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PRE-PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE OF PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN TURKEY THROUGH A SPEAKING CLUB PROJECT TO IMPROVE THEIR SPEAKING SKILLS: A CASE STUDY

Türkiye’de İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarının Konuşma Kulübü Projesiyle İletişim Becerilerini Geliştirmesi: Öğretmenlik Uygulaması Öncesi Durum Değerlendirmesi

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Abstract

In Turkey teaching speaking English is a highly controversial issue while even most of the English language teachers themselves are not competent enough in the necessary communication skills in such a foreign language setting. The problem was tried to be solved through some top-down solutions like making the curriculum more communicative by different governmental efforts. However, the change should start with the English Language Teaching (ELT) departments because a qualified teacher can solve all these problems when given freedom. This study, therefore, aimed to investigate the probable effects of a ‘Speaking Club’ project held in a secondary school during which junior pre-service teachers (PSTs) from an ELT department took part in 2-6 people speaking groups for 10 weeks to improve students’ speaking skills and wrote reflections on their own communicative skills, how to teach these skills, thoughts about the project and perceptions towards being an EFL teacher in Turkey. In this qualitative study, thematic analysis was applied to the data collected from the reflective journals of 27 volunteering PSTs and the focus group interview was held at the end of the project with 10 PSTs. Findings from the analysis demonstrated that they benefited a lot from the project in terms of becoming aware of their weaknesses and improving their speaking and teaching skills. The most critical implication of this study is the urgency to equip PSTs with the necessary communication skills as early as possible. This will also enable pre-service English Language teachers to be well-prepared for their school-based practicum.

Keywords: Speaking skills, pre-service EFL teachers, ELT in Turkey.

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Öz

Türkiye’de İngilizce konuşma becerilerinin öğretilmesi oldukça tartışmalı bir konu olmaya devam etmektedir ve sadece öğrenciler değil, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin birçoğu bu iletişim becerisi ile ilgili bazı eksiklikler yaşamaktadır. Bu sorun farklı hükümetlerin çabalarıyla, müfredatı daha iletişimsel hale getirmek yoluyla yukarıdan aşağı yöntemlerle çözülmeye çalışılmıştır ve çabalar devam etmektedir. Burada Eğitim Fakülteleri İngilizce Öğretmenliği Anabilim Dallarının ders içeriklerinde değişiklikler yapılması ihtiyacı gündeme gelmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, İngilizce Öğretmen adaylarının ‘Konuşma Kulübü Projesi’ kapsamında 10 hafta süreyle bir ortaokulda 2-6 kişilik konuşma gruplarıyla öğrencilerin konuşma becerilerini geliştirme çabalarını ve yine bu süreçte kendi konuşma becerileri ile ilgili yaptıkları durum değerlendirmelerini, iletişim becerileri algılarını ve İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğretecek öğretmen adayları olarak kendilerini nasıl değerlendirdiklerini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu nitel çalışmada tematik analiz yapılmış olup, veriler 27 öğretmen adayının yansıtıcı düşünme yoluyla yazdıkları günlüklerden toplanmıştır. Ayrıca 10 kişilik öğretmen adayları ile odak grup görüşmeleri yapılmıştır. Bulgular, öğretmen adaylarının bu proje vasıtasıyla kendi eksikliklerini görerek konuşma becerilerini ilerletmek ve yeni yöntemler uygulamakla ilgili farkındalık geliştirdiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, bu uygulamanın İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının Okul Deneyimi ve Öğretmenlik Uygulaması derslerine fayda sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Konuşma becerileri, İngilizce öğretmen adayları, Türkiye’de Yabancı Dil Öğretimi

