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VIEWS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER CANDIDATES ABOUT PEDAGOGICAL FORMATION CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

This particular small-scale research tries to scrutinize the teacher training practices and the quality of Pedagogical Formation ELT Certificate Programs from the perspectives of teacher candidates. In this respect, those teacher candidates' views about the issue will be taken through a questionnaire consisting of 5-point Likert-type items and an open-ended section. The data were analyzed by descriptive statistics as well as content analysis. The number of participants is 63. Some of the participants were currently enrolled in the pedagogical formation program when the study was conducted and some of them were graduates of the programs with several years of teaching experience. The results indicate that the pedagogical formation program helped the participants improve their academic and professional skills to a certain extent. Another important finding of the study was that the participants who are employed as teachers and have several years of experience valued the outcomes of the pedagogical formation program more than the prospective teachers. Finally, the study also indicated that more teaching practice is needed.

Keywords: Teacher training, candidate teacher, pedagogical formation, ELT Certificate Programs.

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that education plays a crucial role in the promotion of social development. As such, constant development and improvement of education is a necessity in communities in which continuous changes take place (Donaldson, 2013). To this end, most countries tend to transform their education systems so as to be able to meet the demands of a changing society and a changing world (Şişman, 2006, Özdemir & Güngör, 2017). Karagözoğlu (2008) believes that forming an efficient society depends on having well-qualified teachers. In this endeavor, teachers are the most important agents for realizing the changes and implementing educational practices and qualifications of teachers assume great significance for advancing learning outcomes to a further level (Tuncer & Dikmen, 2016). Similarly, Tosuncuoğlu (2016) also states that “the quality of the teacher is indispensable for raising the outcomes of the teaching process” (p. 609).

According to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2010) the main purpose of Pedagogical Formation Program is “to provide graduates of faculties of science and letters with basic knowledge and abilities to be teachers in their areas of graduation. The teacher candidates completing this program can successfully work in public and private high schools as teacher in their graduation area. It also makes the candidates beware of new developments in our education system.” Both theory and practice aspects are emphasized in this definition.

Within the scope of pedagogical formation programs, teacher candidates take courses such as Introduction to Education, Developmental Psychology, Curriculum Development and Teaching, Measurement and Evaluation, Classroom Management, Learning, Teaching Theories and Approaches, Guidance, Special Teaching Methods, Instructional Technologies and Material Design, and Teaching Practice. These courses seem to cover the areas specified by the MoNE.

Prior to 2011, those who attended M.A. programs without thesis were granted the right to become teachers. The Council of Higher Education abolished this practice and re-introduced pedagogical formation programs as means of teacher training for faculties of science and letters, faculties of letters and science faculties. The universities that are entitled to give pedagogical formation programs are announced every year by the Council of Higher Education. The pedagogical formation programs are managed by the department of education sciences.

There are a number of studies conducted on pedagogical formation programs. Aykaç, Bilgin and Toraman's study (2015) was based on an evaluation of the pedagogical formation program offered at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University. The study was conducted with teacher candidates in Language and Literature, German Language, Philosophy, Mathematics, History and Physics. Their study found that although the pre-service teachers think that giving formation education to the graduates of the above-mentioned faculties is positive, this education would be best given at the same time with their undergraduate education in an applied way. Another important finding is that one problem experienced by the pre-service teachers throughout the program was that the program is given over a very short-time frame, that traditional lecturing is adopted as the primary means of instruction and that a lot of information is given in a short time.

In another study, Önder and Tagay (2015) worked with 136 pre-service teachers at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at Mehmet Akif Ersoy University. Their study found that most of the participants considered teaching profession as a suitable profession for their personalities, and they thought that formation training was necessary for teaching profession and formation program provided pre-teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for the teaching profession. As suggestions to improve the pedagogical formation programs, the participants stated that the program should not be provided in concentrated form and that teaching practice duration and effectiveness should be increased, the program seriously should be taken by both students and instructions.

