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Turkish Pre-service EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards the Integration of the EPOSTL into Teacher Training Programs

Cansu Aykut-Kolay[1] İsmail Hakkı Mirici[2]

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Abstract

Self-assessment plays a key role in foreign language teacher education in terms of enhancing pre-service EFL teachers' professional development. The European Portfolio of Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) is a way of sustaining self-assessment practices among pre-service EFL teachers during their practicum period. Although the use of the EPOSTL is quite prevalent in global context, it is not commonly implemented in FLTE programs in the Turkish tertiary context. Due to the fact that the EPOSTL can have a rich potential to foster teaching competences of pre-service EFL teachers, it is important to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' attitudes towards using this portfolio in their undergraduate programs. In this vein, the ultimate aim of this study is to explore pre-service EFL teachers' general point of views regarding the use of the EPOSTL as a self-assessment tool in their undergraduate program. The study adopts a qualitative design based on a thematic analysis. The participants of the study are 31 senior year pre-service EFL teachers. After they used the EPOSTL for a semester and assessed themselves, their opinions and comments were collected through reflective reports and semi-structured interviews. The results of the thematic analyses showed that the EPOSTL was found to be a very promising portfolio, contributing to the participants' professional development to the utmost. Several different pedagogical implications were reached including the spread of EPOSTL-oriented FLTE course design or curriculum plans to make student teachers more immersed in the process of self-reflection or the introduction of an EPOSTL-based practicum in which other educational stakeholders can also be included to maximize pre-service EFL teachers' professional development.

Keywords: Self-assessment, EPOSTL, teacher education

[1] Corresponding, cansu.aykut@kocaeli.edu.tr, Kocaeli University, Kocaeli, Türkiye.

[2] Author, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Türkiye.

Introduction

The field of foreign language education (FLE) is continuously developing and reshaping with respect to increasing globalization all around the world. Globalization necessitates unity and standardization in foreign language teacher education (FLTE) programs to create and sustain mutual criteria of teaching. In this vein, the Council of Europe initiated several projects to ensure this unity around FLTE programs (Newby, 2007). Among those, the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) aims "to prepare student teachers of modern languages for their future profession by providing a framework for reflection during their teacher education course" (Newby, 2012b, p.207). The design of this document in the form of a portfolio enables pre-service language teachers to realize teaching challenges, connect theory and classroom practices, and foster reflection (Burkert, 2009; Newby, 2012b). Language practitioners can design their courses referring to the descriptors in the EPOSTL which can create a close connection between instruction and student achievement (Horng & Loeb, 2010). Increasing the quality of FLTE programs in this way is beneficial for both language teacher educators and student teachers. The EPOSTL can increase the quality of FLTE programs by ensuring systematic and structured reflection process (Newby et al., 2007). In addition to the improvement in reflective skills, the use of portfolios like EPOSTL can be influential in terms of connecting theory to practice in LTE. Dhiorbháin states that student teachers can find their strong and weak sides in teaching while assessing themselves through the EPOSTL and come up with a critical look into their theoretical background (2019).

However, although the EPOSTL has been extensively discussed in the European context, there is still limited empirical evidence focusing on its systematic use in contemporary Turkish FLTE programs. Given the latest curricular revisions, recently increased emphasis on reflective practice, and the growing need for standardized self-assessment frameworks in teacher education, the present study offers timely insights into pre-service EFL teachers' current attitudes toward the integration of the EPOSTL into their undergraduate teacher training programs.

Literature Review

Triggered by the current mobilization and globalization, efforts were made to ensure a standardized and unified FLTE program around Europe (Newby, 2012a) and which gave rise to the introduction of the EPOSTL (Newby, et al., 2011a). Standardization sustains transparency among LTE programs around Europe (Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2012; Grenfell, 2012) since some fundamental key competences that need to be found in general LTE programs are indicated within the scope of the EPOSTL through "can-do" descriptors so that student teachers of foreign languages can reflect on their teaching competences and capabilities (Newby, 2007). When implemented in LTE programs around Europe, EPOSTL has the function of sustaining unity and standardization deriving from its content and aims. Through the EPOSTL, student teachers of languages can revise their theoretical knowledge and competences to teach, monitor their progress, and scrutinize their teaching by comparing the teaching times when they assess themselves. Such a process of self-evaluation can raise their awareness of teaching by familiarizing them with their strengths and weaknesses. They can prepare themselves for their prospective teaching profession, gaining insight regarding several teaching concepts and contexts. Pre-service language teachers can also have the chance to be immersed in discussions with their peers, mentors or supervisors about the didactic content of the EPOSTL (Newby et al., 2007). Besides, the EPOSTL can serve as a bridge between theoretical tenets of foreign language teacher education and authentic teaching in real classrooms because student teachers can have the chance to review teaching experiences based on a theoretical basis provided by the EPOSTL (Çakır & Balçıkanlı, 2012; Mehlmauer-Larcher 2012a, 2012b) Ultimately, the document can support student teachers' professional development via reflective practice which can encourage them to be more autonomous (Hoxha & Tafani, 2015; Newby et al., 2007; Mirici, 2019). The issue of autonomy can be ensured through the use of the EPOSTL as portfolio holders can grasp the way they teach, whether their style is fruitful in terms of

students' learning and comprehension so that they can make adjustments and modifications, when necessary, which a journey towards mastery in teaching (Bagarić, 2011).

