Linking Theory and Practice in an ELT program: An Evaluation of Materials, Testing and Practicum Courses

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Abstract

Changes and innovations to the English language teacher education undergraduate program in Turkey have taken place quite often over the last two decades, and related research has focused predominantly on the effectiveness of the program, along with the implemented changes. Yet, evaluation studies on the specific components of the program remained scarce. Within this perspective, this study aims to evaluate the testing and materials courses of an undergraduate English Language Teaching (ELT) program offered at a state university through the voices of pre-service teachers, teacher educators, mentor teachers, and graduates. Using the evaluation model for foreign language teacher education designed by Peacock (2009), and the checklist of parameters by Weir and Roberts (1994) as the framework for analysis, questionnaires, interviews and document analysis for data collection, this case study was designed to uncover the theory/practice link among Materials and Testing courses, and the practicum component. The findings indicate a lack of theory/practice link among the components; therefore, suggestions are offered to strengthen the link related to testing and materials and their applications in the pre-service teaching practicum contexts.

Keywords: ELT program, program evaluation, testing, materials design and adaptation, pre-service teacher education.

Introduction

Teacher education programs aim to equip teacher candidates with the necessary professional knowledge and skills required to be a teacher in various educational settings. Yet, the effec-

tiveness of these programs might be questioned in training competent teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Grudnoff, 2011; İlin, 2019; Moreno, 2007), especially in terms of discrepancies between theory and practice experienced by student teachers (Meijer, et al., 2002). The possibility of how theory can be linked to practice in those programs (Korthagen, 2010) draw attention to eliminate the gap created by the dissonance of the two. Recent teacher education reforms paid special attention to *professional practice knowledge* (Mattsson et al., 2011), thereby highlighting the significance of the practicum. In Turkey, there have been some reforms in the ELT teacher education programs to strengthen this link, but it is important that the effectiveness of these reforms should be analysed regularly as part of program evaluations.

Program evaluation models, such as those developed by Peacock (2009), underline the need for "a good linkage among courses, avoiding overlaps" (p. 263) and successful integration of theory and practice to prepare pre-service teachers for classroom teaching. Highlighting the importance of both theory and practice in teacher education programs, Ur (2019) mentions that a good combination of the two would be "starting with a theoretical assumption, and refining it through a recursive process of experimentation, reflection, conceptualization and further experimentation" (p. 456).

Day (1991) points out that there are two major aspects to examining pre-service ESL teacher education programs; the knowledge base or the information that the students must know, and how this knowledge is conveyed to the students. Designing instructional materials and measuring learners' success are important skills for a language teacher, and they require both theoretical and practical knowledge. In the current ELT program in Turkey, there is only one specific course that covers English language testing and evaluation skills of pre-service teaching and "the lecturers teaching this course are usually faced with the dilemma of what to cover... and how to proceed with the training of the teachers" (Hatipoğlu, 2015, p. 112). The same can be applied to the development of materials and adaptation skills of pre-service teachers; the chance to develop and adapt materials in only one course. The Materials Adaptation and Development course enables pre-service teachers to employ their creativity in designing and exhibiting the materials. Yet, the applicability and practicality of those materials created in the course are of significant concern for most pre-service teachers (Uzun, 2016). Within this perspective, these pre-service teachers might encounter problems related to applying theoretical knowledge to their language classrooms. This situation creates an inevitable gap between theory and practice. As Ur (2019) points out, such theoretical knowledge gained in these courses needs to be made explicit so that they contribute to professional expertise.

Studies conducted in the Turkish context that evaluate ELT programs have various foci. Though the profound changes to the ELT curriculum have been significantly researched in general in terms of their strengths and weaknesses through multiple studies (Bayyurt, 2013; Celen & Akcan, 2017; Karakaş, 2012; Kırkgöz, 2007, 2008; Salihoğlu, 2012; Sürüç-Şen & İpek, 2020; Yavuz & Zehir Topkaya, 2013), few studies have investigated the specific components of the program (Coşkun-Ögeyik, 2009; Coşkun & Daloğlu, 2010; İlin, 2019; Seferoğlu, 2006). Yet, in the literature of ELT program evaluation research, such studies that evaluate specific aspects of the ELT programs remain scarce. Drawing on this burning need for theory and practice integration in teacher education programs and the lack of studies evaluating specific aspects of ELT programs, this study reports the effectiveness of an English Language Teaching program in a Turkish state university based on the relation and linkage between two theoretical courses: *Materials Adaptation and Development* (hereafter *Materials*), *Language Testing and Evaluation* (hereafter *Testing*) and the practicum, using the EFL teacher training program evaluation procedures of Peacock (2009) and the checklist of param-

