



## INVESTIGATING TRANSLATION COURSES AT AN UNDERGRADUATE EFL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM: VIEWS OF INSTRUCTORS AND PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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### **Abstract:**

This study aims to investigate the contribution of translation courses to pre-service EFL teachers' professional skills. Also, it is aimed to get in-depth insights from both pre-service EFL teachers and instructors in order to identify the weaknesses and strengths of translation courses in EFL teacher education programs. This study was designed as a qualitative case study and the participants were two course instructors and ten pre-service EFL teachers. The convenient sampling method was used, and the relevant data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. After data analysis, it was found that translation courses are very rewarding for pre-service EFL teachers in terms of increasing their linguistic competence, improving reading comprehension and making contributions to teaching language skills; however, it was also suggested that the number of translation courses should be increased and the content of these courses should be redesigned in order to turn them into introductory courses for pre-service teachers who plan to work as translators or pursue their education in master's degree programs after graduation. Also, it was found that choosing course materials from wide range of topics in translation courses would make positive contributions to prospective teachers' intercultural competence. In the light of above-mentioned findings, this study aims to fill in a gap in the existing research by touching upon the current issues in translation courses in EFL teacher education programs.

**Keywords:** pre-service teacher, EFL teacher education, translation, pre-service EFL teachers, translation instructors

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## 1. Introduction

Translation courses help learners be familiar with the idioms and revisit their knowledge of grammar rules (Li & Zhang, 2021). According to Fois (2020), translation courses are integral parts in student EFL teachers' professional development. In addition, EFL teachers consider translation as a beneficial tool to improve students' cultural-communicative skills (Pekkanli, 2012). In sum, translation is defined as a part of English language teaching because both translation and language teaching have the same communication goal (Cherrington, 2002).

EFL teacher training curricula include linguistics, literature and translation courses in addition to teaching methodology courses because developing good language teaching skills prioritizes competencies in the foreign language while *"incomplete knowledge of language interferes with effective language teaching"* (Şallı-Çopur, 2008, p.11). Improving student teachers' metalinguistic awareness is one of the benefits of translation courses (Anderson, 2018); that's why, translation courses take place in teacher education programs in many countries (Woo-Lee, 2018). Thanks to translation courses, teacher candidates become competent especially in L2 reading and vocabulary (Marqués-Aguado & Solis-Becerra, 2013). Similarly, there are research studies defining translation courses as facilitators in language teaching and learning in EFL teacher education programs (Fischer-Starcke, 2009; Katz & Watzinger-Tharp, 2005; Fois, 2020; Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; Liao, 2006). It is crystal clear that translation courses should be included in the curriculum in order to prevent monolingual paradigm in EFL teacher education context (Cook, 2010).

Teacher education curricula have been continuously changed according to the paradigm shift in education and student needs (Barnett, 2004). Since grammar-translation method gave place to other methods in language teaching, the role and content of translation courses in EFL teacher education programs were started to be questioned by teacher educators and curriculum developers (Marqués-Aguado & Solis-Becerra, 2013).

Considering the relevant literature, it seems that there are limited research studies about the curricular changes in subject knowledge courses, especially about translation courses, in pre-service English language teacher education programs in Turkey (e.g., Coskun & Daloglu, 2010; Hatipoğlu, 2017; Karakas, 2019; Saka, 2020; Acar, 2021; Senol & Cesur, 2021; Kirkgöz, 2021). In the light of above-mentioned studies, this study aims to investigate the impact of translation courses on pre-service EFL teachers' professional skills. This study aims to fill a gap in existing research, which largely focuses on the paradigm shift in EFL teacher education curriculum in Turkey but neglects to touch upon the changes in translation courses. In order to achieve the goals of this study, the following research questions will be addressed:

- What are the views of course instructors on translation courses in an English teacher education program?
- What are the perceptions of senior year EFL student teachers on translation courses in a teacher education program?