Such a multifunctional portfolio is based on a bunch of different parts and sections. In the introduction part, the general aims and objectives of the EPOSTL are highlighted. The personal statement includes various questions about portfolio holders' experiences of previous schooling, a critical reflection of it based on its positive and negative impacts and expectations of prospective teaching with a "rigorous" way of reflection (Mirici & Hergüner, 2015). The self-assessment part is the core part of the EPOSTL in which 195 self-appraisal descriptors that are basic didactic competences of teaching are categorized under seven different domains which are "Context", "Methodology", "Resources", "Lesson Planning", "Conducting a Lesson", "Independent Learning", and "Assessment of Learning". Newby et al. (2007) point out that the descriptors are "core competences which language teachers should strive to attain" (p.5). While each domain has its unique content of the descriptors, some descriptors such as the ones about learner autonomy can be observed in multiple domains since they are related to more than one domain simultaneously (Mirici & Demirbaş, 2013).

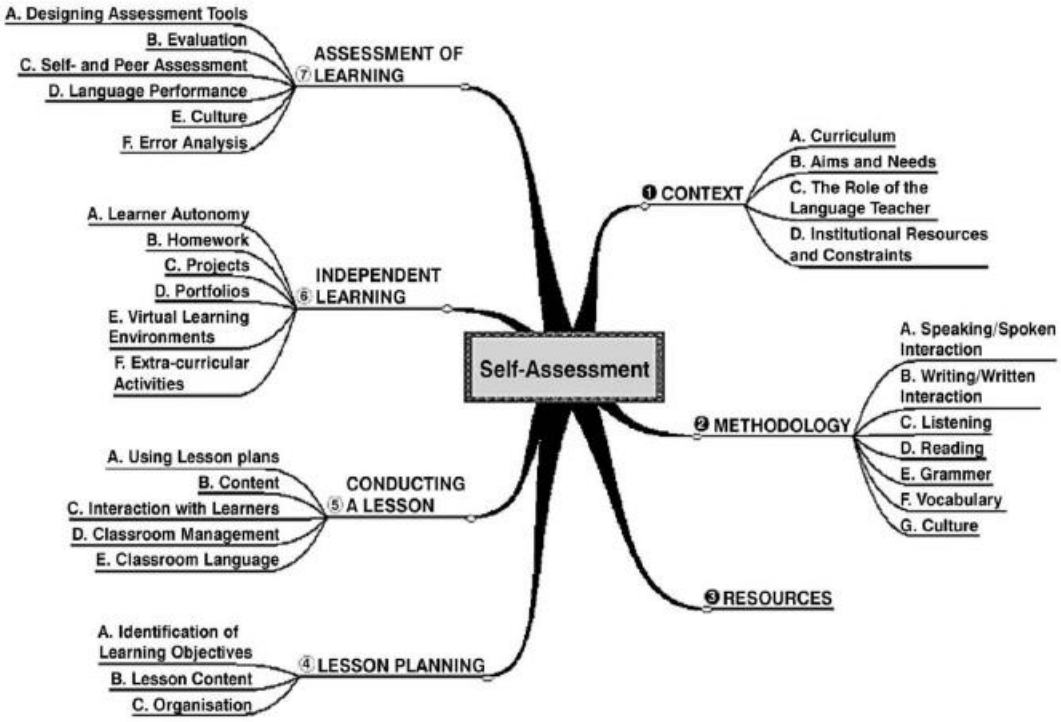


Figure 1. Self-assessment Section of the EPOSTL (Newby et al., 2007)

Each domain includes several other sub domains in which related descriptors are listed in the form of bars to paint (Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008). When the colour gets darker, it means that portfolio holders make remarkable progress in a given area of teaching.

The section of "Context" involves several descriptors regarding the context of the processes of teaching and learning with an emphasis on curriculum, objectives, stakeholders and institutional constraints. "Methodology" includes descriptors on instructional strategies that student teachers employ in their macro-teaching occasions. "Resources" is the section about teaching materials preferred by student teachers. "Lesson Planning" is the part in which descriptors concerning some elements of planning lessons such as objectives of learning or task preference are found. Following this, "Conducting a Lesson" is based on descriptors regarding the implementation of prepared lesson plans with respect to students' individual differences and needs. "Independent Learning" focuses on the concept of *learner autonomy* through descriptors about portfolio assessment, project learning and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills. The last domain of the "Self-assessment" section is

"Assessment of Learning" which concentrates on the time, style and outcomes of the process of assessment.

Dossier is the next section through which student teachers of languages can keep track of their language teaching evidence through notes of observation, reflection and transcripts of lectures (Newby et al., 2007). Glossary of Terms, index and user's guide are among the last sections of the EPOSTL which are included for a more user-friendly experience.

