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Does English language teacher education curriculum promote CEFR awareness of prospective EFL teachers?

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Abstract
This study aims at investigating whether the new English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) curriculum which was put into practice in 2006 promotes prospective EFL teachers’ awareness of CEFR bringing European standards to modern language teaching. In doing so, 72 prospective EFL teachers participated in the study. The data was collected through a questionnaire adapted from Kir (2011). The results of the study revealed prospective EFL teachers’ high level of CEFR awareness and their great willingness for a CEFR-related ELTE curriculum via which they can gain better and more concurrent instructional skills.

Key words: ELTE curriculum; foreign language education; CEFR awareness; prospective EFL teachers.

1. Introduction

Teacher training is one of the most prominent subjects of educational systems. It has a great significance that directly affects the quality of education. In this vein, the curricula of the faculties that train teachers are required to be strategically regulated and developed. With this necessity, it was in 1997 that the programs of education faculties in Turkey were reconstructed (Yelken, 2009). The 1997 curriculum indicates that the main objective of the secondary level English education is to promote the basic communication skills of the learners through the integration of the four skills so that learners can be engaged in powerful communication in the target language (MONE, 2001). At this point, the 1997 curriculum can be viewed as a milestone in English language teaching in Turkey in that the concept of the “communicative” approach was introduced into the ELTE curriculum for the first time (Kirkgoz, 2005).

The number of methodology courses was increased and the teaching practicum component was extended to cover both primary and secondary schools. Thus, teacher trainees had more chance to observe the actual teaching
practices, thereby gaining more practical and hand-on experience in schools. Moreover, English language teaching departments felt the necessity to infuse a new course entitled ‘Teaching English to Young Learners’ into the undergraduate level, which was a crucial step since prospective teachers would be better qualified to meet the needs and expectations of young learners.

In 2006, the Council of Higher Education (CHE) restructured the curricula of the education faculties to meet the changing demands and needs of the social, educational and political domains; and local, national and international requirements (Coşkun, 2008; OECD, 2005). The new ELTE curriculum covers a number of obligatory and a few elective courses. The components of the curriculum are made up of field knowledge (linguistic competence), teacher education (pedagogic competence), general knowledge and teaching practice (Altunya, 2006). Seferoğlu (2006) states that more stress is placed on teaching methodology and practice components in the new program as compared to the 1997 curriculum that was in use from 1998 till 2006. The total number of class hours of the courses amounts to 175, of which 143 hours are assigned to the theory-based, and 32 to the practice-based courses (CHE, 2007).

This new curriculum is based on Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) which provides a common basis for language programs and a comprehensive way to describe language teaching and learning processes (Council of Europe, 2001). Within the framework of the CEFR, the trainees are expected to be independent learners and the teachers are expected to widen the scopes of both personal and professional enhancement. The reconstruction of the curriculum has been planned within the framework of European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) and shaped by taking the prerequisites of teacher training programs and faculties of education into account (CHE, 2008). Although several research studies (e.g. Coşkun & Daloğlu, 2010; Ogeyik, 2009; Erozan, 2005; Salli-Copur, 2008; Seferoğlu, 2006) have analyzed the new programs from several perspectives since 2007, very few research studies have concentrated on the relatedness of the new English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) curriculum and the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) concept. Hence, the aim of the present study is to investigate whether the new ELTE curriculum promotes prospective EFL teachers’ awareness of CEFR.