eters by Weir & Roberts (1994). Considering the significance of the *practicum* as a core course in the program, the purpose of this evaluation is to examine to what extent *Materials* and *Testing* courses guide and support pre-service teachers in the *School Experience* course in which they begin teaching in a real context for the first time. More specifically, this study investigates the potential theory-practice linkage among the Materials, Testing, and Practicum courses, uncovering the needs, problems, and suggestions provided by the instructors, pre-service teachers, mentor teachers, and graduates.

Importance of Practicum Experience in ELT Programs

The practical experience of teaching, practicum, is the core component of language teacher education programs in that it provides pre-service teachers with real-life contexts in which to employ their theoretical skills and facilitate their professional development as prospective teachers. As Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) state, "knowledge of teaching differs from knowledge about teaching" (p. 291), and this knowledge *of* teaching is targeted in real classrooms that play an essential role in the development of pre-service teachers in teacher education programs. The assumption is that teaching practice will enable trainees to apply most of the theories that have been learned in their courses (Farrell, 2008). Still, Grudnoff (2011) argues that "a mismatch between preparation and practice" (p. 231) is not inevitable. He proposes "practicum roles, relationships, and sites should be re-examined" (p.231), since practicum may not always fulfill its primary purpose of providing pre-service teachers with opportunities for such deep learning (Canh, 2014). Therefore, an evaluation of the curriculum becomes pivotal, considering the perspective of enhancing the link between theory and practice (Hennissen et al., 2017), particularly the evaluation of the effectiveness of the practicum.

Overview of ELT Curriculum Changes in relation to the Practicum

Over the last two decades, Turkey has witnessed three major curriculum innovations to foreign language education in 1997, 2005, and 2013 that shaped the revision of primary English language teaching (ELT) programs (Kırkgöz, 2017). In the first reform in 1997, compulsory primary level education was increased to eight years, whereas before, it was only five years. It resulted in placing English language teaching at the primary level, beginning at 4th grade (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu, 1998). One significant change in the ELT curriculum was the inclusion of three practicum courses; the *School Experience I* course in the second semester, the *School Experience II* course in the seventh semester, and the *Practice Teaching* course in the eighth and last semester of the program. The 2005 reform introduced new courses, modified some, and removed others. The *School Experience I* course, was removed. This course was often given in the second semester of the program. In 2013, compulsory education increased to 12 years with the division of 4+4+4. With this latest reform, English language teaching at the primary level now started from the 2nd grade at the age of six. Practicum courses, then called *School Experience* and *Practice Teaching*, were offered both in the fourth and last year of the program. Today, with the 2018 update of New Teacher Education Programs by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) in Turkey, practicum courses are offered in the fourth and final year of the curriculum, with the names *Teaching Practice I* and *Teaching Practice II*. Also, in August 2020, CHE decided to authorise higher education institutions in Turkey to decide upon the allocation of courses and teaching hours in the teacher education curricula, in view of the three previously offered categorisation of courses; subject-matter knowledge, teacher professional knowledge, and general knowledge.