Tural and Kabadayı (2014) studied the attitudes of teacher candidates toward teaching profession in relation to love, value and adaptation dimensions of the profession. Their study found that pre-service teachers have a positive attitude towards the teaching profession. Another study on attitudes of pre-service teachers was conducted by Özdemir and Güngör (2017). They studied with 491 students enrolled in the pedagogical formation programs at Kafkas University and Ömer Halisdemir University. One of the most important findings of their study was that as the ages of students enrolled in the pedagogical formation programs increase, they display more positive attitudes towards the teaching profession. They also found that female pre-service teachers have more positive attitudes towards the teaching profession.

It seems that teacher education plays a crucial role in building a nation and teachers are agents that shape the whole process of education (Belagali, 2011). It is an important and challenging professions and thus raising teachers must get the top priority. Teachers are expected to have cognitive, affective, and psychomotor qualifications. Therefore, as components of teacher education process, pedagogical formation programs are of great

importance and they must be studied in terms of their contributions to teacher candidates. There are studies that focus on attitudes to teaching and pedagogical formation certificate programs in other areas such as science or maths; yet, there are no studies that focus on the contributions of these programs to English teachers. Therefore, the present study aims at having a small-scale evaluation of the pedagogical formation certificate program offered at Karabuk University in terms of content, personal relevance, implementation and process, competence, and skill teaching. The present study aims to evaluate the pedagogical formation programs offered at two public universities in our country. In order to do this, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1) What are the views of the participants in relation to a) content, b) personal relevance, c) implementation and practice, d) competence, and e) skill teaching?
- 2) Do the participants significantly differ in age and gender in terms of the above-mentioned variables?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

The present study is a descriptive study and employs a survey research design.

2.2. The participants

The study was conducted with 63 participants, 22 males (34,9%) and 41 females (65,1%). All the participants are students of English Language and Literature Department. The age of participants ranges from 23 to over 30. Twenty-one of the participants are new graduates and 43 of them who are currently employed were graduates of previous years. Therefore, it is believed that they provided first-hand information regarding the effectiveness of the formation program.

Table 1. *The age range of the participants*

Age	Percentages
22-25	21 (33,3%)
26-30	25 (39,7%)
31 and over	17 (27%)

2.3. Data collection tool

In order to collect data, a questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was formed by the current study researchers primarily based on Taneri's (2016) study. It includes five sub-dimensions: (1) content, (2) personal relevance, (3) implementation and practice, (4) competence, and (5) skill teaching. The reliability level of the questionnaire was calculated as ,835, which indicates a high level of reliability. The questionnaire is a Likert type with 5 options. It also includes an open-ended section where the participants are asked how they would evaluate the practicum.

3. Findings

In this section, the findings are presented in the form of tables. Table 2 presents the responses given by the participants to the content component.

Table 2. *Participant views on content*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I think that the content given in this pedagogic formation program is beneficial in our academic studies.	62	3,9677	,86778
2. I think that our pedagogic needs are covered in the content of this pedagogic formation program.	63	3,4762	,96482
3. During this pedagogic formation program, the content was presented in an enjoyable atmosphere.	63	3,3333	1,09250
TOTAL		3,5924	

As we can understand from table 2, the participants valued the content provided by the pedagogical formation programs at a moderate level (M=3,5924). In this category, the highest mean score belongs to the item related to whether the content provided meets the academic needs of pre-service teachers. a moderate mean score (M=3,9677) indicates that the participants believe that the program provide them with sufficient content as regards their academic needs. When it comes to the pedagogic needs, the participants seem to have a moderate level of appreciation (M=3,4762). Finally, the last question concerns whether the content is presented in an enjoyable way. The mean score for this item is 3,3333. The participants do not seem to believe that the content is presented in a enjoyable manner. Overall, it can be said that the content component is moderately appreciated by the participants. The general mean score for this component is 3,5924.