2. The integration of the European language portfolio and the common European framework of reference into the ELTE curriculum in Turkey

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) was developed and piloted by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, from 1998 to 2000 to foster the progress of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism at all levels (Mirici, 2007). It is a concrete attempt to arrange foreign language teaching activities within the European context and to enhance the quality of communication amongst European people with different languages and cultural backgrounds (Mirici, 2008). The ELP relies on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which presents a common foundation for the explanation of language syllabi, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe (Council of Europe, 1998, 2001). The ELP consists of three parts: the Language Biography, the Dossier and the Language Passport. In the Language Biography, the owner keeps records of his/her foreign language learning process and cross-cultural experiences. In the Dossier, all sorts of documents are kept, and the Language Passport functions as the summary of the Language Biography and the Dossier. Besides, the document contains a grid where the learners can describe their language competences according to common criteria and which can serve as a complement to customary certificates (Council of Europe, 2005). The ELP can be viewed as a device that promotes cross-cultural and international approaches in the curriculum development. Moreover, it can be considered as a device which enhances communication skills to express oneself and comprehend others as well as developing personality for intercultural awareness and respecting others both as a learner model and as a representative of a particular culture (Mirici, 2008).

The CEFR is one of most significant publications of the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe. The main aim of this document is to facilitate “mutual recognition of the qualifications, and communication concerning objectives and achievements standards” (Morrow, 2004, p.7). In country, the CEFR has served as the
major conceptual framework for the teaching of foreign languages to students. At this juncture, ELT in Turkey has experienced three radical changes, namely the design of the new curricula for teaching foreign languages, the design of textbooks dependent on these curricula, and finally organizing in-service training programs across the country to make language teachers familiar with the pedagogical innovations stressed in the CEFR (Çakır & Balçkanli, 2012).

To change the Turkish education system from teacher-centered learning to a learner-centered system, the Ministry of Education in Turkey supported the infusion of the ELP and the CEFR into the ELTE curriculum. The ELTE curriculum, stated by the Ministry of Education (MONE), Turkey (2006, p. 23), describes the functions of the ELP as “making the language learning process more transparent to learners, helping them to develop their capacity for reflection and self-assessment, and thus enabling them gradually to assume more and more responsibility for their own learning”.

The MONE first piloted the ELP and the CEFR in 20 schools in two towns during the 2001–2002 Academic Year because this was a new approach for language teachers. The Ministry of Education familiarized language teachers in these schools with the ELP and the CEFR through in-service teacher training programs, in the form of seminars to groups of teachers. In the 2006–2007 Academic Year, the Ministry of Education increased the extent of the piloting to ten towns and decided to gradually put the program into practice throughout the whole country (Şahinkarakuş, Yumru, & Inozu, 2009).

It was in 2009 that a group of seminars entitled “Training of English Teachers” were conducted throughout Turkey. The aim was to train almost 48000 English language teachers working for the MONE in the light of the principles of the CEFR. Up to now, English language teachers in 48 cities in our country have joined these seminars. The topics such as the CEFR, new English language curricula, integrated language teaching, portfolio assessment in language learning, and materials adaptation within the framework of the CEFR were covered during these seminars (MONE, 2011).

Several studies have focused on the implementation of CEFR in teacher training faculties. However, they are far from being systematic because individual universities have different practices in introducing these new principles to teachers. A systematic device for introducing the underlying principles stated in CEFR is the EPOSTL. This is a document which stimulates students undergoing their pre-service teacher education to reflect on the didactic knowledge and skills necessary to teach languages, assists them in assessing their own didactic competences and enables them to observe their progress and to record their experiences of teaching during the course of their teacher education (Newby et al., 2006). The EPOSTL is strongly believed to contribute to the enhancement of autonomy as a reflection device in foreign language teacher education and to enable student teachers to promote an awareness of their own teaching practice (Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008).

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Seventy two students from the English Language Teaching Department of a state university participated in this study in the Fall Semester of 2011-2012 Academic Year. The selection of the subjects was done in random regardless of gender and race. The students ranged in age from 20 to 23, and 31 of the 72 students were male. Thirty students were junior level students, whereas 42 were senior level students.