Overview of Program Studies in the Turkish Context

There are several studies available in the Turkish context that investigate the ELT curriculum from various perspectives. One example is a study by Seferoğlu (2006) in which she explored pre-service teachers' opinions regarding the link among methodology and practicum courses. She reported that this link was not strong enough, and the students had little practice opportunities. In a similar study, Coşgun-Ögeyik (2009) evaluated the restructured curriculum of ELT departments in Turkey. The results obtained from the study show evidence for the productive aspect of the current ELT curriculum, corresponding with the majority of the students' belief that their prerequisite courses as pre-service teachers, the teaching profession, social benefits, and objectives, as well as learner autonomy is consistent with the curriculum. Coşkun and Daloğlu (2010) also evaluated an ELT program using Peacock's (2009) model and concluded that the program is not sufficient to improve the linguistic competence of the students. In contrast, the students believe that it is the pedagogic side of the program that needs improving. From the perspectives of supervisors, student teachers and graduates, Celen and Akcan (2017) evaluated the ELT practicum component and reported the need for more observations across varied school contexts, increased collaboration with mentor teachers, as well as improvement in the assessment procedures, and technology use. In a similar perspective, İlin (2019) reports that even though pre-service teachers have a high level of confidence in their theoretical knowledge, they feel tense and timid in real classroom settings because it is their first experience in teaching. Furthermore, she suggests that the courses at language teacher education departments need redesigning to suit the teaching experiences of pre-service teachers (İlin, 2019). In a recent study using Peacock's (2009) model as a guide to evaluate the overall components of an ELT program from the voices of pre-service teachers, Sürüç-Şen and İpek (2020) report harmony between linguistic and pedagogic components of the program. Yet, the participants raised concerns for transferability of the skills gained in the program to the local context by conducting self-evaluations. The results from the self-evaluations were not consistent with the participants' self-report, that they were adequately trained to teach. In short, it seems that ELT programs in Turkey share a similar concern of over linking theory and practice and preparing pre-service teachers for actual classroom practice.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework for Evaluation

This evaluation frames itself around a foreign language teacher education model by Peacock (2009). Based on the notion that "it is important for every teacher-training programme to have a system for regular evaluation" (p. 259), Peacock (2009) proposes an evaluation procedure that focuses on "reviewing the literature and producing a set of questions, establishing appropriate sources of data in the setting, choosing and designing data collection methods and instruments, collecting and analysing each set of data against these questions, and constructing an account by relating each interpretation to the others" (Peacock, 2009, p. 262). The same procedures were used to create research questions as well as the design, to implement, and to report the evaluation. The focus was on the strengths and weaknesses of specific components of the program and whether the needs of the pre-service teachers were met. Peacock's (2009) model also proposes a list of 15 questions to ask when evaluating a language teacher education program. The questions focus on the philosophy of the program, preparing reflective practitioners, good linkage among the courses, preparing trainees for different socio-cultural contexts, and maintaining balance among the courses. Two questions from Peacock's model were taken and adapted for this evaluation: 1) Does the program have good linkage among courses, avoiding overlaps? 2) Do students believe the program meets their needs, is relevant to their needs, and adequately prepares them for classroom teaching? We adopted and extended the second question to the teacher educators, mentor teachers, and graduates to involve more stakeholders in the evaluation.

Besides, Weir and Roberts (1994) propose a checklist of parameters to be used in an initial training program for teacher education. The parameters are grouped into sixteen categories, which are mission, program aims, course objectives, intake and entry levels, graduates, program structure, program content, teaching, assessment, staff characteristics, staff roles, accountability, and internal administration, monitoring and evaluation systems, funding and staff levels, resources, liaison, and stakeholder concerns. All these parameters are integrated components of a program. In the current evaluation, we aimed to focus on many of these parameters to illuminate the program (Lynch, 1996) and evaluate it efficiently. The mission, program aims, and course objectives were described. The program structure, especially the coherence of courses in terms of content linkage, were the focus of the evaluation. Lastly, the stakeholder concerns were also emphasised by including teacher educators, pre-service teachers, mentor teachers, and graduates as participants.

Research Design

This study is an evaluative case study aimed to investigate the implementation of an undergraduate English Language Teacher Education program (hereafter ELT) at a state university in Turkey. One of the primary purposes of case studies is to focus on a particular bound system, unearth and explore underlying practices, and evaluate them in detail (McKay, 2006; Nunan & Bailey, 2009). To this end, we evaluated specific components of an ELT program using the program evaluation procedures of Peacock (2009) and Weir and Roberts' (1994) checklist of parameters. We particularly addressed the relation and linkage between two theoretical courses, *Materials* and *Testing*, offered for senior pre-service teachers in the program and the practicum to examine the effectiveness of the program. Considering the practicum course as a base course for teaching practice in the program, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent that Materials and Testing courses guide and support pre-service teachers in the School Experience course, in which they first begin teaching in a natural context. This study aims to answer the following research questions:
1. To what extent does the program provide a linkage among the Materials course, the Testing course, and the Practicum?
2. Do the pre-service teachers and the teacher educators believe that these courses in the program adequately prepare them for classroom teaching?

