EXPLORING PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS' COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND THEIR REALIZATION LEVELS THROUGH PORTFOLIOS

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to explore the expectations of pre-service English teachers from a course at the beginning of the term and realization levels of their expectations at the end as well as investigating the function of portfolios as an assessment tool from pre-service teachers' points of view. The participants were 90 third-year pre-service teachers, who took the *Teaching Language Skills I,* and developed portfolios during the fall term, 2016-2017 Academic year. The data were obtained from the portfolios and semi-structured interviews and they were analyzed by using content analysis technique. The results revealed that pre-service English teachers expected to be trained in four different categories during the course *Teaching Language Skills I*, which are skills teaching, managing learning and teaching, course design, and teacher skills. It was also found that 60% of the expectations of pre-service English teachers were met by the course. Pre-service teachers also reported that they benefited from the course *Teaching Language Skills I* in terms of some aspects of language teaching without expecting to do so.

Keywords: portfolio assessment, language teacher education, teaching language skills, course expectations.

1. Introduction

Every individual course in language teacher education program has a distinguished place and contributes to the preparation of pre-service teachers for teaching profession. Of the courses, Teaching Language Skills I and II program help pre-service English teachers prepare for teaching language skills individually and in an integrated way. Next to their role as an alternative assessment tool in language classroom, portfolios can be a means of reflection for student-teachers and a source of constructive feedback for the course developers and teacher educators.

Conventional teacher education programs follow an apprenticeship model and in so doing they provide student teachers with pedagogical skills and techniques derived from existing body of knowledge. Zeichner and Liston (1987) argue that this model of teacher education inhibits the self-directed growth of student teachers leading to a failure in promoting their full professional development. Contrary to these conventional models, Zeichner and Liston (1987) offered "an alternative model which oriented towards the goals of reflective teaching. Reflective teaching enhances teacher autonomy and increases democratic participation in systems of educational governance" (p. 23)

Nona (1998) tackles the issue of reflection in teaching and teacher education and the possible role of development in becoming a reflective practitioner. These issues are taken up through the lens of a portfolio process. The idea of reflective practice as a goal for teacher

education is not new and it goes back to Dewey (1933). Reflective practice in teacher education gained popularity in the 1980s with the work of Schön (1983, 1987). Nona's (1998) study, by looking at how reflection has been discussed in teacher education, presents data from a longitudinal study with the participation of ten teacher apprentices to examine the experience of becoming reflective through a portfolio process.

As a source of review and reflection, compiling the portfolio prompts the teacher to engage in a comprehensive self-assessment of different aspects of work or a specific course in question. By reviewing the content of portfolio, the teacher can make decisions about the priorities and goals for future development or improvement. Recently, language teachers have encouraged their students to accumulate and present their work. For that reason, portfolios are mostly used in language assessment and reflection. They contribute to teachers in their teaching and assessment practices. As an alternative form of assessment, portfolios have gained recognition in documenting students' learning (Kabilan & Khan, 2012, p. 1007). Different researchers in literature have made various definitions of portfolios. Brown and Hudson (1998) refer to portfolio assessment as "purposeful collections of any aspects of students' work that tell the story of their achievements, skills, efforts, abilities, and contributions to a particular class" (p. 664). Bahar (2006, cited in Demirel & Duman, 2015, p. 2635) defines portfolio as "the organized form of students' termly or yearly studies according to certain standards" (p. 74). Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002, p. 281) state that portfolios provide "the continuous observation of student's progress needed for determining teaching strategies." Shortly, advantages for portfolio assessment can be presented as: "strengthening students' learning; enhancing the teacher's role; and improving testing processes. For the teacher, they provide a clear picture of students' language growth by changing his/her role from that of an adversary to that of a coach, and provide insights into progress of each individual student" (Brown and Hudson, 1998, p. 664). Baume and Yorke (2002, p. 7) point out that "portfolios are widely used to document and assess professional development." In their study, portfolios were used to assess university teachers on courses run by the UK Open University.

