

The Views of Prospective Class Teachers about Peer Assessment in Teaching Practice

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Abstract

The present study was conducted in order to determine the opinions of prospective teachers about peer assessment in teaching practice. Twenty two prospective teachers in the 4th year of the Primary School Class Teaching Program at Cumhuriyet University participated in the study. In every teaching practice, prospective teachers observed their peers and filled out peer assessment forms which include teacher competences; and the assessments were discussed in the theoretical part of the teaching practice, this takes 2 hours. At the end of the teaching practice where peer assessment was made, the opinions of prospective teachers about peer assessment were taken via a semi-structured negotiation technique, and content analysis was carried out. Of all the prospective teachers, 90.91% stated that the use of peer assessment in teaching practice was beneficial. Prospective teachers think that peer assessment helps develop skills in using standards while making assessments; increases the awareness of the individual's strengths and weaknesses; supports learning from the strengths and weaknesses of colleagues; increases the responsibility towards mutually supportive learning and development; improves teacher competences; gives the opportunity to make comparisons with other colleagues (diversity of practice); increases cooperation and interaction; decreases the anxiety that results from being assessed; enables the teacher to focus on teaching; improves openness to criticism; develops assessment skills; improves empathetic skills and critical thinking; brings peer assessment skill and strengthens the relationship with colleagues. The findings of the present study show that peer assessment is an effective method in the configuration of the teaching process.

Key Words

Peer Assessment, Teacher Education, Teaching Practice

In recent years, a passage from “assessing of learning” to “assessing for learning” is observed (Cartney, 2010; Torrance, 2007 cited in Willey & Gardner, 2010). Assessment for learning focuses on learning task and includes learning in assessment (Keppell & Carless, 2006). Assessment for learning

has three main elements (Black & William, 1998; Carless, 2007 cited in Willey & Gardner, 2010): 1) Assessment tasks which focus on learning, 2) Participation of students in the assessment process in order to improve their rating aspects which includes judgment, 3) Transmitting feedback to increase learning.

Assessment for learning focuses on the usage of assessment strategies which can increase student learning, unlike summative assessment made for the confirmation or documentation of learning (Keppell, Au, Ma, & Chan, 2006). According to Boud (1990), the assessment process should be a learning instrument. Ideal assessment intends to make students plan their own learning; define their weaknesses and strengths and improve their transferable skills (cited in McLaughlin & Simp-

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son, 2004). According to Srijbos and Sluijsmans (2010), summative assessment focuses only on the cognitive aspect of learning; includes generally only one performance grade and it is designed and applied by the teacher. However, assessment should not just serve level setting; it should also serve to the targets of formation in a wider point of view. Formative evaluation is an integral part of the learning process and it should take place not only at the end of a program but also throughout the entire program. Formative evaluation focuses on cognitive, social, affective and superior cognitive aspects. It generally includes a multi-method approach and creates a complete profile rather than simply a final grade. Students take an active role in the assessment process.

In the context of formative assessment or assessment for learning, peer assessment, which was seen to increase student's learning, plays an important role (Cartney, 2010; Ploegh, Tillema, & Segers, 2009).

Peer Assessment

Peer assessment is generally defined as a process in which students assess their peers or they are assessed by their peers. Peer assessment is grading the works or performances of peers by class members by using appropriate standards (Falchikov, 2001). Srijbos and Sluijsmans (2010) define peer assessment as an educational mechanism where students judge works and performances of one of their peers qualitatively and quantitatively and where students are encouraged to engage in reflection, discussion and cooperation. Topping (2009), who defines peer assessment as a mechanism for learners aimed at determining and examining the level, value or quality of a product or of the performances of other learners at the same level, states that peer assessment activities can be applied in different program domains and subjects. Various products and outputs including writing, portfolio, oral presentation, test performance and other skills can be assessed by the peer.

Participant locations may differ: The ones who assess and who are assessed may be in groups or couples (Topping, 2009). Van Zundert, Sluijsmans, and van Merriënboer (2010) state that there are different types of peer assessment such as grading via peer researching report, presenting qualitative feedback for the presentations of classmates or assessing the professional work performance of an intern colleague ; and these types become widespread within the realm of education.