1. INTRODUCTION

In EFL classrooms, learners cannot get proficient enough in speaking as they do not or cannot practice many attempts have been made to update and upgrade foreign language teaching. speaking because of the lack of fluency or vocabulary, embarrassment of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, negative perceptions about their competence, lack of self-esteem, inadequate skills development, and absence of adequate role models (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986; Ariyanti, 2016; Toubot, Seng, and Abdullah, 2017). In today’s world, however, English is viewed as a language belonging to the users who are much more than native speakers of it. This perception of English language makes communication more important than speaking flawless native speaker norms of the target language. It is now observed that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) speakers are from various cultures, various languages, and diverse communities which entails a kind of ‘unpredictability and variability of communication’, and ‘an active engagement in the meaning-making process’. As Illés and Akcan (2017:3) puts it “One of the consequences for ELT is that the focus should shift from the desired product, i.e. language which is correct and appropriate in reference to native-speaker norms, to the actual process of communication”. Unfortunately, both in-service and pre-service teachers (PSTs) resist the concept of ELF and prefer more constant native-speaker norms (Dewey, 2012; Biricik, Özkan, and Bayyurt, 2016; Soruç, 2015). This resistance makes PSTs set unrealistic goals and makes them extra anxious about speaking English. Moreover; they develop teaching foreign language anxiety due to personal, perceptual, motivational and technical concerns before, during and after teaching activities. The sources of this anxiety may be a low level of proficiency and lack of teaching experience (Aydın, 2016). Therefore, to make PSTs equipped with communication skills and make them self-confident through teaching practice are crucial for them to fulfil the roles they are expected to play in the future.

The short history of the ELT departments in Turkey shows that First, teacher training institutions evolved into universities in the 1980s and in those years there were great content differences among the ELT programmes (Ülgü and Er, 2016). Later, with the association of the Turkish Council of Higher Education and World Bank, some restructurings were made in education faculties in 1997 to provide a sufficient number of teachers to schools after the compulsory elementary education period increased from 5 to

8 years (Deniz and Şahin, 2006). Another set of restructurings followed them in 2006 to do the necessary updates and to give priority to practicum and to increase school experience courses (Salihoğlu, 2012; Uztosun and Troudi, 2015). After the 12 - year compulsory education, a lot of foreign language teacher education departments were opened as a result of the increasing demand (Ülgü and Er, 2016). Despite all these efforts, the PSTs who passed an examination based on reading, grammar, and vocabulary to enter ELT departments still stated that they perceived themselves as least proficient in listening, speaking and vocabulary which constitute oral communication skills in English (Uztosun, 2017). If today the aim of learning English is to communicate in a world where non-native speakers have already outnumbered the native speakers and non-native- non-native interactions take place more than native-non-native interactions, instead of fully competent native or native-like speakers; non-native speakers who can address local and linguistic needs and preferences seem more eligible. Furthermore, “there is an attempt to provide learners with as much exposure to English as possible, by creating English-speaking environments within a non-native context” (Bhowmik, 2015:147). Since PSTs themselves are still students learning how to communicate in the language they are expected to teach in a few years, a more compromising foreign language teacher education is needed to equip these non-native PSTs with necessary skills to use and teach the target language appropriately in various contexts. Despite the increasing importance of preparing more and more qualified teachers especially in terms of communication skills, a great deal of questions still remain unanswered. Questions such as -what must be done to improve PSTs in terms of their own communication skills and teaching these skills, and how practicum contributes to PSTs’ perceptions, sense of self-efficacy and reflectivity in teaching EFL- should be handled seriously by policymakers, and researchers in language teaching and the academic staff training PSTs at universities.

Teaching practicum plays an important role here in prospective teachers’ development of beliefs about and attitudes towards the profession since it provides a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practice. The nature of the practicum is interactive, dynamic, and social and requires direct participation in the social teaching practices, classroom experiences, collaborative relationships with other PSTs, mentors, and supervisors (Bailey, 2009; Johnson 2009). School-based practicum today takes place in only the fourth year of ELT programmes in Turkey through two courses- ‘School Observation’ and ‘Teaching Practice’. Through School Observation PSTs review the content of methodology courses and observe in-service teachers for only six hours in total while through ‘Teaching Practice’ they design and prepare lesson plans and teach at least four lessons of 50 minutes being observed and evaluated by their supervisors and mentors. School based practicum improves PSTs’ teaching and communication skills through observing real contexts, gives them the opportunity to practice teaching under the supervision of university lecturers and mentor teachers (Tarman, 2012) and enables them to self-evaluate their teaching competence (Siek-Piskozub and Jankowska, 2013). It also enhances their reflectivity, understanding of contextual factors and learner-centeredness (Tülüce and Çeçen, 2016). Therefore, teaching practicum courses must be planned carefully. One of the very first steps to do it is to make PSTs think over their inner thoughts with the aim of deeper analysis through reflecting on their experiences and to enable them to gain valuable insights in their first encounter with future students (Farrell, 2012). Writing reflective journals especially provides a rich source of data to understand how PSTs improve personally (Tavil, 2014), and combines theory and practice (Lee, 2008). Although it was revealed that the perceptions about self-efficacy have a

positive impact on teaching abilities, personal and professional development (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Chiang, 2008; Tavıl, 2014), there has not been much research scrutinizing the relationship of reflectivity and self-efficacy in the field (Chiang, 2008). It can be claimed that regardless of the extent of change in their belief system, most of the in-service teachers are not content with the largely theory-oriented PST education programmes and put forward that PSTs need more practical courses aiming to increase EFL teachers' individual English proficiency and to expose them to easily applicable methods (Yook and Lee, 2016). These theory-oriented programmes need some kind of change by mainly focusing on practicum for a more powerful teacher education.