3.2. Instruments

To investigate whether the new ELTE curriculum promotes prospective EFL teachers’ awareness of CEFR, the researcher adapted the questionnaire developed by Kır (2011) to the context of the present study. The adapted version of the questionnaire was made up of three sections. In the first section, students were asked about
personal information such as name of school, age, gender, and department. In the second section, there were 11 items related to prospective EFL teachers’ levels of agreement concerning the relatedness of the new ELTE curriculum and the CEFR presented on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘1=strongly disagree’, ‘2=disagree’, ‘3=neutral’, ‘4=agree’ to ‘5=strongly agree’. In the last section, there were 20 items related to prospective EFL teachers’ levels of agreement concerning general teacher characteristics gained via a CEFR specific program presented on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘1=strongly disagree’, ‘2=disagree’, ‘3=neutral’, ‘4=agree’ to ‘5=strongly agree’.

3.3. Data collection

The questionnaire was administered to 100 prospective EFL teachers at the English Language Teacher Training Department of a state university (35 junior level students; 65 senior level students). However, the return rate from prospective EFL teachers was 72 (30 junior level students; 42 senior level students). Prior to administering the questionnaire to the prospective EFL teachers, all the items in the questionnaire were clarified by the researcher so that the respondents could easily answer the questions in the questionnaire. Only one questionnaire was given to each respondent. In the questionnaire, prospective EFL teachers were asked about their personal information, their levels of agreement concerning the relatedness of the new ELTE curriculum and the CEFR and their levels of agreement concerning general teacher characteristics gained via a CEFR specific program. Since time limitation and budget deficiency made it difficult for the researcher to administer the questionnaire to a larger sample, the researcher made use of convenience sampling method in the present research study.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the study and links these results with the results of previously conducted studies.

4.1. Prospective EFL teachers’ levels of agreement with respect to the items concerning the relatedness of the new ELTE curriculum and the CEFR

Table 1 exhibits prospective EFL teachers’ levels of agreement with respect to 11 items concerning the relatedness of the new ELTE curriculum and the CEFR. As is clearly seen in the table, prospective EFL teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the items such as a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k. These results show that (a) the majority of prospective EFL teachers know about the CEFR (Agree= 81.9 %); (b) the majority of prospective EFL teachers read the CEFR (Agree= 77.8%); (c) the majority of prospective EFL teachers took a course / got education concerning the CEFR or the CEFR related subjects (Agree=81.9 %); (d) the majority of prospective EFL teachers have sufficient amount of knowledge with respect to the CEFR (Agree=73.7%) (e) the majority of prospective EFL teachers view the CEFR as having impact on the course books used for teaching English to students in their department (Agree= 80.5%); (f) the majority of prospective EFL teachers view the CEFR as having impact on the tests used in their department (Agree= 77.8%); (g) the majority of prospective EFL teachers view the CEFR as having impact on the English language teaching techniques used in their department (Agree=82%); (h) prospective EFL teachers view their lecturers as reflecting the CEFR specific characteristics in the contents of their courses (Agree=68.1%); (i) the teaching program practiced in their institution is a CEFR specific English language teacher training model (Agree=82%); (j) the content of the CEFR should be taken into account in English language teacher education program (Agree=68.1%); (k) the CEFR and the ELP should be incorporated into English language teacher education curriculum as obligatory or elective courses (Agree= 70.9).
Table 1. Prospective EFL teachers’ levels of agreement with respect to the items concerning the relatedness of the new ELTE curriculum and the CEFR