Peer assessment is based on the philosophies of active learning (Piaget, 1971) and adult education (Cross, 1981) and may be seen as the expression of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1962) which includes the construction of information via mutual interaction (cited in Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). According to Sluijsman, Gruwel, van Merriënboer, and Bastiaens (2003), these assessment approaches based on constructivism consider the student as an active individual who shares responsibility, who cooperates, who is always in dialogue with the teacher and it provides for a more unified approach to education.

Two factors play an important role in peer assessment. These are standards used in the assessment process and feedback that peers presented to each other after the assessment. Studies examining the relation between peer assessment and teacher assessment show that there are more similarities between peer assessment and teacher assessment than grading including assessing various personal aspects when students are asked to make general judgments based on explicit and absolute standards and when students know these standards very well and they adopt them (Falchikov, 2001). Student understanding and the adoption of standards seem very important for the efficacy of the peer assessment process.

In peer feedback, students apply reflective criticism of the other students' works and performances by using predefined standards and they provide feedback for them (Falchikov, 2001). Peer feedback is a phase of the peer assessment process in addition to being an important educational function. Peer feedback may be confirmative, suggestive, corrective; it may decrease mistakes and it has positive impacts on learning if taken carefully and completely; it is also necessary for the improving and applying of self-regulatory skills (Topping, 2009). Butler and Winne (1995) state that feedback has many functions. Feedback supports the confirmation of existing information; the addition of new information; the definition of mistakes; the correction of mistakes; the improving of conditional usage of information and the overall reconstruction of a theoretical scheme.

Gibbs and Simpson (2004) define some conditions under which feedback has a positive impact on learning: (i) adequate frequency and detail; (ii) students focus on actions within their control rather than focusing on student performance, learning, the students themselves or their personal characteristics; (iii) that the feedback is pertinent and it is

taken on time; (iv) that it is convenient for standards and the aims of the mission; (v) that attention is paid to feedback; (vi) behaving in accordance with the feedback (cited in Gielen, Peeters, Dochy, Onghena, & Struyven, 2010).

It may be said that in peer assessment, the assessment process, the standards used in assessment and the feedback configuration have an important impact on the benefits that are gained. Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000), Topping (1998) emphasize that the application should be configured well in order to reach consistent and productive results in peer assessment. These are proposed in the peer assessment configuration (cited in Topping, 2009): (1) Determination of the quality of learning products that will be assessed, explaining them to students and receiving proposals. (2) Providing for the participation of students in improving and clarifying assessment standards. (3) Criticizing participants and regulating the relation. (4) Presenting education, examples and practice. (5) Following the peer assessment process and guiding the process. (6) Examining the quality of peer feedback. (7) Making feedback valid and reliable at a desired level. (8) Evaluating peer assessments and giving students feedback.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that peer assessment is commonly used in various disciplines of higher education from engineering education (Willey & Gardner, 2010) to teaching education (Sluijsmans & Prins, 2006). The results of many studies of peer assessment show that peer assessment has an important impact on developing certain skills, increasing learning and it offers benefits to students in various fields. Topping (2009) states that peer assessment provides benefits in many fields to students at primary, secondary and high school levels and to students who need special education or who have difficulties in learning. According to Race (1998) and Zariski (1996), the benefits that peer assessment provides to students are as follows (cited in Vickerman (2009):

- It gives feelings of autonomy and belongingness through the assessment process and it increases motivation.
- It supports students in taking their own learning and development responsibilities.
- Mistakes are not considered as failures, but rather as opportunities, and assessment is understood as a part of learning.
- Applying transferable skills especially those related to assessment skills which are necessary for life-long learning.

- Using external assessment while creating a model for the internal self-assessment of the student about his/her learning.
- It supports profound learning instead of superficial learning.

Laverick (2007) defines metacognition as an awareness of the learning process and considers it as a determinant factor to enable students to learn. According to Laverick (2007), formative peer assessment helps students to find which of the learning, teaching and assessment strategies are the most effective for themselves (cited in Vickerman (2009).

