



TÜRKİYE'DEKİ BİR İNGİLİZ DİLİ ÖĞRETMEN YETİŞTİRME PROGRAMINDAKİ EDEBİYAT DERSLERİ HAKKINDAKİ ÖĞRENCİ GÖRÜŞLERİ

STUDENTS' EVALUATION OF LITERATURE COURSES IN THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN TURKEY

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Özet:

Bu çalışmanın amacı ders programlarındaki edebiyat dersleri hakkındaki araştırmalara dayanarak edebiyat derslerinin etkinleştirilmesi amacıyla öneriler sunmaktır. İngiliz dili öğretmen yetiştirme programında öğrenim gören dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin edebiyat derslerinin etkinleştirilmesine değgin önerilerine eklenen öneriler edebiyat derslerinde daha çok sayıda metin okuma ve yorumlamanın farklı edebi türler ve farklı ortamların (film, müzik, görsel araçlar, vb. gibi) öğrencilere daha doyurucu bir öğrenme deneyimi kazandırdığını göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak, İngiliz dili öğretmen yetiştirme programındaki edebiyat derslerinin etkinleştirilmesi amacıyla literatüre dayalı alternatif öğretim, uygulama ve değerlendirme önerileri getirilmiştir.

Abstract :

The purpose of this study was to present suggestions to make literature courses in prospective teacher education programs at faculties of education more effective. Building on a previous study on literature courses offered in English Language Teaching (ELT) teacher education curriculum and by concentrating on the evaluations of fourth year students studying at English language teacher education programs, suggestions are made to make these programs more effective. It is suggested that these programs should center around an increased number of literary texts and more chances of analysis via different genres and media including films, music and visual materials to enhance students' learning of literature. In the final analysis, further specific and alternative suggestions are made on teaching, application and evaluation of literature courses in such programs.

Key Words: Literature, curriculum, suggestions, English Language Teaching, Turkish universities
Anahtar Sözcükler: Edebiyat, ders programı, öneriler, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi, Türk üniversiteleri

INTRODUCTION

Literature programs in any ELT curriculum are still a matter of discussion, embodying multiple and often clashing views, and remain as

competing constructs despite the relative paucity of empirical research in the field. In such a conflicting realm, literature is attributed a range of labels from being an integral part of the

curriculum to being irrelevant or positively harmful to ELT (Maley, 2001). Such debate continues up to the present, for instance, since Shakespeare, who is far from easy for native speakers, is obligatory reading for undergraduates whose own production of English may occasionally lapse into a comedy of errors (Buckledee, 2002).

Even though EFL research continuously examined its own practices in so many sub-fields, what literature might offer and how this potential can best be exploited remains neither sufficiently nor carefully theorized. Parallel to the available research literature on literature teaching in English as second and foreign language classrooms, the rationale behind teaching of literature must be clarified so as to say ‘why teach literature?’ must be answered before any meaningful discussions can take place (Carter & Long, 1991; Maley, 2001). Thus, the problem arises especially in an English as a Foreign Language context, requiring future research and careful examination of the place of literature within this and all other EFL contexts.

A historical overview of language teaching shows that in contrast to the 1950s, when structures and patterns led language teaching, the trend in the 1970s was toward humanism, with key educational terms shifting towards evaluating language learning as an experience in which the student builds his/ her personal language. Parallel to this move towards experiential individualization of language learning experience, the 1980s put an emphasis on the learning processes, in which students share their learning with others (Farris, 1997). A review of the relevant ELT literature, on the other hand, shows that approaches

to language teaching including the ones in the 1970s, ignored literature teaching (Brumfit, 1985). In contrast, the move in the 1990s emphasized and strengthened the importance of the overall learning process rather than the teaching of a hierarchy of sub-skills by means of connecting the learning process. In our contemporary age, literature and writing are once again moved to the foreground (Farris, 1997), this time as fields with which more communicative interaction can take place in the classroom through authentic materials.

A summary of this overview provides that, as Farris (1997: 26) concludes, the dividing line between traditional and nontraditional approaches has been that the latter emphasize learning processes by giving more choice and flexibility in instruction while providing less structure and direction for the classroom teacher. When the English language teaching is evaluated, we see an ongoing, yet not fully visible chain of conflicts in the relationship between literature and English Language Teaching. In other words, the place of literature in English Language Teaching must be concretized so that classroom applications are projected in a firm manner.