Table 3. *Participant views on personal relevance*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. This pedagogic formation program has positive impact on the attitudes of teacher candidates towards teaching English.	63	3,8413	,72304
2. The awareness of teacher candidates about the necessity of pedagogic formation programs has increased.	63	4,0476	,72798
3. This pedagogic formation program has a significant influence on teacher candidates.	63	4,0952	,85599
4. This pedagogic formation program is sensitive to the individual needs of teacher candidates.	63	3,4603	,99718
TOTAL		3,8611	

Table 3 presents the findings as regards the personal relevance component. It can be seen that the general mean score for this component is 3.86, which is a moderate level. When we look at the items, it can be seen that the ones that are highly valued by the participants are the ones related to pre-service teachers' awareness (M=4,04) and the influence of the pedagogical formation program (M=4,09). It can be seen that the pedagogical formation

program contributes to pre-service teachers' awareness and it has an influence on the pre-service teachers. When it comes to attitudes of pre-service teachers towards the teaching of English, the pedagogical formation program does not seem to have a strong influence (M=3,84). In addition, the pedagogical formation program seems to have a moderate level of sensitivity to individual needs (M=3,46). In short, it can be said that the pedagogical formation program raises pre-service teachers' awareness and has an influence on the participants, but it has less impact on the participants' attitudes towards teaching English and addressing individual differences.

Table 4. *Participant views on implementation and process*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. During the pedagogic formation program, the theory is more emphasized than practice.	63	3,7937	,96985
2. During the pedagogic formation program, I think that the teacher candidates are passive.	63	3,4603	1,11912
3. During the pedagogic formation program, I think that the teacher candidates should do practical activities in the classroom as many as possible such as micro-teaching.	63	4,2857	,83141
4. During the pedagogic formation program, the educational sciences should be more emphasized than content area teaching	63	3,5397	1,04458
TOTAL		3,7698	

As to the implementation and process, Table 4 indicates that the most rated item in this category is the one related to doing practical activities. The mean score for this item (item 3) is 4,2857. This indicates that more practical activities are needed on the part of pre-service teachers. The next most rated item is the first item. The mean score is 3,7937, which indicates that theory is not highly emphasized during the pedagogical formation program. The second item is related to whether teacher candidates are passive or not and the mean score is 3,4603, indicating that teacher candidates are not too passive. The last items in this category was related to the emphasis given to educational sciences courses. The mean score for this item is 3,5397. This shows that pre-service teachers do not think that educational sciences component should be emphasized as much as the content area. However, it may not be a viable option to abandon educational sciences courses on the premise that they are vital for teachers to understand the learning process and what learners go through the learning process, and how learning process takes place.

Table 5. *Participant views on competence*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The formation program has helped teacher candidates to gain teaching experience.	63	3,8889	,80545
2. The pedagogical competencies are more important than content knowledge in such a program.	63	3,3810	,95763

3. Teacher candidates gain the necessary skills needed to become an effective teacher when the program is completed. 63 3,1429 1,01373

TOTAL 3,4709

Table 5 presents the findings related to competence component. There are three items in this category. The mean score for this component is 3,47, indicating a moderate level. When we look at the first item, which is related to whether teacher candidates could gain sufficient experience or not, a moderate number of the participants agreed with the statement (M=3.88). Another item related to competence concerns whether pedagogical competencies are more important than content knowledge. A moderate number of the participants agreed with the statement (M=3.38), indicating that pre-service teachers value content knowledge more than pedagogical competencies. The last item in this category is related to whether teacher candidates gained the necessary skills to become teachers. A smaller number of the participants agreed with the statement (M=3.14), indicating that they still need to gain more skills to become teachers.

Table 6. *Participant views on skills teaching*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1 As a result of the formation program, teacher candidates develop their skills in communicating and interacting with students.	63	3,6032	,83356
2. As a result of the formation program, teacher candidates develop their skills to utilize different teaching methods.	63	3,8095	,73741
3. As a result of the formation program, teacher candidates develop their skills to utilize different effective teaching techniques.	63	3,7143	,83141
TOTAL		3,709	

It is implied in Table 7 that for skills teaching component the general mean score is 3,7, which indicates that a moderate number of the participants agreed with the statements. A relatively high number of the participants stated that they developed their skills to utilize different teaching methods (M=3,80). A smaller number of the participants stated that they developed their skills to utilize different effective teaching techniques (M=3,71). Finally, the mean score for those who believe that the teacher candidates developed their skills in communicating and interacting with students (M=3,60). It seems that more work should be done to improve teacher candidates in terms of interactional skills.