Regarding the implementation of the EPOSTL into FLTE programs, there have been several studies in the existing body of literature. For example, Orlova (2011) suggests a six-step implementation of it into methodology courses in English Language. (p.28). The first step is introducing the document through the part "Personal Statement" and discussing it. Then, a particular section is selected in line with the context of the methodology course. Following this, student teachers are given the fundamental theoretical background regarding that specific section based on descriptors. Subsequently, student teachers design their own lesson plans and teaching activities for their peer-teachings with regard to the specific section that they choose. Appropriate teaching materials selection for peer teaching is also done at this phase. Then, the actual peer teaching is performed and video-recorded which is followed by a post observation session in which student teachers watch their own teaching performance and share their opinions with their peers about their strengths and weaknesses. In the last step, an expert is included in the process and watches the video to make a critical reflection and provide student teachers with feedback. Therefore, the EPOSTL can be employed during student teachers' feedback sessions with mentors or supervisors (Çakır & Balçıkanlı, 2012; Ingvarsdóttir, 2011; Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2012a). Concerning recent studies on the EPOSTL, there have been a few studies based on experimental design (Çakır & Balçıkanlı, 2012; Mehlmauer–Larcher, 2011; Straková, 2010). In Mehlmauer–Larcher's study (2011), the EPOSTL was implemented as a component in methodology lectures concurrently with their teaching experiences in practicum. After student teachers got to know the descriptors, they engaged in discussions through which they shared opinions regarding different foreign language teaching competences. The results showed that the document was found to be quite useful and functional by acting as a structured framework of teaching competences. In a similar manner, Mehlmauer-Larcher (2009) investigated the inclusion of the EPOSTL into methodology courses and found out that the document fostered the concept of autonomy, self-reflective capabilities and self-assessment skills by being a comprehensive framework of teaching competences. It was also concluded that the EPOSTL was functional in terms of planning purposes for prospective classes as the feedback provided by the document could have an immediate influence on the process of lesson and task planning (Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2009). Likewise, Straková (2010) pointed out that the EPOSTL was very useful in terms of supporting competences of teaching and reflection skills, when integrated into daily practices of teaching in a longer period of time as the participants stated that their knowledge of self-reflection was not satisfactory as they were only based on some rubrics and checklists which were very superficial when compared to the deep and detailed content of the EPOSTL (Straková, 2010).Another study regarding the implementation of the EPOSTL was conducted by Fenner (2011) investigated the practicality of the EPOSTL in seminars, and tertiary level courses with the inclusion of supervisors and mentors. Especially in seminars, the EPOSTL was influential in terms of discussing lesson planning and task design in a critical way. The reflection provided by supervisors and mentors in the EPOSTL-oriented feedback sessions helped student teachers close the gap between their theoretical background and practical teaching performance. Such positive viewpoints were also observed in Jones's study (2011) in which student teachers' attitudes towards the content of the EPOSTL were examined. He concluded that the EPOSTL served as a structured and organized to plan, carry out, and assess teaching tasks, which could also be used as a tool for training due to its being a didactic list for teaching competences (Jones, 2011; Shauber (2015). The inclusion of the EPOSTL with mentors into FLTE methodology courses was also studied by Nihlén (2011) Okumuş and Akalın (2015) and it was revealed by most of the participants that the EPOSTL raised their awareness with the help of its reflective nature. Similarly, Bagarić (2011) observed that the EPOSTL was functional in terms enhancing the quality of FLTE programs by providing a comprehensive tool of self-assessment. Çakır and Balçıkanlı (2012) also had a consensus on the use of the EPOSTL in FLTE programs, but they insisted that the document should be incorporated at the right time, not too early or late. Velikova (2013) also examined the use of the EPOSTL in the scope of a methodological course. When implemented within the scope of

methodological ELT courses, the EPOSTL was found to be a practical portfolio to boost professional development, reflection skills, and self-awareness of pre-service language teachers. Furthermore, a further function of the EPOSTL was reported by Mirici and Hergüner (2015). They pointed out that the EPOSTL is influential in terms of promoting pre-service language teachers' metacognitive awareness as the document provided them with autonomy and the chance to observe their own teaching progress during their practicum, which is also effective with respect to shaping a foreign language teacher identity. When their awareness of teaching increases, pre-service language teachers can have better insights into their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, Arikan and Zorba (2016) found out that pre-service language teachers have difficulty in deciding on course materials about target-culture settings especially in terms of concepts such as stereotypes and otherness. When pre-service language teachers are aware of their strengths and weaknesses in teaching, they can be more self-efficient as suggested by Bergil and Sarıçoban (2017) in the study in which they found out the EPOSTL as a reflection tool could have a very high potential to foster self-efficacy beliefs of student teachers. Generally, it was found out that the EPOSTL was regarded as a useful, functional and effective self-evaluation portfolio as it enables pre-service language teachers to monitor their teaching progress and observe their competences, which helps them address the gap between their theoretical background and performance of teaching (Seitova, 2018).