Although English language teacher education programs use a variety of courses to prepare prospective English language teachers, little is researched and written about the views of prospective English language teachers on their curriculum in general and on literature courses in particular. In addition to educational theory, language skills, linguistics, and methodology courses, these students are instructed in a variety of literature courses awaiting empirical recognition

for their place, and effectiveness in the whole curriculum. It is believed that views of prospective English language teachers can provide valuable information for the assessment and re-designing procedures of the curricular development of the programs.

The place of literature in the language teaching curriculum in Turkey, at all levels of instruction, show similarity to the aforementioned situation observable in the rest of the world. Even though teaching literature to EFL/ESL classes has been losing its popularity, it has also been suggested that it should be included in the curriculum of high schools and universities in Turkey (Türker, 1998).

When the place of the new curriculum is reviewed in contextual terms, that is to say, at Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education, English Language Teaching division, it is possible to hear some voices from the staff saying that literature should not be a weighing part of the teacher education curriculum in this specific teacher education context. Such a belief may stem from the assumption that previous curriculum which had given importance to methodology courses was more beneficial for the professional development of the prospective language teachers despite the scarcity of research based conclusions.

Much research is needed to compare the previous and the current curricula in terms of their beneficence in the scarcity of such research. Thus, in such a context, serious and continuous research is needed to check on the development of the newly evolving curriculum, when possible in comparison to the previous one, while improving and updating it with the help of such context specific knowledge. In short, such contextually produced

research knowledge might help (re)structure both specific teaching practices as well as curricular applications within and among literature courses in our curricular contexts.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, curriculum evaluation is carried out as a summative evaluation which seeks to make decisions about the worth or value of different aspects of the curriculum to determine the effectiveness of a program, its efficiency, and to some extent its acceptability (Richards, 2001). This summative evaluation tried to answer the following research questions:

1. What literature courses do these prospective teachers find most beneficial and why?
2. What changes do they suggest to improve the effectiveness of the courses specified?

Two data collection instruments are used for the purpose of this research. The primary data were collected through face-to-face interviews with 15 fourth year ELT students who have taken all literature courses offered at Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education, ELT division. During these interviews a total number of six structured questions were asked to reveal the relationship between the participants' literature courses and their prospective teacher education.

In addition to the primary data, the secondary data were collected through opinion survey of questionnaires conducted with 50 students who were not previously interviewed. The results of these questionnaires were used to strengthen the results of the interviews while

empowering and synthesizing the overall analysis and interpretation process.

In terms of the analysis of the interview data, a thematic analysis is applied. Knowing that themes are abstract constructs that investigators identify before, during, and after data collection procedures, an inductive coding is applied to identify and refine the themes to the point where they can be applied to an entire corpus of texts. In such an analysis, a careful reading and segmenting the data, and comparing each theme with the rest, has evolved as a continuous process attempting to understand, interpret, and write up the views of the prospective ELT teachers.

Following the analysis of the data, a literature review is carried out to suggest alternative view points on making this literature program more effective.

FINDINGS

The majority of the surveyors find all literature courses beneficial. 92 % of the respondents claim that they will use what they have learned in these courses in their future teaching contexts. Likewise, this positive evaluation of the importance of literature courses is also reflected in the respondents' sequencing of the courses from the most beneficial course to the least, since it signifies a meaningful rationale that has a lot to do with how the respondents view these courses in relation to the qualities of these.

For the respondents, Short Story (30 %) and Introduction to British Literature (26%) are the leading courses in terms of their beneficence to the preparation of these prospective teachers. The other three courses show similarity in their final assessment by

the students with 18% for Poetry, 14% for Drama, and 12 % for Novel.

In terms of the relationship among the aspects and skills of the English language and literature courses, 40 % of the respondents claimed that their knowledge of the vocabulary improved with the help of these literature courses while those who claimed they developed their reading skill made up 24 % of their responses. The respondents who believe that they benefited from these courses in speaking made up 6 % and those whose grammar improved made 4 %. On the other hand, in terms of some other areas benefited through these courses, those who claim that their cultural and aesthetic understanding has benefited from these courses made up 24 %, an important numerical evidence that requires careful attention.

In reply to the question investigating if the respondents were satisfied with the contents of these literature courses, only 18 % of them responded positively, and 28 % negatively. However, 54 % of the respondents claimed that all literature courses, by and large, need minor changes even though they may remain as they are in the current curriculum. Thus, it can be said that despite the fact that only 18% of the respondents seem to be satisfied with the contents of these courses, their problems with the contents are minor and not formidable.