Peer assessment as a learning instrument is bringing the skill for creating provisions about how to make a high-quality work. It presents more information to teachers about the individual performances of students in group works (Van Zundert et al., 2010). Peer assessment gives the opportunity for the early identification of and solutions to mistakes and concept errors; it increases reflection and generalization new conditions and improves self-assessment (Topping, 2009). Besides, it increases the efficiency of peer assessment group work. Yurdabakan (2010) reported that peer assessment might be an effective method to assess cooperation skills and the learning acquired from cooperation (cited in Yurdabakan, 2011). For example, in a study conducted by Ross (1995) in which peer assessment was made, students made assessments based on voice records made during the studies of cooperative learning groups. Study results showed that the frequency and quality of receiving help and providing help behaviors of the students increased and that students' attitudes towards asking help improved (cited in Topping, 2009). It is an effective method to provide equal effort and participation to group study and to control Kaufman et al., (1999) the students who cannot fulfill team responsibilities (cited in Yurdabakan, 2011).

Assessments made only by teachers limit the understanding of the individual student's assessment skills, students' educational targets and how these relate to educational applications (McLaughlin & Simpson, 2004).

Haertel (1993), Kimbell (1982) and Williams (1992) state that assessment, solely made by teachers, limits a student's taking responsibility for his or her own learning (cited in McLaughlin & Simpson, 2004). Assessment approaches based on a constructivist approach support the integration of assessment and education as it considers the student as an active individual who shares responsibility,

who reflects, who cooperates and who is always in dialogue with the teacher (Sluijsmans et al., 2003).

“Can students assess the work of their peers?” is one of questions asked about peer assessment. Kerr, Park, and Domazlicky (1995) state that students may display a tendency to give higher grades in grading; however they can distinguish good work from bad work. Besides, the grading skills of students improve with peer assessment practices like the quality of their works the other important anxiety is whether or not peer assessment is as reliable as teacher assessment. In a study conducted by Topping (1998), it was determined that peer assessment was as reliable as teacher assessment. Pond and Ulhaq (1997) also determined that peer assessment increases student appropriation of the learning process and decreases agreed grading (cited in McLaughlin & Simpson, 2004). Sluijsmans et al., (2003) determined many positive products of student participation in the assessment procedure. Peer assessment has an impact on the students’ critical thinking, and their communication and cooperation skills. In a study conducted by McLaughlin and Simpson (2004) which concerns how students feel about peer assessment, the students stated that they learned many things during the assessment process; they liked assessing the works of their friends and they preferred peer assessment to teacher assessment. According to the results of a study conducted by Falchikov (1986), students think that peer assessment makes them think more; makes them more critical and makes them learn more (cited in McLaughlin & Simpson, 2004).

A review of the Turkish literature on peer assessment (Cihanoğlu, 2008; Özan, 2008; Uysal, 2008; Yurdabakan, 2011; Yurdabakan & Cihanoğlu, 2009; Yurdabakan & Olgun, 2011) showed that the studies mainly concentrated on the effects of peer and self-assessment on various types of learning. A study carried out by Yurdabakan (2011) aimed to determine the relationships between constructive theory, active learning and assessment; to analyze the emerging self-assessment, peer-assessment, common and portfolio assessment in theoretical terms and to reveal positive and negative outcomes about these methods.

In a study conducted by Özan (2008) on medical education, the impact of peer assessment and self-assessment on the main communication skills of medical students were investigated. At the end of the study, in which the pretest-posttest trial method was used, an increase in the communication skills

of students in the experimental group which practiced self and peer assessment was found to be statistically more significant than the increase in the achievement of control group students. According to the answers given to qualitative questions, it was seen that the majority of students found self and peer assessment favorable, they found it useful and they emphasized its contribution in terms of understanding themselves and each other.

In the study conducted by Uysal (2008) which aimed to determine the practicability of peer and self-assessment in the Higher Education Preparatory Class, according to the findings obtained, it was determined that students stated positive opinions about peer and self-assessment. Educations and practices created significant differences of opinion among the students, and a conclusion was reached that students were willing for both self and peer assessment. Besides, a high correlation was found between peer grades and teacher grades

In a study conducted by Cihanoğlu (2008), the impact of self and peer assessment on the academic achievement, attitude and permanency in cooperative learning in English lesson for 10th grade Military School students was examined and it was determined that self and peer assessment had positive impacts on these dependent variables in a cooperative learning environment. However, it was seen that alternative assessment activities were challenging for students and it was necessary to educate students at every stage of the assessment.

Below, the importance of peer assessment in teacher education will be stressed after prefacing this with information on the Teaching Practice Lessons where peer assessment is applied.