To address these problems, a 'Speaking Club' project was organized within the framework of a protocol between a secondary school and an ELT department during which PSTs took part in a kind of 'pre-practicum' process in their third year within Community Service Practices course. In the secondary school, such as in any usual government school, the students were not as good at communication skills- listening or speaking- as they were at reading, vocabulary, and grammar since they are used to study for test-based exams on reading, vocabulary, and grammar. For the last two years, conducting Practice Exams consisting of the evaluation of four skills- reading, writing, listening, speaking- separately became compulsory in English lessons in secondary schools in Turkey. This in turn revealed the low levels of proficiency in communication skills and made teachers and students feel the urge to find opportunities to take part in communicative activities which is the main deficiency in such an EFL context. Whether a project like this, which pushes the prospective teachers to think over how to improve their own and students' speaking skills, has an impact on PSTs' beliefs about being a non-native EFL teacher in a country where communication skills rank very low is a research gap the present study aims to fill. With this goal in mind, this study aims to discover how ELT junior PSTs' such a practicum-like experience in their third year affects their perceptions about their own communication skills, and their attitudes towards their future profession. Therefore; this study was designed to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What are PSTs' perceptions of their speaking skills?
2. What are PSTs' perceptions of their teaching of communication skills?
3. How do PSTs evaluate themselves as EFL teachers?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in one of the secondary schools in İzmir, Turkey. Since it is known from the previous studies (Coşkun, 2016; Dinçer, 2017; Tüm and Kunt, 2013) that PSTs mostly complain about their own inefficient communication skills and the mismatch between the education offered in ELT departments and the requirements of work life. During their 4-year education PSTs have speaking courses only in the 1st year in their curriculum. All the other courses are field specific and their struggle with speaking skills remains as a problem in the long run. In this study, it was aimed to see the possible effects of an earlier meeting of PSTs with prospective students before the practicum year to teach speaking since the best way to learn is to teach. Therefore, a 'Speaking Club' project was organized by the researcher who was also an instructor at the school. 37 junior PSTs came to school once a week for their Community Service Practices course given in the sixth term in ELT departments. 27 junior PSTs (19 female, 8 male)

aged between 20 and 22 volunteered to participate in the study. All the participants spoke Turkish as their mother tongue and all of them learned English in Turkey and had little contact with the target language community and speaking courses and micro-teaching experiences served as the only opportunities to practice English.

2.2. Data Collection Method and Procedure

In this study, a qualitative case-study approach was adopted to investigate PSTs' beliefs and perceptions. Qualitative approach was used because it was the most appropriate one to be used in such a study since it is defined as an interpretive naturalistic approach in which things are studied in their natural settings, "attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3). Case study is advantageous in terms of studying a phenomenon within its real context, as well, (Yin, 2009; Yin, 2011) and is a method that can be utilized for "providing a rich and vivid description of events with the analysis of them" (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.317). The data were collected through reflective journals written in English by 27 PSTs every week-10 weeks in total- by making them reflect on their experiences from a different angle each week. The pre-service teachers did not have any experience of writing reflective journals so they had been given some information before the project began. And a focus group interview was held in English with 10 volunteers at the end of the project. They also got prepared for weekly speaking topics like introducing self, education, hometown, television-computer-internet, work life, marriage, sports-music-films, travel, and tourism. Each session was 45 minutes in total- the lunch break of high school students- including the topics above and spontaneous talks. The PSTs came to school on Fridays two lessons before the lunch break in the first of which the researcher and the PSTs shared their experiences and gave suggestions about teaching skills and teaching speaking and in the second for getting prepared for the club. Later, each individual PST spoke English with 3-4 different students drawing the lots having their number on. The PSTs were asked to write weekly reflections through Edmodo and send them to the researcher until the day before the next visit. They were also told that their attendance and reflections would be evaluated as their final score for their Community Services Practice course.