## 2. Literature Review

In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education decided to adopt communicative language teaching instead of traditional form-focused instruction in 2006 (Çetintaş, 2010). This attempt resulted in reforms in translation courses in EFL teacher education programs after a few years later (Saka, 2020). In the current EFL teacher education curriculum in Turkey, there are three groups of courses: subject content knowledge, professional pedagogical knowledge, and general culture (CoHE, 2021). Literature, translation and linguistics courses are placed among the subject content knowledge courses in the curriculum. Three years ago, Council of Higher Education (CoHE) changed the curriculum of EFL teacher education programs in Turkey (CoHE, 2018). Compared to the previous program, a three-hour English-Turkish Translation and a three-hour Turkish-English Translation courses are substituted with one three-hour Translation course.

In the last two decades, teacher educators and researchers all over the world have become interested in the nexus between translation and language learning (Hsieh, 2000; Campbell, 2002; Macizo & Bajo, 2004; Saka, 2000). Pennycook (2008) focused on the role of translation in English language courses and concluded that translation activities were beneficial for both teachers and students in terms of promoting multiculturalism in the classroom. In a similar vein, Lathif et al. (2021) reported that offering translation courses to undergraduate students helps them improve their reading and writing skills. Apart from language learning, translation practices are of vital importance for teacher training (Siregar, 2021). Bagheri & Fazel (2011) asserted that translation courses improved EFL student teachers' reading and writing skills by means of expressing ideas in English and using new vocabulary items in different contexts. According to the research study conducted by Al-Bulushi et al. (2018), there is a relation between content knowledge courses and pre-service EFL teachers' linguistic competence. They reported that both translation and literature courses help pre-service EFL teachers improve their vocabulary competence and meta-linguistic awareness. Translation activities are also employed for textual awareness in EFL teacher education programs with the help of contrastive metalinguistic analysis and a morphologic or a lexical focus (Payne & Contreras, 2019). It is suggested in the relevant literature that translation courses play a significant role not only in improving pre-service EFL teachers' linguistic competence, but also in improving their intercultural competence (Hurtado-Albir, 2017; Bultseva & Lebedeva, 2021). In EFL teacher education programs, translation courses allow pre-service teachers to think beyond their own cultural dimensions, widen their perspectives and teach the language with intercultural communication flexibility (Randaccio, 2012). To this end, Fois (2021) implied that there is a common ground between translation and English language teaching in terms of improving students' intercultural competence. Investigating students' proficiency in English and Arabic in an EFL teacher education context, Akki & Larouz (2021) proposed that translation practices make student teachers realize the syntactic and semantic differences between two languages.

In the Turkish context, Sanlı (2009) conducted a study in order to examine the curricula of English language teaching departments after the decision made by the Council of Higher Education permitting Faculties of Education to modify their one fourth of the curricula. It was found that not all ELT departments were offering translation courses to their pre-service teachers after this decision. On the other hand, ELT departments that give place to translation courses in their curricula explain their rationale as follows: to improve pre-service teachers' English language skills, to make them conscious about the relations between language structures and to help them develop the analytic skills by means of English authentic texts. In a similar vein, Coskun & Daloglu (2010) evaluated English language teacher education programs in Turkey and collected data from pre-service teachers and instructors. They reported that courses relevant to student teachers' linguistic competence, such as translation and linguistics, were seen very beneficial for the professional development of prospective EFL teachers and the number of those courses should be increased. Also, Köse (2010) suggested there is a positive correlation between pre-service EFL teachers' reading comprehension and translation skills. Akbay & Cesur (2019) proposed that personal needs, future plans, and interests of prospective teachers are the main criteria while choosing elective courses. In a similar vein, Bakan (2016) stated that translation is the foremost elective course to choose in EFL teacher education programs due to the fact that some of the prospective teachers are planning to pursue their career as translators.

### **3. Material and Methods**

This study was designed as a qualitative case study in order to develop insights rather than making generalizations about a real situation (Yin, 2013). This qualitative case study aims to provide readers with a holistic overview of different standpoints of pre-service EFL teachers and course instructors about translation courses in a teacher education program.