Research context: ELT program

In Turkey, language teacher education is carried out in four-year ELT programs at the faculties of education to prepare teachers of English to teach at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels at the state, and/or private educational institutions. On the official website, the program is introduced as providing "a solid foundation in the English language, English literature, methodology, educational sciences, and linguistics to make them fully qualified teachers of English" in primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions. (Middle East Technical University, n.d.-a). The fourth year of the program, which is the focus point of the current evaluation, involves both the practicum (School Experience) and Materials and Testing courses. According to the course descriptions provided in the catalogue, the Testing course involves teaching "types of tests; test preparation techniques for the purpose of measuring various English language skills; the practice of preparing various types of questions; evaluation and analysis techniques; statistical calculations" (Middle East Technical University, n.d.-b, Course Content section). The Materials course aims at "enabling students to acquire skills necessary for evaluating language teaching materials in current textbooks, adapting or developing materials for language teaching and language testing" (Middle East Technical Universi-

ty, n.d.-c, Course Content section). The school experience course is offered five hours a week with one contact hour at the department, meeting with the course instructor, and four hours in the field at the schools where the experience is taking place in real classroom settings.

Sampling

A convenience sampling was used to select the participants, as the researchers had access to the pre-service teachers who were taking the mentioned courses at that time. The participants were 17 senior year pre-service teachers, six teacher educators, two mentor teachers from two different high schools, and three graduates of the program working as teachers of English at different institutions. All the teacher educators offering the School Experience course at the time of the evaluation were interviewed.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Three data collection tools were used in this evaluation: online questionnaires to obtain data from the pre-service teachers and the graduates; semi-structured interviews with the teacher educators, pre-service teachers, and mentor teachers; and document analysis to analyse the program documents collected to gather the necessary information required for the evaluation. Table 1 presents a summary of all the data collection procedures used for this evaluation.

Table 1
Summary of collected data

Stakeholders	Questionnaires	Interviews	Documents
Students	n=17	n=2 (~29 min.)	Course outlines, course materials, the academic catalogue of the program, reports by CHE
Graduates	n=3	-	
Instructors	-	n=6 (~154 min.)	
Mentors	-	n=2 (~15 min.)	

Questionnaires, Interviews and Documents

The evaluators designed two questionnaires to gather data from the pre-service teachers and the graduates of the department. The questionnaires included open-ended questions about the extent to which Materials and Testing courses support and guide pre-service teachers for the School Experience course. The evaluators also carried out interview sessions to support the data gathered by the questionnaires, as well as to triangulate the data with as many stakeholders as possible to increase the reliability of the findings. Three sets of interview questions were designed for each group of stakeholders. All the interviews were carried out by the two researchers together and audio-recorded upon participants' consent. The interview for teacher educators included questions about the general aims and objectives of the courses, the methodology, the outcomes, the link between the course and the practicum, and their overall suggestions to improve the courses. For the interviews with the two pre-service teachers, the same questions in the questionnaire were used to gather in-depth data and get them to speak more about their experiences and perceptions. Interviews with mentor teachers included questions about their experiences in mentoring, the opportunities and problems their mentees have

about testing and materials in their classes, as well as their suggestions about improving their mentees' practices in school contexts. Interviews were carried out in Turkish, transcribed, and translated by the researchers into English for analysis. Lastly, the following documents were investigated to gather information about descriptions and mission of the program, changes in the ELT teacher education program, specific course descriptions, course aims, and objectives: the academic catalogue and website of the department, reports published by CHE in 1998, 2006 and 2012, and all the syllabi of the mentioned courses.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were analysed thematically using Boyatzis' (1998) theory-driven code development model. The raw data was first outlined according to their content. Later, the researchers went through these outlines focusing on the codes that were created before. These were the aims and objectives of the courses, methodology used in the courses, effective performances, the link between the courses, opportunities, the problems the students have, and suggestions. After that, both of the researchers reviewed the outlined transcriptions to search for these codes. As the last step, the researchers compared the two different findings of the codes to have a final list of all the codes and themes in the transcriptions to ensure inter-coder reliability.