There have been several studies about language practitioners' or students teachers' perceptions towards the EPOSTL on a global scale (Burkert & Schienhorst, 2008; Çakır & Balçıkanlı, 2012; Ingvarsdóttir, 2011; Newby, 2012b ; Orlova, 2011) or some studies based on experimental design with regard to the integration of the EPOSTL into undergraduate language education programs (Çakır & Balçıkanlı, 2012; Mehlmauer–Larcher, 2011; Straková, 2010; Velikova, 2013). Regarding the local context of Turkey, there are not many studies focusing on the EPOSTL both in experimentally (Çakır & Balçıkanlı, 2012; Mirici, 2019; Mirici & Hergüner, 2015; Okumuş & Akalın, 2015; Seitova, 2018; Arıkan & Arikan, 2016; Bergil & Sarıçoban (2017). and descriptively (Önal & Alagözlü, 2016; Arikan, 2016). In this sense, the current study aims to contribute to the existing body of literature regarding Turkish pre-service EFL teachers' viewpoints regarding the implementation of the EPOSTL into their undergraduate program. Based on this, the following research questions have been formulated:

1- In what ways do pre-service Turkish EFL teachers support the integration of the EPOSTL into undergraduate LTE programs?
2- To what extent do pre-service Turkish EFL teachers find the EPOSTL useful in terms of supporting their professional development?
3- To what extent do pre-service Turkish EFL teachers find the EPOSTL useful in terms of awareness-raising of their teaching?
4- In what ways do pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' use the EPOSTL for self-reflection purposes?

Method

Settings and Participants

The participants of the current study are 31 (16 females and 15 males) fourth grade pre-service EFL teachers, aged between 22 and 24 and all of whom were about to start their practicum. The practicum period lasts two-semesters which equals to a total of 24 weeks. Throughout each semester, they attend their assigned schools for six hours per week. In addition, they are required to conduct a minimum of two macro-teaching sessions per term, which are formally observed by both school mentors and university supervisors. Following each macro-teaching session, structured feedback is provided by these observers, which contributes to the pre-service teachers' professional development and the formation of their teaching philosophies and teacher identities. The participants were reached through convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007) and they share the same educational background. The participants had no prior encounter with the EPOSTL implying that they were not familiar with the document at all.

Data Collection

This study is based on a qualitative research design. The data of the study was collected through the EPOSTL (in the form of a Likert scale), reflective reports and a set of semi-structured interview questions created in line with three experts' opinions who got their PhD degrees in the field of ELT. Data collection period lasted for a semester in which participants used the EPOSTL as a self-assessment instrument in their undergraduate education on a monthly basis. After each EPOSTL use, they wrote reflective papers stating their general experience and attitude towards assessing themselves through the EPOSTL and eight of them attended semi-structured interviews in which they share deeper and detailed experiences regarding the process.

Data Analysis

As for the data analysis procedure, a thematic analysis was conducted since it is an accessible, functional and practical technique in the scope of qualitative data analysis procedures analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are some well-known coding procedures in the existing body of literature including Barkhuizen et al.'s (2014) coding framework and Dörnyei's (2007) framework. For the current study, Barkhuizen et al.'s (2014) coding framework consisting of three main stages (i.e., sustained engagement with the data through repeated reading, the systematic coding and categorization of data segments, and the identification of overarching thematic labels) was followed. In a similar vein, Dörnyei (2007) outlines a two-phase coding process consisting of first- and second-level coding (pp. 251–252), in which salient and recurring patterns are initially identified through close reading of transcribed data, followed by repeated reviews that employ keyword searches to capture fewer salient patterns. This latter stage is closely related to the initial phase of Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik's (2014) coding approach.

In order to observe participants' viewpoints regarding the implementation of the EPOSTL in their FLTE program, they were given the EPOSTL and requested to assess themselves for a semester during their practicum period. After they used the EPOSTL for self-assessment of their teaching competences for a semester, their views were collected through monthly reflective reports and a final semi-structured interview process.

Validity and Reliability

The reliability and the validity of the EPOSTL was studied and proved by the project team in the Centre for Modern Languages while the document was being constructed. Two piloting processes took place and necessary modifications and adaptations were made to the descriptors to enhance their transparency and intelligibility (Newby, 2011a) Moreover, the Cronbach Alpha statistics of the EPOSTL implementations in the current study are 0.917, 0.951, and 0.957 for each implementation which are all acceptable ratios (George & Mallery, 2003). As for the reflective reports and semi-structured interview questions, a procedure of the interrater reliability (Loewen & Philp, 2012) was carried out. An external coder re-coded the data obtained from the transcriptions of semi-structured interviews and reflective reports. Ultimately, the ratios of interrater reliability were found to be 95% for reflective reports and 92% for semi-structured interviews which are ideal according to Mackey and Gass (2012) as they are above 90%.

Findings

Findings From Reflective Reports

93 reflective reports were submitted by the participants at the end of the study. The total word count was 6733 and the number of codes was 129. Out of 129 codes, three key themes (i.e., "Awareness-raising", "Professional Development" and "Self-assessment - A general reflection on current competences") emerged. Six sub-themes were also obtained. The distribution of the themes, and sub-themes emerged in the reflective reports are presented in the following illustration.