Teaching Practice

Teacher education programs consist of theoretical lessons and practical lessons. In teacher education programs, theoretical basis of teaching profession is formed through theoretical courses. On the other hand, teaching practices performed at schools constitute an important phase of practicing and testing the knowledge and skills acquired by prospective teachers at university in school and classroom environment. (Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu [YÖK], 2007). “Teaching Practice” represents a course which develops the teaching skills of prospective teachers according to the branch he/she will teach in the classroom and will enable him/her to teach a certain lesson or lessons in a planned way; and it represents a course where practice ac-

tivities are discussed and assessed (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 1998).

In teaching practice, prospective teachers prepare themselves for the teaching profession and improve their professional perspectives through such activities as practice preparation, observation in the practice school, participation in the missions of the practice teacher, the participation in education/management and in out of classroom activities, and assessing practice works. For this reason, practice lessons compose an important dimension of pre-service teacher education. Teaching practice gives prospective teachers information about what teachers do in their daily classroom practice involving many complex issues (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009). According to Putnam and Borko (2000) learning is a result of education and also it is a product of the influence of professional socialization. Candidates for the profession learn about the thinking and behavior types of social and professional communities and they deepen their experiences (cited in Hascher & Wepf, 2007). Prospective teachers gain a wider experience through teaching practice. Prospective teachers (1) make a connection with a real education environment, (2) they teach through practice, (3) they provide highly positive emotional satisfaction, (4) they provide personal and professional development, (5) they gain opportunities to experience one-to-one education, (6) they gain an opportunity to participate in teaching in the community as future teachers (Perry, 1997 cited in Ergenekon, Özen, & Batu, 2008).

The Importance of Peer Assessment in Teacher Education

“Reflection” which is considered to be important in bringing teaching competences and providing professional development, is emphasized frequently in studies in the field of teacher education. According to Sluijsmans et al. (2003), reflection, defined as the examination of thoughts actively and carefully so as to improve performance, is a known concept in teacher education. Reflection is a process in which an experiment is remembered, thought upon and generally evaluated by considering an aim (Atay, 2003). Reflection is mostly associated with actual teaching performance. In this context, Schön (1987) distinguishes reflection done before and after the lesson as a “reflection on action” and reflection done during the lesson as “reflection in action” (cited in Sluijsmans et al., 2003). Loughran (1996) improved a conceptual framework for reflection in education and this consisted of 3 parts, namely re-

lection during the planning of a lesson; reflection during the education process and reflection after the education process. In the model as improved by Korthagen (1985), there are 5 phases: action, looking at the action or looking back, awareness of the main point of views, creating and trying out alternative solutions or methods of action (cited in Sluijsmans et al., 2003). In pre-service teacher education, prospective teachers need systematic and objective information about their education in order to reflect their strengths and weaknesses and to create strategies which are more effective in the classroom (Acheson & Gall, 2003; Goldhammer, 1993; Morehead, Lyman, & Foyle, 2003 cited in Wilkins, Shin, & Ainsworth, 2009). It is thought that the reflection skills that teachers gain in pre-service will be effective in providing the maintenance of professional improvement during their service.

According to the standards determined before, the peer assessment process which includes making judgments about a peer’s performance and conveying this judgment to the peer, can be considered as a functional process in terms of getting systematic and objective information about teaching processes for prospective teachers. Reflection, which is both a condition and the product of peer assessment processes, plays an important role in teacher education and the professional improvement of teachers. This is because reflection includes the questioning of a teacher’s teaching process in all its dimensions and examining it in a critical way. Peer assessment improves reflective thinking which has an important impact on professional improvement in addition to being effective in bringing various skills necessary for the teaching profession.

According to Sluijsmans and Prins (2006), peer assessment is a powerful method for bringing together teaching skills. Sluijsmans and Prins explain why peer assessment is important in teacher education as follows: First of all, teachers have to work together; they learn from each other and become members of an organization. In works including peer assessment, students cooperate and communicate with each other and thus, they can improve their communication and cooperation skills. Secondly, discussions about reflection are an ongoing subject in teacher education. Supporting students to assess each other’s work provides them with critical, reflective and analytical skills. Reflective skills are necessary for making reliable judgments on peer studies. Thirdly, the student teachers will be evaluators in their own classes. It is beneficial

to learn how student teachers make critical judgments about their peers' performances so that they can make critical judgments on schoolchildren's work in the future. Another reason for peer assessment's importance in teacher education is that it provides students with the ability to trust more in their judgments while assessing their peers about the effectiveness of their performances at school after completing higher education. Being able to interpret the work of colleagues and peers is an important precondition for professional improvement and for increasing an individual's functionality. A teaching peer assessment skill encourages this mutual interaction in order that the teacher can attain a professional level (Sluijsmans & Prins, 2006). Hinett and Weeden (2000) state that combining peer assessment with teacher education programs increases teachers' confidence and motivations to learn and it provides them with an understanding of how to make qualitative assessment (cited in al-Barakat & al-Hassan, 2009).