| Items                                                                 | SD  | D   | N   | A   | SA  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| a. I know about the CEFR.                                             | 3(4.2) | 3(4.2) | 7(9.7) | 45(62.5) |   |
| 14(19.4)                                                              |     |     |     |     |     |
| b. I read the CEFR.                                                   | 3(4.2) | 4(5.6) | 9(12.5) | 29(40.3) |   |
| 27(37.5)                                                              |     |     |     |     |     |
| c. I took a course / got education concerning the CEFR or the CEFR related subjects. | 4(5.6) | 2(2.8) | 7(9.7) | 34(47.2) |   |
| 25(34.7)                                                              |     |     |     |     |     |
| d. I have sufficient amount of knowledge with respect to the CEFR.    | 3(4.2) | 4(5.6) | 12(16.7) | 31(43.1) |   |
| 22(30.6)                                                              |     |     |     |     |     |
| e. The CEFR has impact on the coursebooks used for teaching English in the department | 4(5.6) | 3(4.2) | 7(9.7) | 23(31.9) |   |
| 35(48.6)                                                              |     |     |     |     |     |
| f. The CEFR has impact on the tests used in our department.          | 3(4.2) | 4(5.6) | 9(12.5) | 20(27.8) | 36(50) |
| 38(52.8)                                                              |     |     |     |     |     |
| g. The CEFR has impact on language teaching techniques used in the department. | 3(4.2) | 3(4.2) | 7(9.7) | 21(29.2) |   |
| 29(40.3)                                                              |     |     |     |     |     |
| h. Our lecturers reflect the CEFR specific characteristics in the contents of their courses. | 3(4.2) | 4(5.6) | 16(22.2) | 20(27.8) |   |
| i. The teaching program practiced in our institution is a CEFR specific English language teacher training model. | 4(5.6) | 2(2.8) | 7(9.7) | 22(30.6) |   |
| j. It is necessary that the content of the CEFR be taken into account in English language teacher education program. | 3(4.2) | 4(5.6) | 16(22.2) | 1(1.4) |   |
| 48(66.7)                                                              |     |     |     |     |     |
| k. It is necessary that the CEFR and the ELP be incorporated into English language teacher education curriculum as obligatory or elective courses. | 4(5.6) | 3(4.2) | 14(19.4) | 3(4.2) |   |

4.2. Prospective EFL teachers’ levels of agreement with respect to the items concerning general teacher characteristics that can be gained via a CEFR specific program

Table 2 depicts prospective EFL teachers’ levels of agreement with respect to 20 items concerning general teacher characteristics that can be gained via a CEFR specific program. As is clearly seen in the table, prospective EFL teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the items such as a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t. These results indicate that: (a) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can understand the contents of European documents (e.g., the CEFR, the ELP) and that they can adapt them to their teaching when they start the teaching profession (Agree=77.8%), (b) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can understand the personal, intellectual and cultural value of knowing other languages (Agree=79.1%), (c) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can choose and design different activities for developing and practicing different listening strategies (Agree=77.8%), (d) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can choose and design different activities which can help students to be aware of characteristics specific to the spoken language and to speculate on those characteristics (Agree=79.2%), (e) prospective EFL teachers can design different activities so that students can develop and practice different reading strategies based on the purpose of reading (Agree=66.7%), (f) they can evaluate and choose meaningful writing activities so as to help students to be aware of different text types (letter, report, etc.) and to use appropriate language (Agree=72.3%), (g) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can choose and evaluate tasks that can help students to use new words in spoken and written communication (Agree=79.2%), (h) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can choose and evaluate activities that raise students’ intercultural awareness (Agree=80.6%), (i) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can choose suitable activities and ‘ICT’ materials for students and that they can use them in the classroom (Agree=77.8%),
(j) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can balance and diversify the activities so that they can contain different competencies and skills (Agree=82%), (k) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can balance and diversify the activities to take into account students’ individual learning styles (Agree=79.2%), (l) prospective EFL teachers can engage students in lesson planning (Agree=68.1%), (m) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can be flexible when practicing the lesson plan and they take into account students’ interests during the lesson (Agree=82%), (n) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can relate what they teach to students’ prior knowledge and their language learning experiences (Agree=80.6%), (o) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can help students to develop suitable learning strategies (Agree=80.6%), (p) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can evaluate and choose different activities that can help students to reflect the existent knowledge and capabilities (Agree=79.2%), (q) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can choose and evaluate tasks that can help students to develop specific language learning and work strategies and reflect these specific language learning and work strategies (Agree=79.1%), (r) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can support their students concerning the selection of activities and tasks based on their individual needs and interests (Agree=83.3%), (s) the majority of prospective EFL teachers can plan and organize an interdisciplinary project work by themselves or by cooperating with other teachers (Agree=80.6%), (t) prospective EFL teachers can structure and plan a portfolio work (Agree=68.1%).