#### **3.1 Participants**

The participants were ten senior EFL student teachers and two instructors who taught translation courses in a teacher education program in Turkey. In this study, convenient sampling strategy (Creswell, 2012) was employed. There were 52 senior students in the program and all students were invited to the study via e-mail. Ten of them kindly accepted to be involved in this study. Then, course instructors were sent an e-mail to inform them about the study and invite them for an interview. After receiving a positive respond from course instructors, informed consent forms were given to all participants to sign before collecting data.

### **3.2 Instruments**

Yin (2013) proposes that interview is the main source to gather detailed data in case studies. In this study, the relevant data were collected through semi-structured interviews with two different groups of participants. While the first group of participants was senior EFL student teachers, the second group of participants was instructors who taught translation courses in the same department. According to Guest et al. (2013), semi-structured interviews can be very informative for a qualitative study if the interviewees provide in-depth insights into the issue. For this study, interview questions were prepared by the researcher and examined by two teacher trainers to make necessary changes and finalize before starting the data collection process. In the first phase of data collection procedure, semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior EFL student teachers. They were asked questions from various aspects of their opinions about the syllabus, content, materials, and efficiency of translation courses. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two course instructors. The course instructors were asked questions in order to understand and describe the main aim to give place to translation courses in EFL teacher education programs. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees and transcribed by the researcher.

In order to increase the trustworthiness of this study, the strategies suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985) were used. Firstly, triangulation was ensured via data triangulation which is the use of variety of data sources, including time, place, and people in a study. Secondly, member checking was utilized by asking participants to examine rough drafts of findings in order to check the accuracy and eliminate possible misinterpretations. Then, the researcher and the external audit read and coded the data separately in order to agree on codes and make the necessary changes until provide a consensus. Finally, one of the main issues in qualitative studies is protecting participants' rights. To this end, numbers were given to each participant in order to ensure their anonymity.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

In this qualitative study, data analysis steps suggested by Miles et al. (2014) were employed. First, the audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim, and all transcripts were printed. After reading the transcripts several times and employing the data reduction step in order to eliminate the irrelevant data, the responses were grouped in accordance with the research questions. While reading the transcripts, the researcher took notes and wrote key words next to the statements of participants as suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (2007). Then, a system for retrieving codes from the raw data was developed by the researcher. After that, the most salient statements were highlighted in order to reach the descriptive codes. Afterwards, the researcher grouped codes to reach the broader themes. Finally, the researcher drew conclusions to make interpretations of the data which were displayed by means of four themes.

#### 4. Results

After analyzing the data, the following four themes emerged from the results: the role of translation courses in EFL teacher education programs, the use of translation activities for improving EFL pre-service teachers' reading comprehension, the contribution of translation courses to EFL pre-service teachers' linguistic competence, and the necessary adjustments for translation courses in EFL teacher education programs. The results will be presented in accordance with the research questions of this study.

**RQ-1:** What are the views of course instructors on translation courses in an English teacher education program?

##### **a. The role of translation courses in EFL teacher education programs**

According to the course instructors, translation courses find place in EFL teacher education curricula in order not to turn prospective EFL teachers into translators but to make them aware of the structural and semantic similarities and differences between the two languages. In addition, translation activities help prospective teachers be able to produce a text in English, but not in Turkish. One of the instructors expressed his thoughts as follows:

*"The number of translation courses in EFL teacher education program has been reduced to just one course called 'Translation' a couple of years ago. Before that, I have entirely taught translation from Turkish into English, even though we were supposed to be doing both. I think, in the end it is an English course. The purpose is not to develop their Turkish composition skills, but to develop their production in English."* (Instructor 1)

In parallel with the above-mentioned aspects, the other instructor suggested that the aim of translation courses in foreign language teacher education programs is to make prospective teachers more proficient in English language. She said:

*"Translation course is classified as a proficiency course in EFL teacher education programs. After starting to employ Communicative Language Teaching in our field, translation activities have been abandoned while teaching foreign languages. To this end, the number of translation courses has been decreased and now this course is not seen as a methodology course but a proficiency course in addition to four language skills."* (Instructor 2)