2.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to the data to identify and analyse patterns within data to organize and describe them in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this, the data from the 270 entries of 27 participants' reflections written during 10 ten weeks and the verbatim transcription of the focus group interview were closely examined by being read through several times. In the first readings, specific and related comments were underlined and initial impressions were documented. The related concepts were grouped according to these impressions and research questions. Codes were identified by highlighting related concepts in the data. Potential main and sub-themes were created by arranging these codes into coding units and then categories. In the final readings, the themes were determined and the emerging themes were followed throughout the data to generate a thematic map. The themes were named and related to the research questions to be reported.

3. RESULTS

The themes deduced from the reflections were categorized according to the research questions. The data drawn from the interview were also given in the last part of this section. The results are as follows:

3.1. PSTs' Perceptions of Their Own Speaking Skills

The results revealed three main themes- *weaknesses*, *the normality of mistakes* and *improvement*- and three sub-themes- *lack of language knowledge*, *lack of world knowledge*, and *uncontrollable emotional state*- related to the first theme as shown in Table 1.

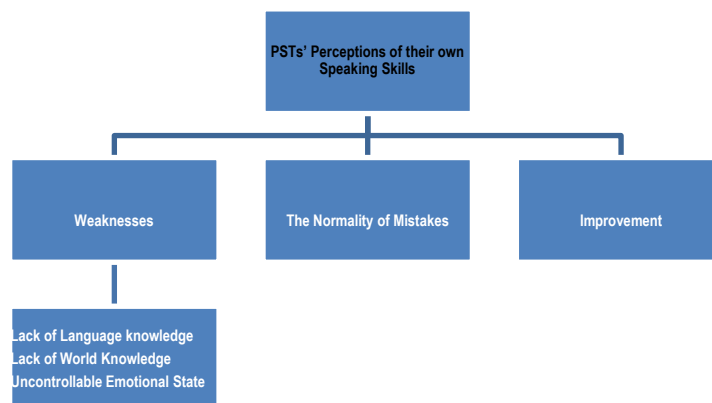


Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes of PSTs' Perceptions of Their Own Speaking Skills

The findings demonstrated that throughout the Speaking Club Project firstly the participants became aware of their deficits or in their terms *weaknesses* pertaining to language knowledge, world knowledge, and their uncontrollable emotional state. To begin with, they found making use of their knowledge of the target language quite challenging in terms of retrieving related vocabulary or chunks from their memories, using appropriate grammatical forms, and using communication strategies as shown in the excerpts stated by different participants (P) below:

"I... face some problems with my speaking such as being not fluent, forgetting words, getting stuck in the middle of the conversation." (P1-Female)

"My big problem is lack of words. I forgot some words because of anxiety, and I used some words again and again. When I could not remember the words, I changed the topic which we talked about. And also I could not use grammar rules exactly." (P2-Female)

"To be honest, I was not good and I could not speak so much and sometimes I could not find the appropriate word to express my thoughts and feelings." (P3-Male)

"I think communication skills are the most important ones to be successful. Until this experience with secondary school students I thought that I had a large stock of vocabulary and grammar rules which would lead me to a successful interaction with the students, however, I was trapped and confused as I was trying to put my utterances in order." (P4-Female)

“I do not know how to and I do not have the patience to paraphrase what I said. I should learn the strategies of clarifying meaning and ways of paraphrasing the things I am trying to express” (P5-Male)

“I tried to simplify what I said but I was not always successful. I need more practice time and experience with students to overcome the problem of simplifying my English. Maybe, oral sentences with a simple structure are much easier to understand than sentences with complex subordinate clause structures. Also I'd better use hand and body gestures to help communicate my message” (P6-Female)

They also underlined that they had insufficient or incorrect knowledge about these areas which forced them to use their mother tongue or to make negative transfer however hard they tried to fight against this will: One of the participants commented on this situation:

“The most frustrating thing was the moment when I could not explain something and used mother tongue and it was not nice. I couldn't set a good model for the students with my insufficient English as I frequently consulted to Turkish. From now on, I will force myself to change this.... and I can” (P3-Male)

They also stated that they lacked necessary world knowledge especially when a mismatch existed between their areas of interest and their students'.