Results

As part of the first research question, we investigated the extent to which the theoretical courses *Materials* and *Testing* provide a linkage to the practical experience of teaching in the practicum course. The analysis of the course documents and the interviews with teacher educators (TEs hereafter) will be presented together to answer the first question. For the second question, pre-service teachers' (PSTs hereafter), TEs', and graduates' opinions, experiences about the implementation, and efficiency of these courses to prepare PSTs for classroom teaching will be provided. Participants have varying degrees of agreement related to the link among the three courses under evaluation. However, they agree on the idea that it is better for PSTs to take these three courses simultaneously in the same term.

> When these two courses [School Experience & Materials] are given together, students can situate it [teaching experience] in a context and they understand whether it would work in the real-life context or not. Thus, they support each other (TE6).

In addition to the sequencing issue, TEs think that the *School Experience* course guides PSTs in the Testing and Materials courses, and not vice versa. Therefore, the TEs stated that the support works in the other direction, adding that it is the *experience* itself rather than the courses that guides the PSTs:

> Their aims are for the longer term not for the shorter term. I mean experience itself helps them in the testing and materials (TE6).

The TEs emphasize the criticality of experience in feeding theory and the School Experience course is meant to support pre-service teachers to better understand the theoretical concepts in those courses. The findings for each theoretical course will be presented separately.

The Testing Course

Concerning the Testing course, TEs encourage pre-service teachers to seek practical opportunities in School Experience and use it as a field of experience where they can observe tests, the statistical analyses the mentors use and have conversations with their mentor teachers.

> I encourage them to use School Experience as somewhat of a laboratory, a field for experience, a field where they can also explore connections to the themes that we're exploring. We look at how the teachers can interpret the scores of the group of students? How can they make sense of this? … I strongly encourage them to constantly share those observations and I remind them to make those observations (TE1).

The document analysis shows that the testing course aims to have the pre-service teachers develop an understanding of testing, overall assessment, and evaluation; examine key concepts and theoretical background related to testing; explore test preparation; reflect on effective assessment practices, study, and compare various assessment methods. It is also acknowledged by one of the TEs as follow:

> The focus is not on like proficiency exams, so not on the big exams, but we have things like how they can test reading, listening, speaking, and writing in their classes and all in all, the Testing course generally aims for "preparation towards the types of issues that they will come across in the teaching profession related to assessment" (TE2).

While on paper the Testing and School Experience courses seem to support each other and the School Experience course is meant to provide space to practice what pre-service teachers have learned in the Testing course, the participants think that the School Experience course is not enough to offer that practice opportunity. When PSTs were asked whether the Testing course guides/supports them for the School Experience course, 14 out of 17 replied with a negative answer. It seems that they were not provided with opportunities to prepare and practice tests in the school context, as PST 9 clearly explained below:

> We don't have enough time to display our skills that we learn in [the] Testing course. Mentor teacher didn't ask us to prepare any exams. Even if she wanted us to prepare, we couldn't form a test because we observed them for just 4 hours in a week and we can't know which parts the teacher emphasizes more in the course book (PST9).

The lack of linkage between the testing course and the practicum is further problematized by pre-service teachers with their reported difficulties in practicing assessment procedures. When asked to grade real quizzes at the school setting, for instance, pre-service teachers encounter problems, as illustrated below:

> Once, our mentor teacher made us read the quiz papers and I struggled when grading them because I don't want them -the students -to lose points and I don't want them to mislearn (PST15).

The same concern for the lack of linkage between theory and practice in the testing course is brought up by the mentor teachers (M, hereafter) as well. They also recognized students' anxiety and their unwillingness to implement tests in their practice teaching.

> None of my mentees suggested to grade papers, nor did they bring any test materials to implement. They are anxious about how they can manage to do it. However, when

they become teachers, they have to prepare tests anyway. Even if they cannot practice it here, they will have to do it in their schools. More experienced colleagues will support them in their initial years (M2).