Both instructors proposed that the efficiency of translation courses is highly related to the number, materials, and content of courses. One of the instructors suggested that course materials should include texts related to education, teaching and cultural studies. The relation between course materials and the efficiency of translation courses is stated as follows:

*“The efficiency of translation courses depends very much on the instructor and materials. For example, I never used any poems in translation courses because I think that poems should be translated by the poets. I tried to choose texts that students mostly interested in. We translated texts about Turkish culture and history, English language teaching and language. I think materials should be about language education, and foreign language teaching.” (Instructor 1)*

The same instructor emphasized the contribution of translation practices to student teachers’ intercultural competence. According to him, language teaching is highly related to culture teaching and translation courses can serve materials based on cultural knowledge and intercultural communication for prospective EFL teachers. He said:

*“I think that translators are cultural ambassadors because they represent two different languages, so two different cultures at the same time. In language classes, using L1 is undesirable, so our students may not develop awareness about the existence of cultural differences between Turkish and English. Our students won’t be translators, but they will teach English language and its culture. We can use Turkish and English in translation courses, so we can make them be aware of the differences and commonalities. That’s why, I was trying to choose materials about education, culture, teaching to unearth this issue.” (Instructor 1).*

On the other hand, the other course instructor stated that she was using texts about translation theories, poems, newspaper articles, stories, political texts in translation courses. She summarized her choice of materials with the following statement:

*“If you ask me, improving student teachers’ language skills should not be the only aim of translation courses in EFL teacher education programs. As far as I know, some of our graduates work as translators and some of them apply Translation Studies Master’s programs. Therefore, I try to include translation theories and a variety of texts from different areas. My aim is to present this course as an introduction to translation in order to widen my students’ perspectives about translation studies.” (Instructor 2)*

#### **b. The use of translation activities for improving EFL pre-service teachers’ reading comprehension**

Both course instructors claimed that translation courses should be designed to improve pre-service EFL teachers’ language skills. It is proposed that translation courses are very beneficial for especially their reading skills. The instructor said:

*“They [student teachers] see different kinds of texts in translation courses that they won’t see in their methodology, linguistics, or literature classes. One more thing... Although they will never teach translation, they are going to teach reading. I think that translation*

*requires a close analysis of the text. This kind of an analysis also be necessary when you are dealing with a reading passage. So, I think that this is a contribution.” (Instructor 1)*

In a similar vein, the following excerpt clarifies how translation courses make contributions to pre-service EFL teachers’ reading skills:

*“Our students love this course. They find this course beneficial because they learn new words and phrases in English. The thing surprises me a lot that some of our students misunderstand the texts I bring to the classroom. Most of the time they cannot express the main idea of the text in English. I think that translation courses are very beneficial for student teachers to improve their English reading and writing skills.” (Instructor 2)*

**RQ-2:** What are the perceptions of senior year EFL student teachers on translation courses in a teacher education program?

**a. The contribution of translation courses to EFL pre-service teachers’ linguistic competence**

All student teachers implied that translation courses are of vital importance for them in terms of improving their linguistic competence. The following excerpts indicate that translation courses do not make a direct contribution to student teachers’ teaching skills but to their linguistic capacity:

*“For me, translation courses are not necessary to improve our teaching skills; however, at the end of our translation course I realized that I learnt new vocabulary and their usage in different contexts. So, I think translation activities are beneficial in terms of lexical competence.” (Student Teacher 2)*

Similarly, it is suggested that translation courses help student teachers be aware of the syntactic differences between English and Turkish. They said: *“Tenses and how they are used in a sentence are not same in Turkish and English. Before taking this course, I haven’t realized this” (Student Teacher 4)*. In a similar vein, the following participant shared his experience as follows: *“For the first time, I clearly saw different usages of Present Perfect Tense in this course while translating a text. So, I believe that I will explain this tense to my future students in the most correct way” (Student Teacher 8)*. In parallel with this, the following excerpt emphasizes the benefits of translation courses to student teachers’ lexical competence: *“For me, translation courses are not necessary for language teaching; however, thanks to this course, I realized that we didn’t know different usages of ‘and’. Translation provides metacognition” (Student Teacher 7)*. Finally, one of the participants stated with the following excerpt that she learnt different terminologies to be used in the future while teaching reading: *“Thanks to the texts we used in translation courses, I saw that EFL teachers should be aware of different terminologies to teach reading especially in advanced classes” (Student Teacher 10)*.