Arslan (2014) studied integration of feedback into prospective English language teacher's writing process via blogs and portfolios. He investigated the effects of keeping blogs and portfolios on a group of pre-service English teachers' writing skills. The study shows that "the practice of blogging and portfolio keeping and specially receiving feedback both on paper and online contributes to student-teachers' writing skills significantly on basic elements of writing skill such as process, organization, content, language use, vocabulary, mechanics and accuracy. One more suggestion is that blogs and portfolios need to be integrated into writing classes in order to secure better benefits from writing practice in EFL context" (p. 131). Jarvinen and Kohonen (1995, p. 25) evaluate professional development in higher education based on personal portfolios during one year-long induction program. The findings indicate that self-assessment via portfolio keeping is an important tool for professional development. Stone (1998) examined student teachers' and supervisors' ideas about the portfolio process. In the study, the participants identified problems, pitfalls and benefits associated with portfolios. It is suggested that portfolios can be an excellent means for student teachers to document and reflect on their learning and growth as teachers. It is also recommended in the study that student teachers should start keeping portfolios at early stages of their undergraduate education. In another study, Anderson and DeMeulle (1998) examined the use of portfolios in 24 teacher education programs. The findings show that the teacher educators have not explicitly recognized the full value of portfolios, and the use of portfolios as an assessment tool is reflective of a constructivist paradigm. Tanner, Longayroux, Beijaard and Verloop (2000, p. 20) tell their experiences from using portfolios as an instrument for

professional development during a one-year pre-service teacher education course for language graduates. In the study, they present their belief that portfolios can demonstrate a trainee's learning process over time, illustrate an individual's development, show a complexity of a teacher's life, and stimulate reflection. They also demonstrated the ways of giving feedback on portfolios and made recommendations for strengthening trainees' reflective skills. Banfi's (2003) study presents portfolios, which aimed at developing the linguistic, academic and professional skills of trainee teachers and translators. The results demonstrated that "the flexibility of portfolios is considered to make them ideal tools for encouraging learner autonomy and a useful means of showing progress in the development of the skills mentioned above" (p. 34).

1.1. Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the expectations of pre-service English teachers at the beginning of the term and realization levels of their expectations at the end of the term, as well as investigating the function of portfolios as an assessment tool from pre-service teachers' points of view. Towards this aim, this study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1) What are the expectations of pre-service English teachers from Teaching Language Skills I in terms of their professional development?

2) According to pre-service English teachers, to what extent their expectations from the course are met?

3) Are there any aspects of teaching emerging at the end of the course that pre-service English teachers benefited without expecting to do so at the beginning?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study is qualitative in design (see Berg, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Dörnyei, 2007). The participants were 90 third-year pre-service teachers, who took the *Teaching Language Skills I* and developed portfolios in *Teaching Language Skills I* during the fall term. These pre-service teachers had completed the courses aiming at developing linguistic skills, and professional development such as skill courses in the first year and methodology and language acquisition courses in the second year. The learning portfolios of the pre-service teachers with 180 introduction and conclusion entries were fed into learning portfolios. As part of the assessment of the course, the pre-service English teachers were asked to keep a portfolio in the fall term of 2016-2017 Academic year. The portfolio consisted of compulsory and optional tasks. In compulsory part, student teachers were asked to write an introduction to their portfolios at the beginning of the term and a conclusion at the end.

2.2. Analysis of the Data

The data obtained were analyzed by using content analysis technique. Recurring themes obtained from the analysis of the content of both introduction and conclusion parts of the portfolios were given in frequencies and in order of mostly referred themes; skills teaching, managing learning and teaching processes, course design and teacher skills (Saldana, 2009).

3. Results

R.Q.1: What are the expectations of pre-service English teachers from Teaching Language Skills I in terms of their professional development?

Pre-service English teachers reported that they were expecting to be trained in four different categories during the Skills Teaching I course. Those categories are *skills teaching, managing learning and teaching, course design, and teacher skills*. Table 1 displays the categories and the expectations of pre-service teachers together with their frequency levels.

Table 1. *Pre-service teachers' expectations from Skills Teaching I course*

Categories	Expectations	*f*
Skills Teaching	How to teach four skills	25
	How to teach pronunciation	15
	How to teach listening	13
	How to teach speaking	12
	How to teach reading	4
	How to teach grammar in an enjoyable way	4
	How to teach writing	3
Managing Learning and Teaching	How to manage motivation	5
	How to manage communication	4
	How to teach different levels of students	4
	How to increase participation	3
	How to deal with unexpected situations	3
	How to organize group work	2
	How to catch attention	2
	How to manage classroom language	1
	How to manage error correction	1
Course Design	How to design a lesson	9
	How to design an activity	9
	How to design materials	2
Teacher Skills	How to teach various learning styles	3
	How to teach various age groups	2
	How to teach young learners	1
	How to become a skillful teacher	1
	How to raise awareness	1

In the skills teaching category, pre-service teachers expected to learn how to teach four skills in an integrated way and as well as learning how to teach listening, speaking, reading, and writing as individual skills. Additionally, they said that they expected to be trained in terms of how to teach pronunciation and grammar in an enjoyable way. Learning how to teach four skills in an integrated way is the mostly expected one in this category. Learning how to manage motivation and communication, teaching different levels of students, increasing classroom participation, dealing with unexpected situations are among the expectations of pre-service teachers in the category of managing learning and teaching. In terms of course design, pre-service teachers expected to be trained in designing a lesson, an activity, and materials. In terms of the aspect of teacher skills, pre-service teachers wanted to learn about teaching various learning styles and age groups, teaching young learners, becoming a skillful teacher and raising awareness of students about learning a foreign language.

