important course topics as classroom assessment and alternative assessment. From an inquiry stance, the reason lies on the context. As implied by Taylor (2009), literacy level differs from context to context. In foreign language context research in Turkey, Sarıyıldız (2018) discovered that the participants stated topics about language testing and assessment as follows: assessment types, testing young learners, validity and reliability. The students declared that these topics would help them to know how to design, adapt, administer and evaluate tests, and also employ different assessment tools to meet needs of the students in their contexts. Again, in Turkish context, Hatipoęlu (2010) found out that testing skills/knowledge, reliability and validity were commonly listed topics by the majority of ELT students. The students considered that testing techniques for different skills, designing exams for each skill and interpretation of question items were the practical subject matters to be used in their future careers. Abstract topics were removed to assess the students actual performance. In accordance with the findings, it is clearly evident that assessing English language skills is vitally important for pre-service teachers to assess foreign language development of their students. Kırkgöz, Babanoęlu and Aęçam (2017) inspected the EFL teachers'perceptions on core language skills in language testing and assessment in primary education in Turkey. The responses revealed that speaking, vocabulary and grammar are considered to be the most significant skills while reading and writing are paid adequate

care. On the other hand, listening is revealed to receive the least attention in assessing the success in language classrooms.

Jannati (2015) asked the students to state a topic regarding aim of the course. They mainly focused on all four main skills of language learning. There seems to be a need to know how to assess the framework of communicative competence in order to assess communicative language skills (Morrow, 2018). Because, EFL teachers generally performed well in implementing the test, giving score, and evaluating test results, while reported the lowest performance was on communicative tests (Plake, 1993). Conversely, assessment training needs of teachers in Europe focus on portfolio assessment, designing tests, and peer-and self-assessment (Hasselgreen, Carlsen & Helness, 2004). Rather unfortunately, none of the students suggested portfolios or other alternative assessment tools as the topics taught in the present research. This finding might represent that the students were illiterate in assessment as Popham (2010) claimed. As stated by Schmitt (2002), individual differences is a highly demanding need to be satisfied in language learning process. It is also notable that the topic of individual differences is covered by the students in the present study. Once again, this finding suggests further evidence for research results that the topics should match with the students' needs, course content, social and pedagogical assessment skills properly to keep abreast of theoretical and practical issues in teacher education programme.

Conclusions

The major concern of this research was to get in-depth data on prospective teachers' opinions about ELTE course they received in the 8th term of EFL teacher education program, and uncover their needs and preferences. One more to note, the students' expectations are largely determined by and teacher education programmes' needs. In an attempt to support the claim made by scholars, this study aimed to provide a profound understanding to prospective English teachers regarding the process of testing and evaluation. Also, this study strongly supports the urgent need for reviewing and amending the ELTE course in order to increase its effectiveness and accountability in ELT curriculum. Most EFL teachers highly believe that the assessment training may not prepare undergraduates to make the decisions routinely (Mertler, 2009). In fact, this implies that the challenges to be coped with is largely due to insufficient assessment training offered in teacher instructional programs (Plake, 1993). The researchers in literature mostly agree that language teachers are not provided with ample possibilities for assessment training in EFL teacher education programs. Therefore, they are incompetent at taking part in assessment-related activities (Fard & Tabatabaei, 2018; Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003; Plake & Impara, 1993). In parallel with these purposes, the methodology of this study was kept within the border of a qualitative study to identify the possible views of a group of EFL prospective teachers on ELTE course and know their needs and expectations. Based upon the findings of research, it may be put forward that ELTE course must offer adequate support to train and promote pre-service teachers' LAL at university-based language assessment training. Results indicated that the participants of the study are not savvy on language assessment literacy, and have a limited range of LAL. There is little doubt that the pre-service EFL teachers hold a common belief that language assessment required practical knowledge rather than theoretical knowledge. Hence, it is needed to place one more course in language teacher education program to keep up with both robust knowledge in theoretical aspect and novelties in the practices of language assessment field. Thus, pre-service language teachers should be offered long-lasting and sustainable training in order to be equipped and knowledgeable EFL teachers in real practical examples. ELTE course in English teacher training program needs to be revised or redesigned in terms of its content in a way that it should provide both solid knowledge base and

practical implications adequately to meet the demands of language teachers. Results showed that the senior students indicated their priorities and possible topics that could be covered in an assessment course as follows: How to test/assess the students, testing language skills, evaluation and evaluation techniques.

The results of the study testify value of the assessment course and help further research to appreciate the contribution of that course to a highly demanding language teacher training education. In line with this background, the current research aims at expanding the assessment paradigm and provide teacher trainers and curriculum designers with useful insights into the current status and role of ELTE course in ELT curriculum. Since, language assessment identifies necessary goals for language teaching and also observes the progress in achieving those goals (Davies, 1990). One point to note from the outset is that ELTE course seems to be perceived as an obligation to graduate from a language teacher education program and to be future's well-qualified and skillful EFL teachers. In a certain sense, the current study with a glimpse of higher education is believed to improve omnipresent tendency towards describing the needs and demands of prospective teachers of English. With this in mind, there are some implications drawn from the findings of this research both for pre and in-service teacher training programs. Undoubtedly, the challenge probably lies in providing plentiful opportunities for students to explain their assessment needs. Assessment is never assumed to be a simple task. Clearly, depth of knowledge and practice in language assessment are prominent in making strong changings and to promote awareness in assessment literacy culture in EFL teacher education program (Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). Arguably, in Turkish educational context, there is a critical need to ponder over to create ample attempts to integrate perception and practice in a greater insight of the purpose, role and function of assessment.

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