Table 7. Anova results based on age of the participants

Variables		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	F	Sig.
Personal relevance	22 – 25 ages	21	14,5714	2,44073	10,00	18,00	6,492	,003
	26 – 30 ages	25	14,9200	2,90000	7,00	20,00		
	31 and over	17	17,2941	1,82909	15,00	20,00		
	Total	63	15,4444	2,71066	7,00	20,00		
Implementation	22 – 25 ages	21	15,6190	1,90987	12,00	19,00	,711	,495
	26 – 30 ages	25	14,8000	2,62996	8,00	20,00		
	31 and over	17	14,8235	3,04621	10,00	20,00		
	Total	63	15,0794	2,52919	8,00	20,00		
Competence	22 – 25 ages	21	9,7619	2,04707	6,00	13,00	3,335	,042
	26 – 30 ages	25	10,3200	2,01494	4,00	14,00		
	31 and over	17	11,3529	1,49755	7,00	13,00		
	Total	63	10,4127	1,97268	4,00	14,00		
Teaching skills	22 – 25 ages	21	10,4286	1,96396	6,00	13,00	3,155	,050
	26 – 30 ages	25	11,0400	2,28181	6,00	15,00		
	31 and over	17	12,1176	1,86689	9,00	15,00		
	Total	63	11,1270	2,14395	6,00	15,00		
Content	22 – 25 ages	20	9,5000	1,67017	7,00	13,00	8,380	,001
	26 – 30 ages	25	10,7600	2,71232	3,00	15,00		
	31 and over	17	12,3529	1,45521	10,00	15,00		
	Total	62	10,7903	2,35488	3,00	15,00		

In order to understand whether there is a statistically significant difference among age groups and participants' evaluation of the pedagogical formation program, the researchers conducted ANOVA. The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in terms of *personal relevance*, *competence*, *teaching skills*, and *content* components of the pedagogical formation program (Table 7). When we take a look at the mean scores, we can understand that the age group 31 and over valued all the components more than the others: personal relevance (M=17,29), content (M=12,35), teaching skills (M=12,11), and competence (M=11,35).

3.1. The analysis of open-ended questions

The final part of the questionnaire included an open-ended section in which the participants were directed questions regarding positive and negative aspects of the pedagogical formation program and what their suggestions were in terms of improving the process. The answers provided by the participants were analyzed through content analysis

and emerging codes were reached. Table 8 presents participant views on positive sides of the pedagogical formation program.

Table 8. *The positive aspects of pedagogical formation program*

Codes	Frequency
useful and beneficial	14
less anxiety by time	13
positive attitude towards real classroom teaching	11
self-confidence	11
Necessary	10

As we can understand from Table 8, the emerging codes as to the positive sides of pedagogical formation program are related to self-confidence, anxiety, and usefulness. The most important item as to the positive sides was “useful and beneficial” which was rated by 14 times by the participants. Another item is “less anxiety by time” and this item was voiced by 13 participants. Participants also believe that the pedagogical formation program helps teacher candidates gain positive attitudes (n=11) and self-confidence (n=11). The last code that emerged in this category is “necessary” (n=11). Some sample answers provided by the participants are as follows:

Helped teacher candidates to gain skills of utilizing different effective methods and techniques at the end of the practicum.

The most important moment in one's academic life.

A beautiful and important experience and enjoyable activity.

The next item in the open-ended section was related to the negative aspects from the viewpoint of the participants. The emerging codes are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. *Codes regarding the negative sides of the pedagogical formation program*

Codes	Frequency
limited practicum period and therefore, not sufficient	15
insufficient theoretical knowledge in practice	8
not so much helpful to become a real teacher	7
unnecessary micro-teaching (only twice) because almost nobody listened	3
lack of interest of classroom teachers and students	3
Insufficient for KPSS	1