R.Q.2: According to pre-service English teachers, to what extent were their expectations from the course met?

There were 25 expectations emerging in pre-service English teachers' portfolios at the beginning of the course. Of them, 15 expectations were reported to be met by the pre-service English teachers in their portfolios at the end of the course. In conclusion, 60% of the expectations of pre-service English teachers were met by the course *Teaching Language Skills I.* Therefore, it can be said that a considerable rate of student expectations were met by the course; and this shows both the pre-service teachers' high awareness level about what to expect from which course and also the instructor's skill in designing the course in a way to cater for student needs. Table 2 displays pre-service teacher expectations that were met and not met at the end of the course. Expectations written in bold were the ones which were met throughout the course.

Table 2. *Pre-service teacher expectations*

Categories	Expectations at the Beginning	Expectations at the End
Skills Teaching	**How to teach four skills** **How to teach pronunciation** **How to teach listening** **How to teach speaking** **How to teach reading** **How to teach grammar through enthusiastic methods** **How to teach writing**	**How to teach four skills** **How to teach pronunciation** **How to teach listening** **How to teach speaking** **How to teach reading** **How to teach grammar through enthusiastic methods** **How to teach writing**
Managing Learning and Teaching	**How to manage motivation** **How to manage communication** **How to teach different levels of students** **How to increase participation** How to deal with unexpected situations How to organize group work How to catch attention How to manage classroom language How to manage error correction	**How to manage motivation** **How to manage communication** **How to teach different levels of students** **How to increase participation** How to make transitions between activities
Course Design	**How to design a lesson** **How to design an activity** **How to design materials**	**How to design a lesson** **How to design an activity** **How to design materials**
Teacher Skills	How to teach various learning styles **How to teach various age groups** How to teach young learners How to become a skillful teacher How to raise awareness	How to carry out task based teaching **How to teach various age groups** How to provide student engagement How to use various techniques and strategies How to raise awareness on weak points How to use technology

It is apparent that the aspects of teaching in the categories of *Skills Teaching* and *Course Design*, all of the expectations of the pre-service teachers were met. Nearly half of the expectations related to the aspects of teaching in the category of *Managing Teaching and Learning* were also met during the Skills Teaching I course. However, it is seen that pre-service teachers had different expectations related to *Teacher Skills*. They expected to be trained about some aspects such as teaching various learning styles, teaching young learners, raising awareness, etc. However, some of their expectations can be regarded as beyond the scope of this course. For instance, there is a course named Teaching English to Young

Learners, which aims to train pre-service teachers specifically in teaching young learners. Therefore, it cannot be expected from the Skills Teaching I course to train pre-service teachers in that aspect. Other expectations about learning how to teach various learning styles or how to become a skillful teacher can be objectives of the course named *Special Methods in Language Teaching*.

R.Q.3: Are there any aspects of teaching emerging at the end of the course that pre-service English teachers benefited without expecting to do so at the beginning?

Pre-service teachers reported that they benefited from the Teaching Language Skills I course in terms of some aspects of language teaching without expecting to do so. They stated that, in the categories of managing learning and teaching, and teacher skills they learned how to make transitions between activities, carrying out task-based teaching, providing student engagement, using various strategies and techniques, raising awareness on weak points, and how to use technology.

4. Conclusion and Implications for Teacher Education

Results of this study revealed that nearly 60% of pre-service teacher expectations from *Teaching Language Skills I* course were met and they benefited from the course in some other aspects of teaching without expecting to do so at the beginning of the term. Finding out about pre-service teacher expectations may have implications for language teacher education programs. At first glance, bringing pre-service teachers' expectations of a course to their consciousness level through portfolios may maximize the advantage they take from that course. By this way, they can compare what they expected and what they found from a course and this may be an effective way in evaluating what they have done throughout a course. This can also help them be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, being aware of the expectations of pre-service teachers from a course may help course instructors in terms of designing the course effectively and meeting his/her students' expectations. All those benefits may increase effectiveness of a foreign language teacher education program.

As for further research studies that can be built on this study, pre-service teacher expectations that are not met throughout the course can be scrutinized; and reasons and results of this situation in terms of pre-service teacher thinking and actions can be examined. Teacher educators' views on the situation can also be studied.

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