On the contrary, some of the student teachers claimed that translation courses can make direct contributions to their teaching skills. According to one of the participants, learners are natural translators, since they start learning a foreign language by making translations in their minds, especially in earlier stages. So, experiencing translation practices themselves can be very beneficial for prospective teachers to understand this process. The participant explained his idea as follows: *“Beginner level students make translations in their minds while learning tenses because we did the same thing in the past. So, maybe this course will be usable for me to understand their actions”* (Student Teacher 3). The following excerpt supports the previous opinion: *“I don’t prefer translation as a method in language teaching, but I know that students do it. I realized that I do the same thing in translation courses. So, it may help me understand my future students”* (Student Teacher 4). Two of the participants suggested that translation courses make direct contributions to their teaching reading skills. One of them stated her opinion with the following statement: *“While we are translating a text, we try to develop some strategies to understand the content. It means that we develop reading strategies. I think that learners do the similar thing in reading lessons”* (Student Teacher 5).

#### **b. The necessary adjustments for translation courses in EFL teacher education programs**

This study put forward that some implementations should be revised in translation courses in EFL teacher education programs. According to the participants, taking only one translation course was not enough for them, since they could only translate texts from English to Turkish in one semester and not enough time was spared for translation theories. One of the participants said: *“We didn’t have enough time to translate texts from Turkish to English. I know that we don’t have a prescription for rules of how to translate a text, but some basic theories should have been presented.”* (Student Teacher 1). Similarly, it was implied by one of the participants that EFL teacher education programs include at least two English Literature and Linguistics courses, but they have one translation course: *“Some of us are not interested in English Literature or Linguistics but we have two literature courses and three Linguistics courses. We won’t be writers or linguists but some of us work as translators after graduation. So, we need at least two translation courses in our program”* (Student Teacher 5). In parallel with the previous statements, one of the participants implied that translation courses should be presented in every year of EFL teacher education programs: *“I think translation courses should start in the first grade, so we should have four translation courses in total. If we have this, we can deal with theories and practices at the same time”* (Student Teacher 9). Finally, all participants implied that course materials should be prepared by the instructors with the aim of presenting this lesson as an introduction to the field. One of the participants summarized her opinion as follows: *“We translated newspaper articles and poems. I think it was not useful for us. Translators earn money by translating technical documents, medical texts and legal contracts. Of course, you need to be competent in those fields. Each week we should see some examples”* (Student Teacher 6).

## 5. Discussion and Recommendations

The aim of this study is to investigate the current issues in translation courses in an EFL teacher education program. After reviewing the relevant literature and presenting the results of the study, some key points emerged which have been neglected to be discussed in the Turkish EFL teacher education context before. First of all, the aim of translation courses was set very clearly by the course instructors. According to them, the main goal of translation courses is to make student EFL teachers be aware of the syntactic and semantic differences between Turkish and English. This result is in line with the assertions of a similar study, which found that student teachers had opportunities to compare two languages in translation courses (Akki & Larouz, 2021). Additionally, one of the key findings of this study is the contribution of translation practices to writing and reading skills of prospective EFL teachers. Although the above-mentioned result introduces the same points with the similar studies (Hsieh, 2000; Macizo & Bajo, 2004; Köse, 2010; Bagheri & Fazel, 2011; Lathif et al., 2021), this study goes a step further by implying that translation courses are also beneficial to teach reading. Both the instructors and prospective EFL teachers stated that translating texts requires a close look at reading passages in English which means that they study on English vocabulary and reading comprehension at the same time.