While PSTs think that they do not know the students at schools well enough to test and grade them or they are too anxious to undertake those tasks; it seems that mentors also avoid giving a chance or encouraging pre-service teachers to practice testing. The teacher educators at the faculty give reasons for this lack of practice opportunities mentioned both by the pre-service teachers and mentor teachers. They mostly state that the students have almost no opportunities to apply what they have learned in the Testing course. In limited occasions, however, the TEs point out that the mentor teachers might ask the students to grade quizzes which seems to almost be the only case where the students link the Testing course with the school experience context in a practical way. TE2 stated that since the students do not have any statistical background from previous years, they have problems with calculations and computations required for different tests. The same TE further commented that since the PSTs were not presented with a clear-cut rubric by mentors, they had difficulty grading students' papers; they did not know which points to allocate to which question and this was why they approached the issue of grading with great caution.

Some suggestions were also offered from the part of the pre-service teachers to eliminate this gap and improve the testing course. They reported that there should be one more course specific to English Language testing as the present course was difficult. Also, they indicated their requests for more emphasis on having chances to practice testing in real contexts.

> I guess we must have this lesson for more than one semester since it is so hard. Preparing an exam is really difficult (PST9).

> In testing, we should do more practice rather than learning theoretical topics and memorizing them (PST15).

When graduates (G hereafter) were asked about the link between testing and practicum courses, they mostly related to their current situations as teachers in schools where language teaching is difficult due to the lack of motivation of students in their contexts. Yet, one of the graduates of the program stressed the importance of balancing theory and practice. In addition, they generally stated that they benefited from hands-on activities, reflections, and micro-teaching sessions in the testing course more than the assigned readings.

> Teaching objectives and testing objectives should always be hand in hand (G1).

> Balancing theory and practice and emphasizing the importance of student-teachers' language proficiency is important (G2).

In summary, pre-service teachers find testing difficult, and they need more supportive courses. Also, more practice to learn how to design and implement tests in practice schools should be available. The findings indicate there is not a clear consensus among mentors to the extent of which pre-service teachers should be involved in testing during practicum.

The Materials Course

The results of the document analysis and the interviews with teacher educators show that the Materials course seems to provide the linkage between theory and practice for the practicum context. TEs reported that the course aims to familiarize pre-service teachers with major approaches and frameworks of criteria for materials evaluation in ELT; allow them to engage in adaptation work of the materials reviewed; train and prepare them for materials development in the light of the major principles involved; make them familiar with the principles and techniques involved in evaluation, creation, development, modification or adaptation of new materials; and make them acquire a critical attitude towards the evaluation of coursebooks.

Similar results were obtained from the questionnaires with pre-service teachers related to the correlation between the materials course and the practicum. Pre-service teachers believe that the materials course definitely supported and guided them in the School Experience course, especially in designing, as well as developing, materials such as worksheets, hand-outs, and simplifying the language according to the students in real school settings.

> We learn the usability of course books, how to adapt, how to develop materials. We make lesson plans and the teacher gives feedback. We become more competent in School Experience (PST10).

> In all my teachings, I either adapted the book or developed a material. Materials course is one of the most practical courses in our department and I experienced it. I applied what I learned in Materials to my teachings in School Experience (PST17).

The results showed that the pre-service teachers benefitted from the school experience course, which provided a space for applying theory to practice in the school setting. Some PSTs even reported having the chance to evaluate the coursebook used in practice school in the Materials course, as shown in the quotation below.

> We started with evaluating the coursebook, like external and internal. At the same time, we were doing the same coursebook in college. When I had the coursebook, I directly wanted to evaluate it; what are the characteristics for young learners and everything (PST8).

The experiences of the PSTs showed that evaluating the coursebook of the training schools in the Materials course is really beneficial for them. At the faculty, they worked on a coursebook; at the same time, in the school, they had a chance of seeing whether the coursebook worked for real students. On the other hand, teacher educators were sometimes dissatisfied with the books used in the course for adaptation purposes. The TE4 approaches the issue from both sides, expressing dissatisfaction of both self and the PSTs on using the coursebook provided by the Ministry of Education for adaptation purposes in the Materials course:

> I feel the need that sometimes when we are taking them to school experience, every state school uses exactly the same coursebook, maybe they need to have a copy and we have to do some of the activities on those course books. But sometimes you find those books so unsatisfying that you do not want to even include them in your course pack. They do not like them; they would like to use more global coursebooks but at the end they must adapt those course books (TE4).

To deal with the dissatisfaction with the coursebooks, adaption tasks in the Materials course seem to help pre-service teachers. Since they do not have the chance to decide which book will be used in the school setting, PSTs reported that they frequently used different adaptation strategies.