Purpose of the Research

In this research, it is aimed to examine the opinions of prospective class teachers about peer assessment in the teaching practice lesson. An attempt was made to find answers to the following questions: (1) What are the opinions of prospective class teachers on the practice (or not) of peer assessment in the teaching practice lesson? (2) What are the opinions of prospective class teachers about the benefits of peer assessment in teaching practice? (3) What are the opinions of prospective class teachers about the difficulties encountered in peer assessment in teaching practice? (4) What are the proposals of prospective class teachers for an increase in the efficiency of peer assessment in teaching practice?

Method

This research is a qualitative study in which the opinions of prospective teachers about peer assessment in teaching practice were sought and assessed by means of content analysis. Qualitative research provides more profound information than quantitative research methods about psychological measurements and social events. Qualitative research is necessary for finding answers to questions which are difficult to express with traditional research methods (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2010). Research data were collected via semi-structured negotiations made with teachers after an application and content analysis was made.

Participants

The research sample was formed using criterion sampling, one of the intentional sampling methods. The main approach in this sampling method is to study all cases which meet a series of predetermined criteria. The criterion or criteria mentioned here can be formed by the researcher or a previously prepared criterion list can be used (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In this study, the taking of Teaching Practice lesson, and the peer assessment of each other in this lesson are used as the sampling criteria. Twenty two final year students (7 females, 15 males) studying in the Cumhuriyet University Primary School Class Teaching Program participated in the study. The prospective teachers undertook their teaching practice in the 2008-2009 spring term at the Rauf Orbay and Ziya Gökalp Primary Schools which are located in the Merkez county of Sivas.

Practice

Prospective teachers participated in 4-hour-long peer assessment training conducted by the researcher at the beginning of the practice. This training included theoretical information about peer assessment, an explanation of items (assessment criteria) that appear in the peer assessment form and of peer assessment practices. During the teaching practice, prospective teachers assessed each other in each other's practice and they filled out the peer assessment forms that the researcher gave them.

Prospective teachers assessed their peers verbally in the 2-hour-long theoretical part of the teaching practice lesson which is done after teaching practice and the assessments were discussed. Peer assessment forms were filled out by prospective teachers and written assessments were collected by the researcher.

Peer Assessment Form: Items in the peer assessment form that prospective teachers used during teaching practice while assessing their peers were formed according to teacher competences (Selçuk, 2001; Köksal, 2008). This form was not used as a data collecting instrument within the scope of this research.

Improving the Data Collecting Instrument

Negotiation questions were formed under four main titles in the light of the literature about peer assessment and teaching practice. Negotiation

questions were prepared with the aim of determining the prospective teachers' opinions about whether or not peer assessment should be used in teaching practice; the benefits that peer assessment provides to prospective teachers in teaching practice; the difficulties that they encounter in peer assessing during practice with the aim of increasing the efficiency of peer assessment in teaching practice. Questions were presented to experts for their opinions in order to provide validity and reliability. They were reformulated according to the feedback that came from the experts and they were reorganized after the initial negotiations.

Data Collecting

Research data were collected via a semi-structured negotiation technique after the teaching practice had finished. Negotiations were realized by the researcher with prospective teachers on the days and hours indicated. Each negotiation lasted 20-30 minutes and negotiations were recorded with a voice recorder. Participants were asked all the questions during negotiations. Necessary explanations were made when there were questions that prospective teachers did not understand and when necessary, additional questions were asked in order to elicit more profound answers. Türnüklü (2000) states that a semi-structured negotiation technique is rather more flexible than a structured negotiation technique; the researcher can affect the fluency of negotiation with different "side" or "sub" questions; and he/she can allow for the person to expand on his/her answers and give more details.