“I think that I am not ready especially when I cannot cope with the students with different interests from me. I realized that I don't know anything about the sports, music and films they like. This prevented me from having a strong bond with them. A big problem for communication...” (P7-Female)

In addition to these, they complained about not being able to control their emotions such as anxiety felt especially when they were unable to use the target language properly and when they made students confused. They provided reasons based on their personal judgments to justify their experiences or problems encountered during the project:

“Anxiety prevents me from doing things that I can or should do for learning or teaching English. For example, I cannot choose the appropriate vocabulary or grammatical patterns as we are discussing a topic with them because the feeling of ” (P8-Male)

“The most frustrating thing was making mistakes when I spoke English and making students confused. I felt an incredible sense of panic. To overcome this feeling, I need to find a way to not to focus on mistakes.” (P1-Female)

“We're coming from a grammar-oriented generation. When I was at their age I was focusing on accuracy and rules. But these students are lucky to have a chance to speak English fluently now. They do not bother rules as I did. On my part, as a prospective teacher, I develop a kind of speaking anxiety while I am speaking with them. I do not know what to do. I sometimes have a sick feeling in my stomach. I should calm down a bit. ” (P9-Male)

In these quotations, the participants reflect on what kind of problems they encountered and how they empowered themselves. Through the end of the club, very few of the

participants emphasized that making mistakes frustrated them a lot since they were soon going to be teachers and would not be students forever. Most of the participants claimed that they had to embrace mistakes since they thought that at least they took a chance to improve their skills by making mistakes and to be a teacher was to be a student forever. Some of them even stated that they sometimes made mistakes deliberately to show their students that they were indispensable and talked about both their mistakes and their students' during the last phases of their club time:

“When my student made a mistake, I did not correct him because I did not want to discourage him. Instead, I tried to use the correct form to make him notice his mistake. At the end of the club, I gave him feedback and we talked about both my and his mistakes and I told him not to get afraid of it because language is learned by making mistakes.” (P10-Female)

Additionally, they asserted that there was always room for improvement and they worked on the ways to improve themselves by collaborating with friends or asking some experienced teachers around them. Doing researches by using their books of other lessons or the Net, preparing speaking practices in front of a mirror or through private speech also gave them an invaluable chance. Here are some quotations:

“I should do practice, practice a lot. I have a long way.” (P7-Female)

“Week by week I observe some improvements in my speaking skill because after Speaking Club I check my spelling and pronunciation and try to correct if I made mistakes in some way.” (P11-Male)

“The more and more efficient you use English, the more fluently and easier you speak and manage students confidently. This project guided me and shaped my ideas by focusing on my weaknesses.” (P12-Female)

3.2. PSTs' Perceptions of Their Teaching of Communication Skills

Since the participants wrote their reflections from some certain and very different angles about teaching English during 10 weeks, many themes emerged in this category as shown below in Table 2.

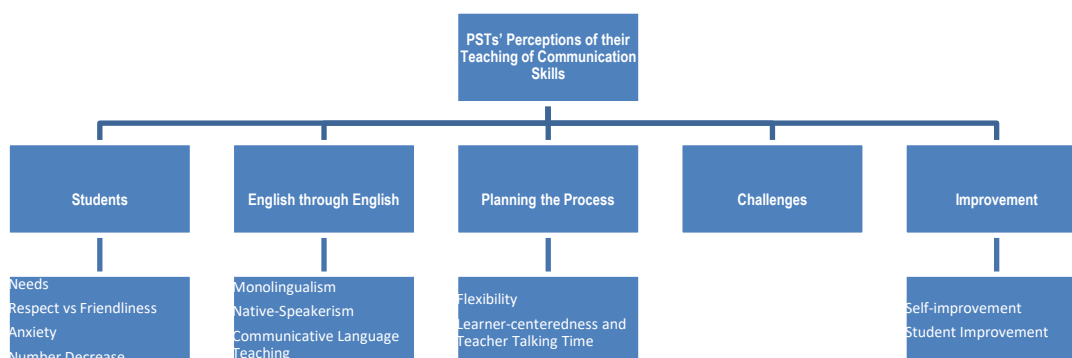


Table 2. Themes and Sub-themes of PSTs' Perceptions of Their Teaching of Speaking Skills

The findings demonstrated that the participants gave importance to their students and tried to analyse their needs in terms of their age, level, interests, and abilities. They

asserted that they observed them closely, compared their lives to theirs since there was not a huge age difference, and did researches on the net to cater for them. In the first weeks, most of the participants mentioned that they had some prejudices against teenagers with the fear that they would not respect them. However, later they stated that this fear disappeared and they tried to be warmer and friendlier to keep the balance and harmony. The excerpts from the first, sixth and eighth weeks below show the transformation:

“I expected them to be a bit rebellious since they are high school students and there would be some management issues.” (P8-Male)

“We did our Speaking Club as if several friends had a talk about daily lives. I hope such projects will continue in the future. I learnt many things, the atmosphere was good and motivating enough to focus on speaking.” (P2-Female)

“I understand the hierarchy between a teacher and a student... However, I believe that a teacher can create a healthier environment based on mutual trust, love, and respect.” (P13-Female)

After they overcame the fear of meeting different students every week, they began to complain about the decrease in numbers of high school students because they had to team teach with their friends spontaneously which caused lots of troubles about communicating and applying their plans. However, some of them enjoyed working with fewer students since the students felt less shy and could interact better, and some of them thought that team teaching was really advantageous in terms of compensating for each other's weaknesses.

Another main theme emerged was using English to teach English. While one of the participants stated by referring to her experience while learning French that *Monolingualism*- using the target language only to conduct a class- frustrates her, many participants stated that real communication can only be taught by using English only in class and that it is the only chance for students to be exposed to the target language in a foreign language context. However, they also added that despite warnings and trying not to allow students, they tried to use Turkish or make them translate many times. When they wrote their beliefs about *Native-speakerism* they stated that English is a lingua franca, they are not native speakers and they do not need to be like them. Therefore; mistakes about pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary are acceptable and the most important thing is to communicate must be taught to the students as early as possible. They asserted that all these facts make communicative language teaching more important than ever since the primary aim of language learning is to communicate. Moreover, today's students have every reason and facility to learn the language as a medium to integrate into the world of technology, to trends in economy and culture.

The following theme about teaching speaking is planning the process. After the participants tried to apply planning to their teaching, they stated that it made the process easier. They expressed that the most important thing was the flexibility of the plan in terms of time management and materials as expressed in the excerpt below:

“No matter how much knowledge we have, we should be prepared and have a B plan before we come to the class because things may not go as we have planned. I tried to be prepared for the unexpected things in the class” (P11-Male)

They also claimed that they became very attentive about making their plans as student-centred as possible by giving more time to students to speak and letting them speak with each other. Depend on peer feedback as well as teacher's, enabling students to direct the process and reducing teacher talking time as much as possible were the other things they did during the planning stage. Though one of the participants argued that Turkey is not ready for this, nearly all of the participants argued that they believed in the young generation of English language learners.

The participants mentioned a lot of challenges they had to face throughout the project. Some of these challenges were not being able to find a common ground, making students speak, the shyness of students, students' incomprehensible sentences, poor time management or planning, their impatience to wait for slow students, awkward silence moments, seeing different students every week and not being able to see the consequences. They underlined that they tried to overcome these problems by time.

On their part, they stated that they improved gradually by practising more and more and became more fluent by seeing their flaws and working on them which in turn made them more confident. They also emphasized that they gave some advice to their students about the ways to improve their English speaking skills such as watching films or series in English, watching YouTube videos or TED talks, using social media, reading books, playing computer or online games, speaking English with friends, and trying to think in English. In short, as mentioned below, the participants indicated that:

“It was a half teaching half studying process... to improve my speaking skills. The students improved their speaking by practising more, but I also made great strides and became more confident and patient.” (P14-Female)

“We had a chance to apply methods and ways we believe useful in teaching. My speaking improved and also my writing through reflections. From the early beginning of the club I developed my abilities so much in terms of teaching.” (P10-Female)

3.3. How PSTs Evaluate Themselves as EFL Teachers

The last research question was how PSTs evaluated themselves as EFL teachers and after thematic analysis it was observed that the participants were either positive or negative about themselves and the system as shown in Table 3.

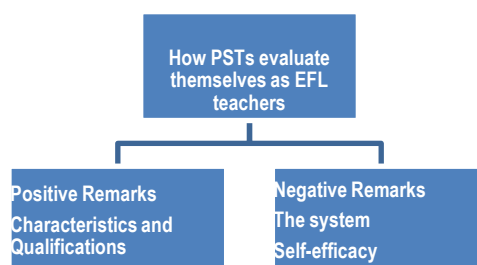


Table 3. Themes and Sub-themes pertaining to How PSTs Evaluate themselves as EFL Teachers.