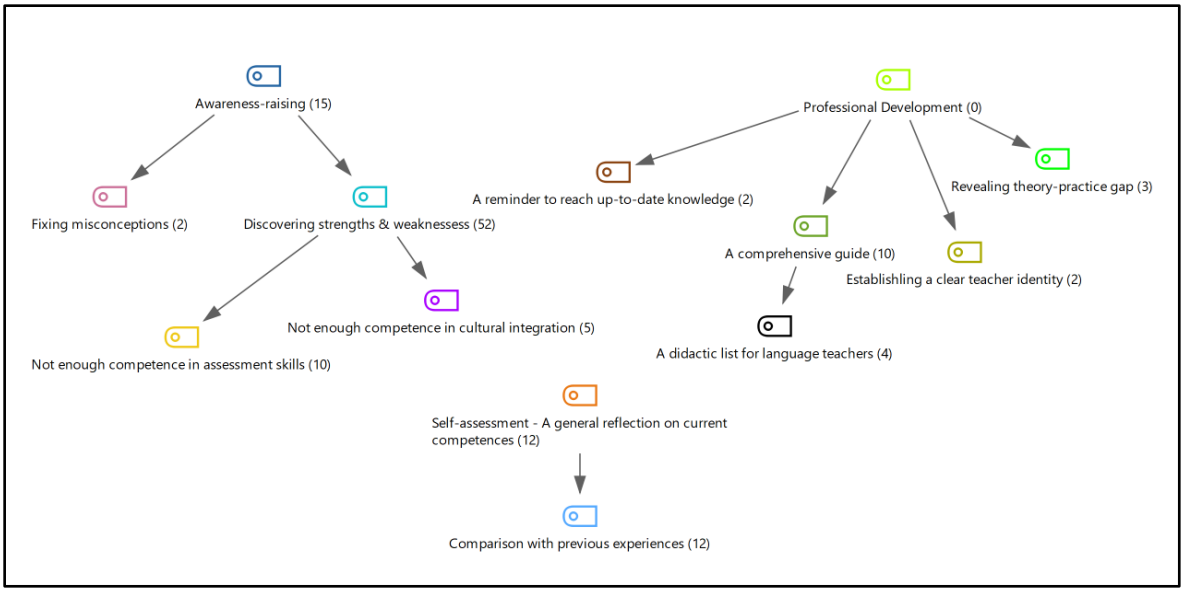


Figure 2.Themes and Sub-themes of Reflective Reports

In Figure 1, it is observable that "Awareness-raising" is remarkable as the most frequently coded key theme. The theme is basically about participants' processes of self-awareness through the EPOSTL. In addition, they specifically mentioned their strengths and weaknesses. As a distinct form of self-awareness, they also stated that they fixed some misconceptions about their competences or the way they teach. The following excerpt is a comment from one of the participants about her own general awareness-raising when she used the EPOSTL.

Excerpt 1

"This implementation that we did for a semester was very helpful and helped us gain awareness about the criteria that we need to assess as pre-service EFL teachers. This portfolio enabled me to comprehend the teaching qualities that I should have, and areas of improvement."

The participant touched upon her own general awareness-raising with respect to classroom teaching. Regarding teaching criteria, the participants also mentioned some specific aspects of teaching as their strengths or weaknesses. Especially "Cultural Integration" and "Assessment" were among the frequently mentioned areas as for areas of improvement.

"Fixing misconceptions" is another sub-theme in this category. Some participants stated that they modified some of their self-beliefs about their teaching competences. They stated that they had some negative prejudgments about their teaching competences, but they realized that they were not too bad at them when they assessed themselves through the EPOSTL.

"Professional Development" emerged as another key theme hosting four sub-themes. Sub-themes focus on various aspects that are conducive to participants' professional development. The most frequently mentioned one is "A comprehensive guide" through which the participants stated that the EPOSTL was conducive to their professional development as the EPOSTL was regarded as a document highlighting practical parts of teaching and required teaching criteria.

Excerpt 2

"The EPOSTL provided me with an insight into what aspects of teaching English as a foreign language are deemed important"

The participant pointed out that the EPOSTL allowed her to realize the required teaching criteria holistically just like a handbook of FLTE. The participants generally stated that self-assessing their

competences with regard to different domains of the EPOSTL enabled them to recall and review essentials of FLTE and supported their theoretical background.

"Revealing theory-practice gap" is another remarkable sub-theme of "Professional Development". Through the EPOSTL, some participants realized their knowledge in the theoretical part, but they had difficulty in assessing themselves in terms of the implementation of those in actual classes.

Excerpt 3

"…I realized that I am aware of the categories and sub-categories in the self-assessment part, but in practice, I have difficulty in applying these in the class even though I remember all of them. Through the EPOSTL, I realized this."

As can be seen, the participant highlighted that he was aware of the teaching aspects that he encountered in the descriptors but recognized that he had difficulty in implementing these in the class.

The third and last key theme deduced from the reflective reports is "Self-assessment- A general reflection on current competences". In the scope of this theme, the participants indicated their general attitudes towards general self-assessment processes.

Excerpt 4

"…This portfolio helped me see the clear difference between the first time and last time that I self-assessed myself."

In Excerpt 4, it can be observed that the participant compared her first self-assessment and the last one and stated the considerable improvement in her competences of teaching grammar.

Findings From Semi-Structured InterviewsFor semi-structured interviews, a key theme for each question was reached and 121 segments were coded in total under different themes and sub-themes. The prevalent themes were illustrated in line with each question separately in the following figure.