In terms of the evaluation of each of the literature courses, respondents pointed at two courses as requiring urgent change. Despite the students' evaluation of Introduction to British Literature course as the second best course in beneficence to these students, it is surprising, yet noteworthy, that 50 % of the surveyors demand that the content of the

Introduction to British Literature courses are the ones that necessitate the most urgent change. Following that, Poetry Analysis and Teaching made up 24 % of the responses. Both Novel and Drama courses equally made up 12 % and Short Story was the only course that was required to be changed only by 2 % of the respondents, signaling an increased satisfaction in terms of its content. The interview findings, given below, will investigate the reasons for such results.

When asked what aspects or segments of these courses should be minimized or strengthened for their effectiveness, 84 % of the surveyors wanted to have more exposure to literary texts while 66 % of them wanted the emphasis to be put on the teaching of literature such as those structured pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. Upon the biographical and historical knowledge taught in these courses, 72 % of those surveyors demanded minimizing such knowledge. Thus, it can be said that, the majority of students demanded to be given more literary texts but less historical and biographical knowledge, while they seem to be satisfied with the teaching of literature despite a stronger rejection by 44% of those wishing the minimizing of such knowledge.

One question asked to the respondents was whether they would like to have additional, selective courses such as World Literature, Film and Literature, etc., and 88 % of the respondents responded to the idea positively. Such a result might be used to emphasize that, for the participants, literature means a connector between these students' linguistic and cultural development, bridging their professional and educational growth with the target language and culture as

well as the students' own life styles through various means. The following is a description of the findings derived from the analysis of the interview scripts.

In the interviews, all prospective language teachers, except one, declared that literature courses were a fundamental part of their education without which an important segment of their learning experience would be missing. It is noteworthy that the exceptional student who claimed that literature was not a fundamental part of her education suggested that it is not that literature courses were not important, but she had trouble with the idea of having to read literature on demand, unlike her past literary reading experiences which were largely done voluntarily. Hence, it is possible to claim that all interviewees identify the value of literature courses in their prospective teacher education. In one student's words the value of literature rests in

The value of studying and reading closely in order to interpret rather than memorizing bits and pieces.

The interviews revealed that literature courses were seen as valuable for the participants in their development as teachers because of the benefits that fall into three main categories. First of all, these courses help the participants with many language skills among which vocabulary and reading make up the largest segment. The interviewees claimed that not only did they develop their vocabulary but also they read literary texts, in processes taking longer time than any other reading happening in and for any other course. Furthermore, the majority of the students also reported that literature courses were the ones in which they

experienced satisfactory classroom interaction in English.

Secondly, the participants found literature courses of utmost importance, for these courses introduced different world-views and ideologies through which they were sensitized towards other cultures and individuals other than their own. One student responded as follows:

Before I took these courses, I had never heard such terms as Existentialism, Jazz Age, Formalism, and Racism. These courses made me feel interested in history and philosophy.

Thirdly, it is not the mere knowledge that made such an experience appealing, but the very nature of the knowledge encapsulated in these courses. One exemplary opinion was suggested by one interviewee as follows:

Literature courses possess all sorts of discussions from history to politics and from religion to arts. No other course gives us this wholistic view to discover what is in the human's experience. As such, these courses give us a perspective, a method to understand the rest of the world.

Additional and elective courses seem to be a compelling idea for these students because they want to further their cultural and aesthetic growth. Ten of them claimed that such elective courses would help them practice through native texts. One student said:

I think there should be elective literature courses with which we can learn more about arts and literature. I know there are some 'film and literature' courses elsewhere and it

would be a great chance to combine the two for our imagination and perspective.

Similar to the questionnaire results, interviews suggest that prospective language teachers want Introduction to British Literature course to be restructured more than any other course offered in the curriculum. The reason is that, for these students, even though they are exposed to the history of British literature in a survey type of syllabus design, the course is one that prioritizes mere knowledge rather than involving the analysis and discussion of literary passages. Parallel to that, Short Story course is argued to be the most accessible course since the passages are shorter and the classroom interaction is more dynamic. Drama and poetry, on the other hand, are still difficult for these students, because the students have a hard time understanding the literary and poetic language used in the texts offered in these courses.

The interviews have shown that students are in dilemma in terms of what these courses should include. That is to say, they often show their dilemma by focusing on whether the tasks and activities offered in the present program are applicable in their future contexts. The participants are aware that literature is not a part of English Language Teaching programs in the Ministry of National Education and the courses fall short in legitimizing itself in this situation. Some students suggested that some courses should focus on the teaching of literature, but others should emphasize analysis and literary interpretation. Furthermore, some others claimed that the teaching of literature should be an elective or separate course on its own.