Data Analysis

A content analysis approach was used in analyzing the data collected in negotiations. An attempt was made to define data and to reveal the truths that can be hidden in data via content analysis. An operation that is fundamental to content analysis is to gather similar data together within the framework of certain concepts and themes and to interpret them by organizing the data in a way that reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Within the framework of this aim, firstly an inventory of negotiations made with each participant was made for content analysis. Recordings were listened to again and again while negotiations were tran-

scribed and inventories were controlled; inconsistencies between the recordings and written inventories were removed. In the second phase of data analysis, written inventories were examined and they were encoded according to the categories and sub categories established within the framework of the purpose of the study. The researcher finalized the code numbers by reading the data set several times; by working on the codes related to categories and sub categories and by making the necessary corrections. According to the encoding key obtained, data were additionally and independently codified by another expert. The reliability of the research was provided by looking at the reliability of the encodings of the two encoders.

Match percentage formula (Türnüklü, 2000) was used in calculating reliability. $\text{Reliability} = (\text{number of matched categories}) / (\text{number of all matched and unmatched categories})$. According to this reliability calculation, the match among encoders was calculated at 85.5%. Keeves and Sowden (1994, p. 1469) state that an 80% reliability level is adequate (cited in Türnüklü, 2000).

Results

In this part, findings are obtained from the answers that prospective teachers gave to questions they were asked in negotiations made within the framework of the research. Categories under four main titles are formed with the answers given to questions; they are presented in the tables below. Despite such similar categories as "Bringing the skills to use standards while making an assessment" and "Bringing the skills to make an assessment", separate categories were formed, rather than only one category, because of the points that prospective teachers raised and emphasized during the negotiations.

Table 1.
Opinions of Prospective Teachers on the Practice or Not of Peer Assessment in the Teaching Practice Lesson

Categories	F	%
1. Peer assessment should be practiced in the teaching practice lesson	20	90.91
2. Peer assessment should not be practiced in the teaching practice lesson.	2	9.09

Twenty of the 22 prospective teachers stated that the practice of peer assessment in the teaching practice lesson was beneficial.

Table 2.
Opinions of Prospective Teachers on the Benefits of Peer Assessment in Teaching Practice

Categories	f	%
1. It develops the skills to use standards while making assessments	42	17.80
2. It increases awareness of strengths and weaknesses	32	13.56
3. It provides for learning from the strengths and weaknesses of colleagues	28	11.86
4. It increases the responsibility for mutually supportive learning and improvement	27	11.44
5. It improves teacher competences	14	5.93
6. It provides the opportunity to make comparisons (practice diversity)	13	5.51
7. It increases cooperation and interaction	13	5.51
8. It decreases the anxiety that results from being assessed	13	5.51
9. It enables a focus on teaching	13	5.51
10. It improves openness to criticism	12	5.08
11. It develops assessment skills	7	2.97
12. It improves empathetic skills	6	2.54
13. It improves critical thinking	5	2.12
14. It improves skills to practice peer assessment in the future	5	2.12
15. It helps in the preparation for assessment by others (inspector, manager, colleague) once the trainee teacher has become a teacher	3	1.27
16. It strengthens relations with colleagues	3	1.27

In the opinions of prospective teachers about the benefits of peer assessment in teaching practice, “It develops the skills to use standards while making assessments” category has the highest frequency. “It helps in the preparation for assessment by others ... once the trainee teacher has become a teacher” and “It strengthens relations with colleagues” are the categories with the lowest frequency.

Table 3.
Opinions of Prospective Teachers on the Difficulties Encountered in Peer Assessment in Teaching Practice

Categories	F	%
1. Feeling under pressure while being assessed	14	48.28
2. Anxiety about not being assessed objectively	13	44.83
3. (Lack of adequate support from practice school	1	3.45
4. Problems concerning practicing teacher	1	3.45

In the opinions of prospective class teachers about difficulties encountered in peer assessment in teaching practice, “Feeling under pressure while being assessed” category has the highest category. Prospective teachers expressed that being always watched by someone during practice put pressure

on them. However, most of prospective teachers who expressed this difficulty also expressed that this pressure decreased in time.