Furthermore, it is stated in this study that translation practices are as much important as language teaching methodology courses in terms of improving student EFL teachers' lexical competence. Student teachers implied that translation courses help them learn new vocabulary items and see their usage in different contexts. This finding is in line with the findings suggested in the related literature (Marqués-Aguado & Solis-Becerra, 2013; Bagheri & Fazel, 2011; Al-Bulushi et al., 2018). However, the current study has an implication emphasizing the contribution of translation courses to student teachers' lexical competence and contextual grammar skills as a fifth ability to be developed in EFL teacher education programs.

Apart from above-mentioned skills, a translation course can be a useful instrument to uncover drawbacks in student teachers' intercultural competence. In this study, one of the instructors proposed that cultural knowledge and intercultural competence can be promoted in translation courses with the help of choosing the appropriate material. This finding is in line with the findings covered in the relevant literature (Hurtado-Albir, 2017; Randaccio, 2012; Pekkanli, 2012; Fois 2021; Bultseva & Lebedeva, 2021). To this end, it is crystal clear that translation courses can make valuable contributions to intercultural competence of teacher candidates and provide insights into intercultural issues they may encounter if the course materials are chosen well.

Taking a closer look at the Turkish context, this study found parallel results that support the assertions of previous studies which reveal the notable contributions of translation practices to EFL student teachers' professional skills (Sanlı, 2009; Köse, 2010; Coskun & Daloglu, 2010; Bakan, 2016). In the relevant literature, it is stated that translation courses are seen as an integral part of EFL teacher education programs by

virtue of improving student teachers' reading and writing skills, helping them develop textual awareness (Payne & Contreras, 2019), and providing lexical competence. Supporting all the above-mentioned results, the current study also presents a different perspective about this issue. All the participants in this study mentioned that translation field is a second career option for English language teachers in Turkey. To this end, they appreciate the existence of translation courses in EFL teacher education programs, since they assume that a good introduction to translation may provide them a chance to work as a translator or pursue their education in an interdisciplinary field.

Another striking result found in this study is that there is an urgent need to revise the aim and content of translation courses in EFL teacher education programs. It is clear that student teachers enroll courses which are rewarding for their professional skills or future careers (Akbay & Cesur, 2019). Although translation courses are compulsory in EFL teacher education programs in Turkey, student teachers expressed that they would have not preferred to enroll elective translation courses if the content and aim of translation courses remained as it is. However, they also mentioned that employing curricular changes in translation courses for continuous professional improvement of teacher candidates may make these courses more appealing in teacher education programs. In that sense, it is suggested in the current study that the number of translation courses should be increased, and the syllabi should be revised by considering the needs and expectations of student teachers. Translation courses are given place in EFL teacher education programs all over the world (Woo-Lee, 2018; Marqués-Aguado & Solis-Becerra, 2011; Fischer-Starcke, 2009; Katz & Watzinger-Tharp, 2005; Fois, 2020; Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; Liao, 2006). The current study found the same result by taking a step forward that translation courses are classified by course instructors and student teachers as *catalysators* for language skills taught in methodology courses in Turkey. To sum up, even though the current study puts forth the similar results with the relevant literature, it also suggests new insights into the phenomenon.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study concluded that translation course is an indispensable part of EFL teacher education programs, since it makes contributions to student teachers' professional skills such as reading, writing, intercultural competence and lexical proficiency. The current study found the same results but also suggested new insights into the issue. This study put forward that translation courses are not only beneficial for reading skills but also very rewarding for teaching reading. Moreover, it is apparent that student EFL teachers raise textual and syntactic awareness thanks to translation practices. Additionally, promoting intercultural competence is another contribution of translation courses to EFL teacher candidates, which was proposed in the current study but neglected in the relevant literature within Turkish context. Furthermore, the study put forth a very striking result that student teachers attached importance to translation courses, since they perceive translation field as a second career option. However, course

instructors did not adopt the same approach to this issue as student teachers did. According to them, the main aim of translation courses is to support student EFL teachers' language skills which is taught in methodology courses. At this point, it is interesting that there is a mismatch between student EFL teachers' expectations and course instructors' syllabi. Thus, student teachers' needs and the aim of translation courses should be executed clearly, and the curriculum should be revisited.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest for this study.

### **About the Author**

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