DISCUSSION

It has been supported that literature is not an object to be studied and a literary work does not have a single correct interpretation (Iser, 1978). Deriving much from reader response theory, it has been argued that meaning in the text is constructed by readers' own interpretations of their experiences while they are reading the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). Meaning, from this perspective, is a process that resides in the exchange between the reader and the text, where the reader constructs meanings guided by the text. In such a process, the reader's experiences cause a selection of images and feelings that will shape the meaning of the text, while the text shapes the reader by creating new images and experiences (Gambrell, Morrow & Pennington, 2000).

A recent questionnaire distributed to 250 pre-service English language teachers revealed that 72 % of the subjects' only access to L2 was through reading books in English, 27 % of them were reading books and watching TV programs in English at CNBC-E, CNN, and BBC, and only 1% of them claimed to have found native speakers of English to develop their listening and speaking skills. These results show the importance of reading in L2 as the single most important channel for contacting English language as future ELT teachers. Similarly, recent developments that connect English Language Teaching and literature underline the importance of effective instruction of literature in such a way that students will not only be ready, but also eager to read. Thus, rather than seeing literature as a resource for knowledge of linguistic or literary competence, contemporary

views withhold the assumption that literature is used to develop love of literature so that the students become eager to read. In addition to using literature for creating love of and attachment to reading, it is argued that literature, if taught in a response-based manner need not be only a vehicle for language teaching, but also a form of cultural understanding that enhances the experience of reading in a foreign language (Liaw, 2001). This cultural understanding, under the light of new literary trends such as the post-modern New New Criticism, emphasizes that a literary work cannot be separated from the cultural context in which it is created and "the reader is expected to know the situation, the cultural context, to understand the causes leading to the creation of the work of art" (Kantarcıoğlu, 1999: 54).

In the light of the data collected and analyzed, the following points appear to be fundamental in the completion of this research process:

- As the data suggest, prospective teachers want to have more access to literature related courses such as 'Literature for Vocabulary Development' or 'Film and Literature' through which the students will have access to the authentic use of the language. Thinking that such courses will have positive affect on these students' language skills such courses must be taught at least as elective courses.
- Even though the students are content with these courses, they also demand minor changes in the literature curriculum. It is the students' argument that certain literature courses necessitate

urgent content changes among which Introduction to British Literature course is the first one. For this specific course, students demand less survey knowledge but more exposition to literary texts.

- Furthermore, the interview results suggest that the students find the contents of the Novel, Poetry, and Drama courses more difficult to follow because these types require ways of reading that are different from those of the Short Story and Introduction to British Literature. Here, students need more analytical tools with which they can deal with such texts more successfully.
- Upon the content of these courses at large, students demand to be exposed to a greater number of literary texts, less historical and biographical information, and somehow more teaching of literature in classroom as microteaching activities.
- Thus, future research must, first, concentrate on needs analyses upon which the contents of these courses are changed by bridging the students' expectations, opinions, and needs and the givens of the curriculum (Yalden, 1987).

CONCLUSION

In such a complex process, as the data suggest, how the instructors see literature, thus the literary texts, must be taken seriously for their views go hand in hand with research literature in ELT. In sum, research suggests that literature has an undeniable place in ELT as it

provides cultural enrichment, because literature is a mode of 'good' writing and it has potentials of mental training while stretching the linguistic abilities of the learners via authentic materials (Parkinson & Thomas 2000). By considering these, in the light of the data, literature courses should be seen as a multidimensional field from a curricular perspective which requires serious study, so as to say, literature teaching does not become a monolith in the curriculum in which any teacher can teach because the view of the text never changes but literary texts should be seen as starting points for creative activities that lead to production (Widdowson, 1992). Thus, literature courses may provide valuable opportunities to develop students' listening, reading, speaking, writing skills along with carefully planned courses.

Parkinson and Thomas (2000: 4) claim that "courses which involve extensive surveys of literary history, and teaching methods which rely substantially on lectures, may help students to pass the required examinations, but they do little to develop literature for the resources of the majority of individual students. Hence, future modifications should consider what students have commented on, what literature says, and how the context can allow the framework of the new curriculum. The analyzed data shows that this view is applicable to the literature program in which this study is carried out.

Keeping in mind that each and all aspects of English Language Teaching are interrelated, the body of literature courses may be re-conceptualized together with the spread of parallel notions such as emotional intelligence (Maley 2001) or constructivism (Erdem & Demirel

2002) all of which are co-applicable. Such conclusion shows the importance of literature as an undeniable segment of language teaching from a theoretical perspective both from ELT as well as curricular perspectives.

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