Most participants claimed that they thought they had the necessary characteristics and qualifications to be an efficient EFL teacher such as having the ability to build rapport with the students, being diligent, patient, enthusiastic, cooperative, flexible, proficient, up-to-date in terms of using technology, giving value to the students and knowing how to manage multilevel groups and make their plans and practices more student-centered and meaning based. However, the rest argued that they were rather hopeless evaluating the system. They wrote that they were not content with the system in the university since they were asked just to memorize theoretical knowledge and were rarely given a chance to really experience teaching or using English in real contexts and were expected to be ready right after the graduation. The excerpt below shows their opinion:

“We will not teach to books. We need students to work with. If I were the man in charge, I would put more practical courses to the syllabi in education faculties.”
(P13-Female)

Some participants stated that this project was like a punch in the face since it showed that the reality is totally different from the theory. They also criticized the Ministry of Education and the society’s perspective towards EFL teaching by stating that some teachers just finish the book in return for money and the society sees all of the teachers as lazy having long holidays and not deserving the money they take. Some of them were also not content with their performance and confessed that they were afraid to be like one of the teachers they criticized because they became aware of the fact that they knew less than they thought. Therefore, they wrote that they were still not ready to be a teacher. What is more, they stated that English language education is underestimated by both the system and themselves as stated in the excerpt below:

“We are improving each day but I believe that improving should not be considered as only a technical term... In Turkey as a future EFL teacher I believe that we were raised as machines to think systematically in given conditions. Especially in English we know the rules but we cannot speak. We are getting high grades in our exams but we never use the target language. We see the language just as a means of ascension in our career. We have to understand the importance of an international language and suit our lessons in accordance with it.” (P15-Female)

3.4. Focus Group Interview

When asked about what they gained through this project the participants stated that it helped them overcome their fears before the internship, change their perceptions towards teaching as a career, build self-confidence, speak fluently, manage small groups and unexpected things and have experience of working with teenagers. Then, they were asked about the resources of knowledge they benefited from and they ranked the real-life experience as the first and later the documents sent before the club meetings and weekly researcher-participant meetings in which experiences and suggestions were shared. The most favourite moments or outcomes were finding a common ground with the students, the glitter in the students’ eyes, being called as ‘teacher’ and feeling the responsibility, meeting new people, meeting theory and practice, balancing friendship and authority, and feeling hopeful again. Lastly, they suggested that the curricula of the education

faculties should be based on more practical courses like Community Services Practice lesson and skills should be taught more than theoretical knowledge and theoretical knowledge should be supported with practice in state schools.

4. DISCUSSION

Today the meaning of language learning has radically changed. In today's globalized and highly interconnected world, regardless of the context- foreign or second- the learners are expected to produce language without being obliged to be Native-like but by finding a way to communicate. Therefore, there has been a shift in the literature over the years, and value has been given to productive skills more, and the concept of ELF has been discussed. However, the practices do not follow on the heels of this change especially in Turkey where 'I can understand, but I cannot speak' syndrome still prevails (Coşkun, 2016:2). Moreover, in this context, there is still a strong attachment to native speaker forms and accuracy and resistance to adopt ELF approach (Deniz, Özkan, and Bayyurt, 2016). In this study, the aim is to fill the gap by organizing a 'Speaking Club' project to give a chance to both high school students and PSTs to improve their communication skills and make PSTs think over the current situation in ELT in Turkey.

The results revealed that the project made PSTs become aware of their weaknesses and then embrace their flaws and search for the ways to improve. Especially in the first weeks, it was observed that the PSTs' self-confidence was seriously shaken by seeing that speaking was a highly anxiety-provoking, extremely demanding and difficult task (Pawlak, Waniek-Klimczak, and Majer 2011; Dincer, 2017). They started to label themselves as successful or unsuccessful since success is generally associated with being able to carry out a conversation fluently (Bosker, Pinget, Quené, Sanders, and de Jong 2012). Becoming aware of the expectations and responsibilities they have to fulfil in the near future and perfectionism seemed to make them hyper-critic and more anxious since the start of their teaching career was approaching (Tüm and Kunt, 2013). After a few weeks, PSTs started to accept their current level and tried to improve themselves by studying English to expand their linguistic knowledge, checking up on trendy topics of teenagers to expand their world knowledge, and reading on foreign language anxiety and how to overcome it. They also started to research intercultural competence, the advantages of being a Non-native speaker EFL teacher and the acceptability of mistakes when the primary aim is to communicate effectively in the target language. This in turn made them more tolerant and flexible and they started to give more importance to local culture and intercultural competence, diversity, and student-centeredness.