> Sometimes the mentor teacher wants us to follow the book and I don't want to do it because some activities are impossible to apply. In this case, I just adapt the book. I still cover the topics of the book but the activities turn out to be more effective (PST17).

Some PSTs reported that they had hesitations about adapting the coursebook and had to stick to the way the mentor teacher followed, similar to the avoidance of grading tasks in practicum.

> When it comes to adapting materials, we struggled to adapt some parts of the coursebook because the part which we want to omit may be the most important part for our mentor teacher (PST12).

To encourage PSTs, teacher educators reported that they constantly told them to be as active as possible in creating their own chances for adapting materials used in the school contexts:

> I usually say that even if your mentor teacher tells you to use the material as it is, you can do some adaptation, bring your own creativity, at least do some warm-up, something different than what the textbook suggests or as a post activity do something different. I try to encourage them to think more critically and creatively about using the material (TE6).

However, teacher educators were also aware of the fact that the practice opportunities depended on the school and the attitudes of the mentors working with the pre-service teachers. To exemplify, the differences between state and private schools were addressed and the state schools were reported to be stricter to adapt the curriculum. Moreover, the attitudes of the mentor teachers were influential, some being more collaborative than others due to the curriculum limits and constraints. It seems, then, that there is not a strict policy between faculty and practice schools regarding material adaptation tasks.

When we study the program to see to what extent the courses prepare pre-service teachers for classroom teaching, the teacher educators and the pre-service teachers noted the timing issue of the Materials course. Teacher educators expressed that it should be changed with *Teaching English to Young Learners* course so that pre-service teachers first have a general idea about materials and then specifically focus on young learners, who are mostly the target student groups in the school contexts where the pre-service teachers are doing their practicum:

> I would put it into the second term of the third year and I would take young learners and put it in the materials course. Because young learners are very particular, they have ELT methodology one; general, specific, and then general again (TE4).

Another suggestion was that the Materials course might be divided into three groups considering the new 4+4+4 system applied in the primary and secondary levels. This way, there would be a separate Materials course for very young learners, young learners, and teenagers.

Graduates refer to the positive link between the materials course and the practicum, stating that the course prepared them well for using materials in the real school settings. On the other hand, they highlighted the contextual challenges and problems they faced in their immediate classroom environment, as well as the situated nature of the teaching profession. They pointed out the need for improvement of pre-service teacher education to equip teachers with real-life abilities to deal with contextual challenges.

Discussion and Conclusion

One of the main findings of this study is that the link between Testing and Practicum courses is not strong enough to prepare pre-service teachers for the testing practices in real school contexts, in terms of test preparation and administration. In other words, the testing course reported to fall short of enabling pre-service teachers to gain practical skills required in the field. As Hatipoğlu and Erçetin (2016) point out, pre-service teachers do not have the chance to develop their testing and assessment skills when they graduate with insufficient background from the programs. They further stress the importance of having at least two courses related to testing and assessment, with a balance between theory and practice. The views of the participants in this study indicate that the testing course, in its current form, cannot provide this required balance. One consequence of this lack of practical ability in testing and assessment is that teachers will have to teach to prepare their students for the tests designed by others (Hatipoğlu & Erçetin, 2016). This lack of practical ability in testing reported in this study is parallel to those reported in Hatipoğlu (2015) and Lam (2015). In her study, Hatipoğlu (2015) says that even though the pre-service teachers reported that the testing course would contribute positively to their professional development in terms of testing and assessment, it was seen in the study that they still have very little knowledge about testing even after four years into the program. Similarly, Lam (2015) stresses that assessment courses are unable to bridge the theory and practice gap. It is essential, thus, that testing and assessment in ELT should not be limited to only one course in the program to allow pre-service teachers to focus more on practice. This voice has already been raised in different studies previously (Hatipoğlu, 2015; Hatipoğlu & Erçetin, 2016; Ölmezer-Öztürk & Aydın, 2019) and we also stress this importance.