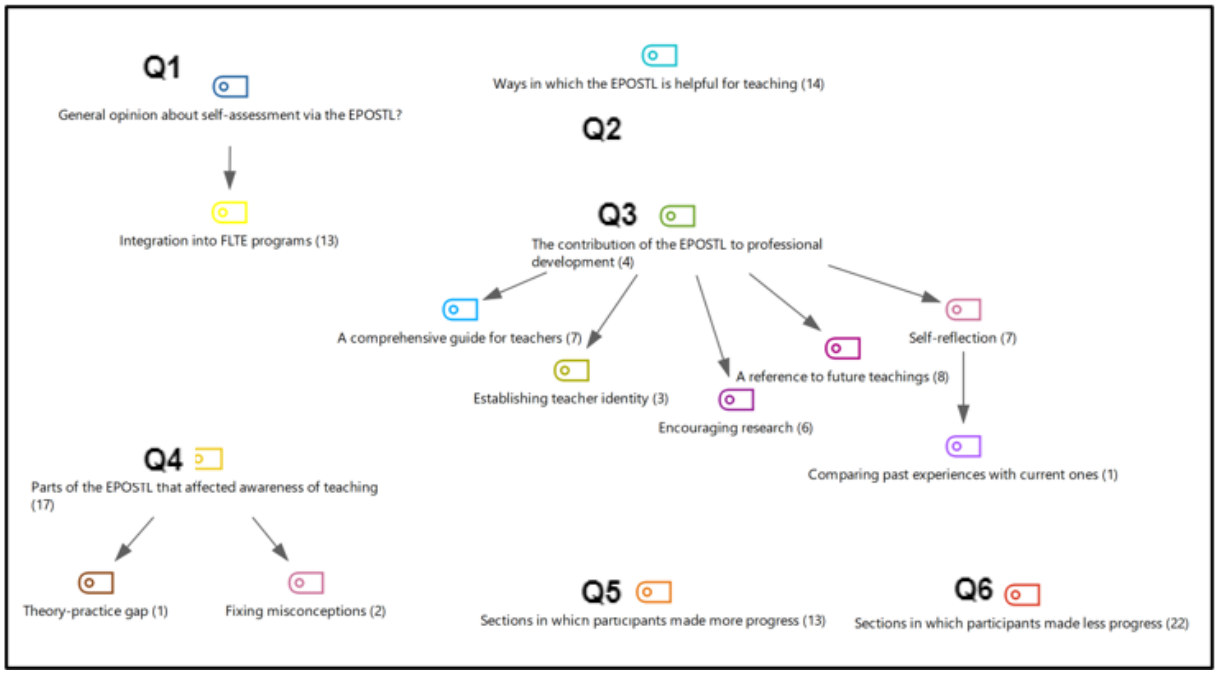


Figure 3. Themes and Sub-themes of Semi-structured Interviews

As can be observed, six main themes for six interview questions are detectable together with several sub-themes. The first semi-structured interview question sought for the participants' general point of

view towards the process of self-assessment via the EPOSTL. All eight participants attending the interviews concluded that they harbour positive feelings towards the use of the EPOSTL as a self-assessment.

Excerpt 5

"My experience is also positive… This portfolio fosters reflective practice for us, through which we find a chance to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses. By this way, we can see what worked or what did not in our teaching and can make some solutions for the problems that we encounter. Accordingly, we can learn ways or draw new lessons from our past experiences."

It can be deduced from Excerpt 5 that the participant's general opinion concerning her experience with the EPOSTL is favourable and promising, which is a prevalent occasion observable in all other participants' responses. Therefore, "Integration into FLE programs" was highlighted remarkably as the sub theme. They stated that the EPOSTL should be a part of practicum period, or it can be integrated into methodological courses earlier so that they can be prepared to assess themselves when they start their practicum. This integration can be done through its use as a resource in seminars or courses section by section or a self-assessment document can be implemented in peer teachings before practicum period.

As for the second interview question, a number of different sub-themes including enhancement of teacher self-efficacy, maintenance of a systematic and structured framework of self-assessment, recognition of strengths and weaknesses and discovery of the complexities of FLT are observable. The participants touched upon several aspects of the contribution of the EPOSTL to teaching, which is why no prevalent sub-theme were reached due to variety.

The third question was about the benefits of the EPOSTL on participants' professional development (PD). Five sub-themes were attained under this main theme that are shown in the following figure.

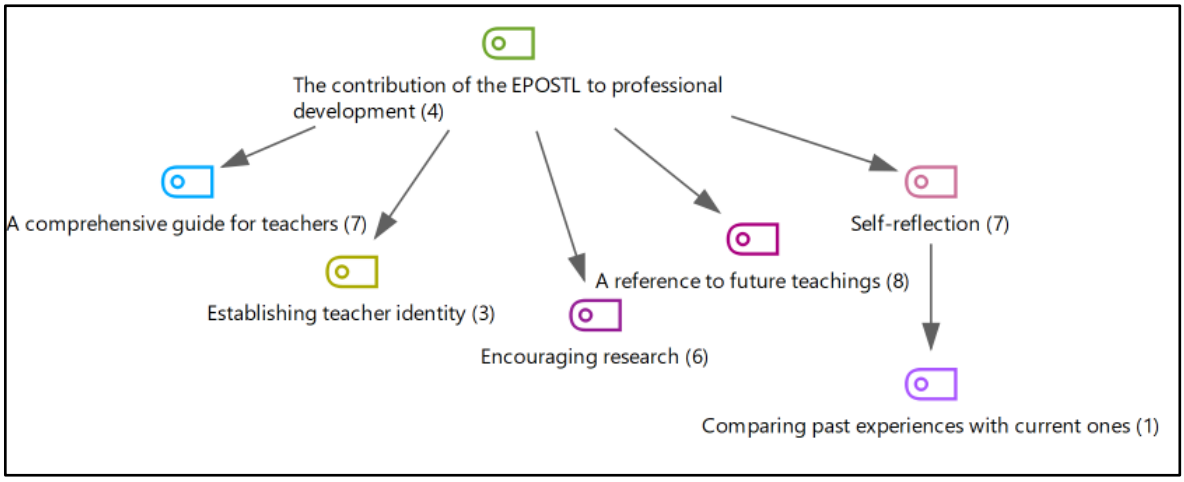


Figure 4. The Sub Themes of the Main Theme "Professional Development"