Table 4.
Proposals to Increase the Efficiency of Peer Assessment

Categories	F	%
a. Making groups	38	79.17
a.1.a. Making heterogeneous groups in terms of gender	12	31.58
a.2. Not making groups consisting of close colleagues	11	28.95
a.3. Changing groups members often	5	13.16
a.4. Making groups of two people	3	7.89
a.5. Increasing the number of group members	2	5.26
a.6. Making groups consisting of close colleagues	2	5.26
a.7. Group members with the same gender	2	5.26
a.8. Making groups arbitrarily	1	2.63
b. Conduct theoretical lesson just after internship and discussing assessments	4	8.33
c. Practicing peer assessment also in other lessons apart from teaching practice lesson	4	8.33
d. Informing the practice teacher and school where internship is realized about peer assessment	1	2.08
e. Removing prejudices about peer assessment before starting practice	1	2.08

Proposals that prospective teachers presented in order to increase the efficiency of peer assessment in teaching practice are separated into 5 categories. The “Making groups” category has the highest frequency. The most mentioned proposal concerning “Making groups” is “Making heterogeneous groups in terms of gender”. Prospective teachers think that heterogeneous groups will be effective in making a more precise and objective assessment for seeing teacher competences and to understand the point of view of the other gender.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this research, the opinions of prospective class teachers about peer assessment in teaching practice were examined. The findings obtained in the research show that the prospective teachers who participated in the research find using peer assessment in teaching practice beneficial in many ways. According to the opinions of prospective teachers, peer assessment has a positive impact on assessment skills and the skill to use standards while making assessments. There are such operations as making judgments based on pre-determined standards and the configuration of feedback given to peers according to these standards. The positive

impact of peer assessment on assessment skills can be explained with these operations. The finding that peer assessment develops assessment skills shows similarity with the findings of a study that Sluijsmans and Prins (2006) conducted. Sluijsmans and Prins examined the impact of peer assessment education in teaching practice on some variables and determined that peer assessment education had a positive impact on developing assessment skills.

Prospective teachers think that peer assessment increases their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. There are similar views in the literature on peer assessment. Students have to use their reflective skills in order to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and be able to assess their own work and/or the work of their peers. From this point of view, the analysis of the work of peers and the development of an awareness of the quality of one's own work have a strong relation to both self-assessment and peer assessment (Falchikov, 1995; Freeman, 1995 cited in Sluijsmans et al., 2003).

Two of the prospective teachers stated that they did not want the use of peer assessment in teaching practice. Also, in a study conducted by Stanier (1997), in addition to stating the beneficial aspects of peer assessment, 40% of students evaluated peer assessment as an uncomfortable experiment (cited in van Gennip, Segers, & Tillema, 2009). In the study of Cartney (2010), students stated that they felt anxious when they assessed their peers and when they were in turn assessed. They stated that the feedback giving and feedback receiving processes were situations which increased anxiety. In this study, the prospective teachers stated that they felt themselves under pressure while being assessed and they were anxious about not being assessed objectively. These results are consistent with the results obtained by Cartney (2009). It was stated that negative feelings that emerge while assessing or being assessed (feeling oneself under pressure, feeling anxious) decreased in time and then disappeared. Prospective teachers think that peer assessment also prepares them for processes in which they will be assessed in their professional life in the future. Peer assessment education may be useful in dissolving prejudices and negative feelings about peer assessment in the peer assessment process.

Students stated that peer assessment improved critical thinking, cooperation skills and interaction. Also, in the study conducted by Sluijsmans et al. (2003), it was determined that peer assessment was effective for critical thinking, cooperation skills

and interaction skills. In the study conducted by Özan (2008), self and peer assessment were determined to be positively effective on communication skills. In their studies, Wen and Tsai (2006) reached the conclusion that peer assessment increased the quality of the social interaction between students and teachers; provided students with an understanding of their peers' thinking and let them to understand their own cognitive and metacognitive fields concerning their own learning process and improved social skills (cited in al-Barakat & al-Hassan, 2009). There is a mutual interaction in peer assessment while giving and receiving feedback. It can be said that this interaction among peers improves cooperation, communication, empathy and openness to criticism. The positive impact of peer assessment on critical thinking can be explained by the fact that students make a reflective criticism of their peers' works and performances by using pre-determined standards in the peer assessment process. Topping, Smith, Swanson, and Elliot (2000) state that peer assessment can improve many social and communication skills such as verbal lecturing skills as well as an ability to criticize and an openness to criticism.