This study underlines the weak link between theory and practice in the Testing course by presenting the voices of all stakeholders in pre-service teacher education. It is suggested that schools and faculties collaborate to create a space for future teachers to engage in specific testing tasks, and this collaboration should be built around mutual trust among the stakeholders. For instance, mentor teachers and pre-service teachers might work together on the tests prepared by the pre-service teachers, and the pre-service teachers should be given opportunities to use their own tests in the classrooms. In the current ELT program, there are two courses related to testing and assessment; a general one called "Testing and Evaluation in Education" and another ELT specific one called "Test Preparation in ELT". We believe that these courses should focus more on the practical applications of tests that the pre-service teachers can use in practicum schools. In addition, the practicum should be organized in such a way to offer more practice opportunities for pre-service teachers in preparing and grading tests. For example, pre-service teachers can write quizzes or fill-in-the-blank type of tests to apply in the classrooms. To accomplish these goals, the first step would be to revise the course requirements of the School Experience course to ensure trainees' involvement in practice schools by increasing time and the number of tasks.

Another important result obtained from this evaluation is the positive link which was reported between the Materials and the Practicum courses. Overall, the participants believe that the

Materials course provides practical skills for pre-service teachers in adapting and evaluating materials. Uzun (2016) also reports that most of the pre-service teachers are presented with opportunities to discover and use their creativity in the materials course. Similarly, Sürüç-Şen and İpek (2020) report the effectiveness of ELT programs in training on the usage, adaptation of materials, and transferability of skills to the local contexts. It seems that the course itself provides the necessary linkage between theory and practice successfully.

Yet, concerns were raised related to the approaches of mentors in giving the pre-service teachers the possibility of adapting and using materials in natural classroom settings. In other cases, the school type (whether it is a public or private one) had an influence on the flexibility of allowing pre-service teachers to adapt and use materials. Some pre-service teachers reported that even though they theoretically knew how and when to use different parts of coursebooks, they had difficulty in practice because they did not know their mentors' approach in adapting materials. This raises the importance of university and faculty cooperation in the practicum process to define the roles and responsibilities of each participant stakeholder (Aydın & Ok, 2020; Bayyurt & Akcan, 2016; Farrell, 2008). Mentors in the practicum schools might need specific training to enhance the communication between mentors and pre-service teachers so that each pre-service teacher has equal access to practices. As Aydın and Ok (2020) point out, pre-service teachers' "varied perspectives regarding the fulfilment of different mentoring roles and responsibilities reveal certain inequalities in terms of the effectiveness of practicum mentoring" (p. 12). Therefore, a more professional and academic practicum plan is needed for mentoring pre-service teachers, especially in adapting and using materials by bridging the theoretical courses at the university with the practical applications in real school contexts.

Regarding the specific aspects of the Materials course, some suggestions were also drawn from the data related to teaching English to very young learners such as the materials course being placed after the Teaching English to Young Learners course, in the current ELT programs. It is suggested in this study that there needs to be specific courses for teaching very young learners (Kırkgöz, 2016), and the placement of such courses should be after the Materials course. In this way, the pre-service teachers can first acquire a general knowledge of materials development and adaptation. Later, they can use this knowledge to design and use materials for young and very young learners, depending on the context and location of their practicum.

This evaluation study investigated the correlation among specific components of an ELT program, namely testing, materials, and practicum courses from the perspectives of pre-service teachers, teacher educators, mentor teachers, and graduates. Although it is a small-scale evaluation, it is believed to serve a developmental purpose in improving the courses to ultimately guide pre-service teachers in ELT programs that are more focused on school contexts. As Alderson (1992) highlights, "evaluations are perhaps best distinguished from 'research' in that they are intended to serve practical ends, to inform decision-makers as to appropriate course of action, and, above all, to be useful and to be used" (p. 298). After examining the specific courses of an ELT program in their relation to the practicum course, it becomes evident that theory and practice in the field of ELT might not always support each other in the ways that the course designers wish.

This study had some limitations as well. Firstly, it is a small-scale evaluation of an ELT program with few participants. The stakeholders in this study do not include people from the Higher Education Council who design the overall curriculum at universities and the Ministry of National Education, who administer mentoring processes at schools. Last but not least, in

the light of the findings of this evaluation, we hope that further studies might be conducted to look for other specific courses (such as methodology courses) and their relation to how theory is represented in the real-life teaching situations through the voices of stakeholders involved. Further studies might also investigate how the same pre-service teachers reflect on the courses that they have taken when they become teachers and have their own classrooms.

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