Table 9 indicates that the most rated negative aspect on the part of the participants was limited practicum period (n=15). This drawback can be overcome by involving more micro-teaching sessions in the theoretical component of the pedagogical formation program. The importance of micro-teachings is emphasized in the literature. Sarıçoban (2016) conducted a study on pre-service teachers' beliefs on micro-teachings and found that micro-teaching practices raise pre-service teachers' awareness, see their strengths and weaknesses, increase their intrinsic motivation and most importantly help them gain experience and develop positive attitudes towards the teaching professions. As such, more micro-teaching practices can be incorporated throughout the pedagogical formation program. Other issues voiced by the pre-service teachers are *inefficient theoretical knowledge* (n=8), *not being helpful* (n=7),

lack of interest in micro-teachings ($n=3$), lack of interest on the part of classroom teachers ($n=3$), and inefficiency for KPSS (Public Personnel Selection Examination) ($n=1$). Finally, the participants were inquired in terms of their suggestions for the betterment of pedagogical formation programs. Their answers are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Participants' suggestions to improve pedagogical formation programs

Codes	Frequency
more teaching practices	20
theoretical courses should be conducted more meaningfully	11
responsibilities in preparing and administering tests, even assessing them	10
prolonged practicum	10

As we can understand from Table 10, the main point that can be inferred is that more practice is needed ($n=20$). Participants believe that practice not theory is necessary, and more opportunities for teaching in the real classroom atmosphere should be provided. In a similar vein, some of the participants stated that theoretical courses should be conducted in a more meaningful way ($n=11$). To this end, more case studies can be incorporated in theoretical courses. Another important suggestion was giving teacher candidates more responsibilities in preparing, administering tests, and assessing tests ($n=10$). The final suggestion is to prolong the practicum period ($n=10$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was undertaken in order to obtain pre-service English teachers' views on the pedagogical formation programs offered at Karabük University in terms of content, personal relevance, implementation and process, competence, and skill teaching. As for the *content* component, it is observed in the study that the participants have a moderate level of satisfaction in terms of the content presented. In terms of *personal relevance*, it is a fact that the pedagogical formation program raises pre-service teachers' awareness and has an influence on the participants, but it has less impact on the participants' attitudes towards teaching English and addressing individual differences. As for the *implementation and process* component, the results of the study indicate that more practical activities are needed on the part of teacher candidates. Hopefully, the participants in general state that they are not totally passive during the process of pedagogical formation program.

As regards the *competence* component, a relatively high number of the participants agree with the statement indicating that the pedagogical formation program provided them with the necessary competencies. More specifically, it is found out that pre-service teachers value content knowledge more than pedagogical competencies and most of the participants do not believe that the skills that they gain are not sufficient. The final component within the evaluation is the *skills teaching* component. It is pointed out that participants develop their skills to utilize different teaching methods and their skills to utilize different effective teaching techniques to a lesser extent. However, it is clear that the teacher candidates do not find the pedagogical formation program sufficient in terms of interactional skills.

One of the major findings of the present study is that as the age of the participants increases, the views of the participants become more positive. This is an interesting finding. In literature, there are other studies that come up with the same finding. Özdemir and

Güngör's (2017) study conducted at Kafkas University and Ömer Halisdemir University report that the participants tend to have more positive results as their age increase. It can be speculated that older participants, most of whom are already employed teachers, benefit from the pedagogical formation program because they come across with more cases where they can use all the information and skills that they acquire during the pedagogical formation programs. Therefore, this finding actually points to the effectiveness and usefulness of pedagogical formation programs.

The open-ended questions also provided important insights as regards the positive and negative aspects of the pedagogical formation program and offered some suggestions. In the first place, as regards the positive sides, it was found that the pedagogical formation program helped teacher candidates increase self-confidence, form positive attitudes towards the teaching profession, and view their strengths and weaknesses. In terms of the negative aspects of the pedagogical formation program, the participants mainly voiced limited practicum period, insufficiency of theoretical knowledge, and lack of interest on the part of practicum teachers at schools.

5. Suggestions

Finally, when it comes to the suggestions offered by the participants, we can see that the most important suggestion is to improve the practice time so that teacher candidates could see their strengths and weaknesses and giving more responsibilities to them at schools, especially in test preparation and administration since the practicum component is found to be rather limited. More time for instructional techniques and opportunities for practice in their formation programs such as micro-teachings should be allocated to teacher candidates to feel themselves as teachers.

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