"A reference for future teachings" is regarded as salient since it was mentioned by almost all participants. They pointed out that the EPOSTL can function as a source of inspiration to design novel and creative FLT activities or adapt different instructional methodologies for prospective teaching occasions.

Excerpt 6

"This portfolio will be so useful to us for us to be a reference in our future teaching profession."

In Excerpt 6, the participant stated that she can benefit from the content of the sections of the EPOSTL in her prospective teaching years, which emphasizes its use as a reference for future teachings.

The participants' general awareness-raising processes through their recognition of strengths and weaknesses was the focus of the fourth interview question. Especially, they stated that they realized some misjudgements regarding their teaching performances which they noticed while using the EPOSTL.

Excerpt 7

"I was thinking that I was good at teaching writing skills or assessment of writing, but when I was evaluating myself, I realized that I did not know much."

It can be understood that the participant had some misconceptions about her own teaching which were realized through the EPOSTL.

The fifth and sixth questions were about the sections of the EPOSTL in which participants made more and less progress. Participants pointed out several aspects of teaching including managing class, planning and conducting lessons, and assessing writing as the ones in which they made more progress. As for the ones in which they made less progress, designing materials, assessment, integrating cultural content, applying curriculum, and assigning homework can be counted.

Discussion

In the scope of the current study, participants' general viewpoints concerning their process of self-assessment via the EPOSTL was investigated. After they used the document for a semester and assessed themselves for three months, they stated their attitudes towards this process by writing reflective reports and attending semi-structured interviews. In both processes of data collection (e.g., reflective reports and semi-structured interviews), overlapping themes emerged. Mehlmauer-Larcher (2009) indicated that the EPOSTL is a functional document that enables student teachers to have autonomy in their teaching, assessing themselves, and getting detailed feedback about their competence to increase awareness. Similarly, such findings were reached within the context of the current study since the participants stated that the EPOSTL served as "A reference to future teachings". Furthermore, Fenner (2011) asserted that the EPOSTL allowed student teachers to critically reflect on their future teaching plannings, which is among the findings of the current study as the participants also stated that they could use the EPOSTL as a reference to their future teachings. In addition, the EPOSTL was regarded as a "focused and well-structured" document (Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2009, p.201) which is quite close to the content of the sub-theme "A comprehensive guide" observed in the findings of the current study. The participants stated that they could have the chance to review the necessary teaching competences to support their professional development through this function. Besides, the integration of the EPOSTL into FLTE programs was frequently mentioned by all participants in the current study. This finding is in line with the results of the study conducted by Jones (2011) in which it was claimed that the EPOSTL can be implemented for training purposes in terms of required foreign teaching functioning as a didactic list in FLTE programs. Among the findings of the current study, the EPOSTL was found to be functional as being a structured and organized framework of self-assessment procedure. Similar findings were also obtained by Straková (2009), Urbaniak (2010), Ingvarsdottir (2011) since they asserted that the document revealed desired teaching requirements in a traceable way through a common framework of self-assessment and can be used as a didactic list of teaching criteria, which were all among the comments of the participants as the results of the current study. Melmauer-Larcher (2011) and Shauber (2015) also emphasized the systematicity and organization of the document in terms of evaluation of teaching competences. In a similar manner, the participants of the current study stated that they could systematically evaluate their teaching abilities by referring to different sections of the EPOSTL which enabled them to see their overall improvement.

Apart from its being an organized, comprehensive and structured framework of self-assessment, the EPOSTL was also regarded as an efficient tool to increase awareness in the scope of the current study which is a similar finding with the results of several other studies (Çakır & Balçıkanlı, 2012; Fenner, 2011; Hoxha & Tafani, 2015; Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2012a, 2012b; Mirici & Hergüner, 2015); Orlova, 2011; Velikova, 2013). Arikan and Zorba (2016). For instance, "cultural integration" was found to be among teaching weaknesses by the participants of the current study which is also a similar result with the study conducted by Arikan and Zorba (2016), coded under the sub-theme of "Discovering strengths & weaknesses". Among strengths, the participants touched upon the fact that using the EPOSTL had a positive influence on the increase of their teaching self-efficacy beliefs.