After reaching a kind of compromise with themselves by being not too judgemental about their mistakes in speaking and trying to find alternative ways to improve, their attention turned towards the way of teaching this skill. An issue about teaching speaking was using English to teach English and it seemed that PSTs seemed more oriented towards the monolingual approach which was in line with Lee's study (2016) conducted with PSTs favouring monolingual approach and in-service teachers inclined to use bilingual approach. However, it was inconsistent with Macaro's study (2001) with student teachers whose beliefs about the monolingual approaches changed to some extent after they had some teaching practice. The reason why they favoured monolingualism probably stemmed from the fact that it was a speaking club, not an ordinary class, and the aim was to make students be exposed to and use English as much as possible. Even though it was not a formal lesson, they had to research diverse areas of teaching EFL to observe the club from a certain angle and write their reflections accordingly which made them more

student-centred gradually. They also became aware of the fact that they were 'soon-teacher-to-be's. Planning the process every week in depth to overcome challenges encountered and to improve both themselves and students, though being time-consuming and effortful, made them reflect on their teaching in a more constructed way just as in Wong and Chuan's study (2002).

Besides improving PSTs' speaking and teaching speaking skills, one of the main contributions of such a project was heightened self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy promoted by keeping reflective journals which was in line with previous studies (Tavl, 2014 and Lee, 2008). Additionally, the reflectivity naturally aroused by this process helped them decide where to begin to improve themselves, create their own teaching style, form their identities, get familiar with school structure and administration, decide whether they really want to be teachers or where they want to work (Gan, 2014; Merç, 2015; Subedi, 2009). This outcome also supports Horwitz's (1985) study, which demonstrated that most PSTs' beliefs are constructed during teaching in real settings. On the other hand, the same outcome is not in line with Gutiérrez's study (2015) indicating that PSTs' beliefs do not change since they are already formed. However, a small group of participants were rather hopeless and their beliefs did not change much since they thought that they may have been given a chance to do more practice for improving their communication skills with real students in a real setting. Also, they believed that the same ineffective system still went on and would be operating in universities and government schools out there. To annihilate this hopelessness, the transformation should start from scratch which is teacher education in this context since it has the potential to transform beliefs (Borg, 2011). Specifically, as Tüm and Kunt put it, "the student teachers should be given the advice that "it is normal to experience anxiety as an affective state when they communicate in the target language with their peers, with native speakers, or in their future classrooms with their students" (2013:395). PSTs should be supported to reflect on their performances critically and work on their identity development consciously since it is not acquired automatically with experience but with deliberate action and awareness (Kavanoz, 2016).

5. CONCLUSION

This project made it possible for PSTs to work with their prospective students, read extensively on and think over the main issues related to teaching communication skills. PSTs constructed their identity week by week by writing reflective journals and speaking about their experiences with the researcher and other PSTs. The project also helped them continuously seek ways to improve their communication and teaching skills and test their hypotheses pertaining to teaching. It gave a chance to junior PSTs to crawl while they are expected to directly walk or run in a couple of years. This study investigated the effect of taking part in such a project and has several implications for PST education by suggesting the integration of more practical courses pushing PSTs to improve productive skills. It is recommended that there should be more projects or lessons like this to enable PSTs work with future students earlier and more to improve skills mutually and collaboratively.

However, this study is not without weaknesses. The project can be implemented only with volunteers and more PSTs in a more suitable environment and time instead of a crowded and noisy hall in lunch-break to increase the number of student participants. The effects of this project on the other stakeholder- high school students- should also be investigated to see the benefits of it to the communication skills and find ways to eliminate the

negative factors impeding these skills to come out. Furthermore, the scope of the study was confined only to the qualitative data obtained from the reflective journals of 27 PSTs and a focus group interview held with only 10 PSTs of English at a certain department at a state university in Turkey. Further studies might be implemented with more PSTs to analyze the issues in greater depth. It may be implemented in pre-test post-test design with a questionnaire which may be formed with the findings of this study to measure the improvement of speaking skills and perception change. This study may be longitudinal, as well, to see the long-term effects of the project in the practicum year and in the first in-service years of the participants.

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