The finding that peer assessment provides a focus for teaching practice and improves teacher competences, as reached in this study, is supported by some research findings in the literature. Many authors state that peer assessment increases learning skills in various fields (Topping, 2005, 2009; Vickerman, 2009; Wiley & Gardner, 2010). In the study conducted by al-Barakat and al-Hassan (2009), peer assessment and how it contributed to prospective teachers' development in their field experience was examined. It was determined that peer assessment improved educational competences; skills to form standards for reflection and assessment; and it had a positive impact on self-confidence and attitudes to peer assessment.

The finding that peer assessment gives the opportunity to make comparisons (practice diversity shows that students compare their practice with the practice of their peers while assessing each other; and they get more opportunity to practice more when this is compared to traditional teaching practices. Gielen et al. (2010) state that peer assessment gives the opportunity to see different examples and approaches for the ones who are assessed and it provides them with the ability to learn by internalizing given criteria and standards.

Among the proposals that prospective teachers presented in order to increase the efficiency of

peer assessment, the proposal related to “making groups” has the highest frequency. “Making heterogeneous groups in terms of gender” and “Not making groups consisting of close friends” are the subcategories with the highest frequency. Falchikov (2001) stated that when peer assessment groups consist of close friends, students are not willing to make an assessment. That supports the conclusion which is reached in this study. While there are different opinions about the size of peer assessment groups, there are various research findings showing that the assessment system works more efficiently in small groups. In a meta-analysis study conducted by Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000), it is stated that grades given by many evaluators show less similarities with grades given by a teacher when compared to grades given by fewer evaluators or just one evaluator. Even though it is accepted that multi assessments are more qualified than mono assessments, in this study it is concluded that mono evaluators show as good a performance as large student groups. However, the bigger the group is, the more there is a “social loafing” or “free riding” effect. In their studies, Kerr and Bruun (1983) reached the conclusion that when the number of members increased in a group, individual motivation decreased (cited in Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). In a study conducted by Van den Berg, Admiraal and Pilot (2006), it was posited that peer feedback was best given in small groups. “Making heterogeneous groups in terms of gender” may assist teachers to gain different point of views and aid them in becoming more careful and attentive in the teaching practice process. It may also have an effect that prevents the formation of differences resulting from gender in the classroom.

Another proposal that prospective teachers present in order to increase the efficiency of peer assessment in the teaching practice lesson is the conducting of a theoretical lesson just after the practice. Conducting a two-hour-long theoretical part of the teaching practice lesson just after the practice may provide prospective teachers to retain the details make discussions.

The last proposal that prospective teachers suggested for an increased efficiency of peer assessment was to use peer assessment in other lessons apart from the teaching practice lesson. Using peer assessment in different lessons in teacher education may encourage prospective teachers to adopt and apply modern approaches in addition to increasing their academic achievement and developing their teacher competences. According to Sluijsmans and

Prins (2006), peer assessment is a strong method in developing teaching skills in teacher education. This is because of the advantages that peer assessment provides, in other words the skills that it brings are the skills which are necessary in the teaching profession. Besides, it can be thought that efficiency of the new program that was first applied in the academic year 2004-2005, depends on adoption and application of new approaches such as peer assessment by the teachers. It is of paramount importance to know which mechanisms affect learning and how these mechanisms can be supported in order to increase the impact of peer assessment on learning (Gielen et al., 2010). For this reason, there is a need for studies which research how the peer assessment process and criteria and the feedback factors in this process affect learning under different conditions.

The literature in recent years has stated the necessity for the active participation of students in their assessments, while emphasizing the value of dialogue among the students in this process, and it suggests that this is vital for the understanding of the complex relation between assessment and learning. It is stressed that formative feedback, which is accepted as having an important role in the development of learning, cannot stand alone in the achievement of high educational standards. In recent studies, it is argued that there is a space between feedback giving and feedback receiving. The important point is whether students go into action or not after feedback and whether they see or not the connections and how they can improve their future performances (Cartney, 2010). It could be argued that studies that examine the impact of the interactive patterns formed while giving and receiving feedbacks and the educational applications concerning the drawing up of criteria and the feedback configuration on different dependent variables could provide contributions to further knowledge.

The learning-teaching elements of the program being applied now should be devised in line with new approaches; and the pre-service and in-service training of teachers should be configured properly in order to develop teacher peer assessment since this is considered to be an important part of the learning process.

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