Supporting professional development was also another remarkable function of the EPOSTL detected in the current study, which is also attained by Velikova (2013) in the study in which she concluded that

pre-service EFL teachers assumed the EPOSTL as a tool to develop their professional through self-reflection and awareness-raising. Orlova (2011) and Okumuş and Akalın (2015) also highlighted similar results stating that self-reflection through the EPOSTL helped pre-service EFL teachers gain a critical insight regarding their teaching capabilities as their self-reflective skills were boosted. This is also parallel with the findings of the current study as the participants pointed out that they compared their previous teachings by revising their former EPOSTL implementations and reviewing their mistakes, which enabled them to have a critical point of view towards their teaching. The supporting of professional development was also highlighted by Correspondingly, Seitova (2018) also stated pre-service EFL teachers see the EPOSTL as a useful document for their continuous professional development. Similarly, Mirici (2019) concluded that the integration of self-assessment through the EPOSTL into FLTE programs had a paramount importance on pre-service EFL teachers' professional development, which are confirmatory results with respect to the findings of the current study.

In terms of the inclusion of the EPOSTL into FLTE programs, all participants were in favor of such an inclusion. This was also investigated by several scholars (Bagarić, 2011; Balçıkanlı, 2009; Bergil & Sarıçoban, 2017; Çakır & Balçıkanlı, 2012; Ingvarsdóttir, 2011; Nihlén, 2011; Orlova 2011; Straková, 2010; Velikova, 2013). Bergil and Sarıçoban stated that such an integration can create a common basis for the discussion of necessary foreign language teaching competences. Likewise, the participants of the current study suggested that they can compare their teachings and share their opinions about them by referring to the sections of the EPOSTL in scope of courses or seminars as a professional development activity. In the current study, with regard to the integration of the EPOSTL, several different suggestions were made such as the inclusion of the mentors into the process. Balçıkanlı (2009) and Nihlén (2011) supported the inclusion of mentors into this process as it was claimed that pre-service EFL teachers' autonomy could be boosted more in this way when mentors became aware of the section of the EPOSTL through which student teachers assessed themselves as they can provide them with more autonomy and flexibility. This results is also in line with the findings of the current study as the participants who were in favour of the inclusion of mentors into the EPOSTL implementation process stated that their autonomy could be restored in this way because sometimes they could be hindered by their mentors in terms of activity design and execution but if the mentors had the chance to be included in the process too, this problem can be solved as they stated.

Lastly, the participants of the current study emphasized the function of the EPOSTL as a tool to close the gap between their theoretical knowledge base and practical teaching performances. Such a finding was also reached in the study conducted by Seitova (2018) as she stated that pre-service EFL teachers realized their theoretical knowledge was not always enough to sustain a successful teaching in real classes especially when challenges were encountered. Likewise, Mehlmauer-Larcher (2012a, 2012b) touched upon this issue and concluded that the descriptors in the EPOSTL acted as a "bridge" between participants theoretical knowledge base and actual classroom practices. Parallelly, Shauber (2015) found out that the EPOSTL was very promising in terms of connecting theoretical parts of teaching with practical aspects All of these findings are in line with the results of the current study since participants pointed out that they had the chance to monitor their theoretical background by using the EPOSTL and the opportunity to assess their current practical teaching performance by reviewing their previous self-assessments through the EPOSTL.

Conclusion

The ultimate purpose of this study was to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' general point of views regarding their use of the EPOSTL as a self-assessment tool in the FLTE program. The data collected through reflective reports and semi-structured interviews suggested that the EPOSTL was regarded as a very effective tool for self-assessment and awareness-raising. In their reflective reports, the participants stated that the EPOSTL was influential in terms of detecting their strengths and weaknesses, recognizing the gap between their theoretical background and practical teaching, boosting their professional development, and supporting their self-assessment practices. Particularly, they mentioned that the EPOSTL was effective to make them notice some misjudgements regarding their foreign language teaching abilities, especially with regard to "Assessment" and "Cultural integration". Moreover,

"Professional Development" emerged as a major and prevalent theme having different sub themes. The participants also commented on their general self-reflection experience with a by focusing on a special comparison between their previous teaching competences with the current ones. With regard to the semi structured interviews, the participants expressed that the document was very useful and practical, and its integration into FLTE programs was highly recommended by the participants as the EPOSTL was regarded as a rich comprehensive guide for pre-service EFL teachers. By acting as a didactic guidebook, it helped them the participants review their theoretical knowledge and do research especially when they encountered an unfamiliar term in descriptors which contributed to their professional development as well.

Implications and Suggestions

Similar studies comparing the views of pre-service EFL teachers from different regions of Türkiye can be conducted to enhance the generalizability of the results. Such comparative studies can also give different insights regarding the current affairs of different FLTE programs in Türkiye and be used as a refence for curriculum or course design in the field of FLTE. The same area of research can also be studied in the scope of different FLTE programs other than English as the use of the EPOSTL is not limited to English. In this way, some inter-language comparisons can be drawn, which can be effective while tracing language teachers' development holistically. Based on this, different EPOSTL-oriented teacher education frameworks can be planned with the integration of several stakeholders including supervisors and mentors. EPOSTL-oriented methodology courses can be designed through which student teachers can be immersed in discussions about several sections of the EPOSTL after each micro-teaching session. Such a reflective-practice oriented practicum period can highly boost student teachers' autonomy, self-assessment skills, and professional development. Besides, the inclusion of the EPOSTL into FLTE programs can also be advantageous for supervisors and mentors as they can have the chance to assess themselves with respect to their genuine identities as teacher educators. They can decide to what extent they provide support to their student teachers to achieve the goal of each descriptor of the EPOSTL. The functionality of such implementations can be investigated within the scope of further studies.

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