| Items                                                                 | SD     | D      | N      | A      | SA     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| a. I can understand the contents of European documents (e.g., the CEFR, the ELP) 2(2.8) 5(6.9) 9(12.5) 10(13.9) and I can adapt them to my teaching when I start the teaching profession. |        |        |        |        |        |
| b. I can understand the personal, intellectual and cultural value of 24(33.3) knowing other languages. | 3(4.2) | 4(5.6) | 8(11.1) | 33(45.8) |
| c. I can choose and design different activities for developing and 20(27.8) practicing different listening strategies. | 3(4.2) | 4(5.6) | 9(12.5) | 36(50)  |
| d. I can choose and design different activities which can help students to be aware of 19(26.4) characteristics specific to the spoken language and to speculate on those characteristics. | 4(5.6) | 2(2.8) | 9(12.5) | 38(52.8) |
| e. Based on the purpose of reading, I can design different activities so that students 28(38.9) can develop and practice different reading strategies. | 3(4.2) | 5(6.9) | 16(22.2) | 20(27.8) |
| f. I can evaluate and choose meaningful writing activities so as to help students to be 31(43.1) aware of different text types (letter, report, etc.) and to use appropriate language. | 3(4.2) | 3(4.2) | 14(19.4) | 21(29.2) |
| g. I can choose and evaluate tasks that can help students to use new words in spoken 30(41.7) and written communication. | 2(2.8) | 4(5.6) | 9(12.5) | 27(37.5) |
| h. I can choose and evaluate activities that raise students’ intercultural awareness. 31(43.1) | 4(5.6) | 3(4.2) | 7(9.7)  | 27(37.5) |
| i. I can choose suitable activities and “ICT” materials for students and 37(51.4) I can use them in the classroom. | 3(4.2) | 4(5.6) | 9(12.5) | 19(26.4) |
| j. I can balance and diversify the activities so that they can contain different 47(65.3) competencies and skills. | 4(5.6) | 3(4.2) | 6(8.3)  | 12(16.7) |
| k. I can balance and diversify the activities to take into account students’ individual 20(27.8) learning styles. | 2(2.8) | 6(8.3) | 7(9.7)  | 37(51.4) |
5. Conclusion and recommendations

The present study investigated prospective EFL teachers’ awareness with respect to the relatedness of the new ELTE curriculum and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The results of the study revealed that the majority of prospective EFL teachers know about the CEFR, read the CEFR, took a course / got education concerning the CEFR or the CEFR related subjects, had sufficient amount of knowledge with respect to the CEFR, view the CEFR as having impact on the coursebooks used for teaching English to students in their department, on the tests used in their department and on language teaching techniques used in their department. The results of the study also unearthed that prospective EFL teachers view their lecturers as reflecting the CEFR specific characteristics in the contents of their courses, that the teaching program practiced in their institution is a CEFR specific English language teacher training model, that the content of the CEFR should be taken into account in English language teacher education program, that the CEFR and the ELP should be incorporated into English language teacher education curriculum as obligatory or elective courses.

Regarding general teacher characteristics that can be gained via a CEFR specific program, the results of the study showed that the majority of prospective EFL teachers understand the contents of European documents (e.g. CEFR, ELP) and that they can adapt these documents to their teaching when they start the teaching profession. In our time, adapting innovations in every field is possible by educating well-qualified teachers. At this point, the curricula of foreign language teacher training departments in education faculties should be in line with innovations. Through using a CEFR and ELP related language teacher training curriculum, we can create appropriate learning environments for students contributing to affecting students’ course related attitudes in a positive way. Especially, in courses focusing on language skills, the ELP should be preferred by language teachers. Activities that can actualize descriptors in the CEFR should be infused into foreign language coursebooks by coursebook writers. In foreign language education departments, there must be two fundamental aims: (1) The ELP should be put into practice, (2) prospective EFL teachers should graduate from their department with C1 level (IŞişağ & Demirel, 2010).
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