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HOW PARTICIPATORY IS LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION?: TRAINEES' PERSPECTIVES

Research Article

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Abstract

Within the complex “coral gardens” (Breen, 2001) of human learning and teacher education, participatory and mediational tools such as social relations, concepts and cultural artifacts or problem-posing activities, deserve more time and effort as they are scarcely investigated. This exploratory study with both cognitive-interactionist and sociocultural perspectives aims at shedding light on the ELT trainees’ views about the use of such tools through project work during their pre-service teacher training courses at a Turkish university under a mixed-methods research design. A thick description of the trainees’ interpretations of their engagement with project work displayed that participants supported the use of such tools as a teaching strategy that values themes and contents of their interest and choice regarding learning and teaching language skills and research. They showed willingness to undergo an authentic and meaningful learning/teaching experience by expressing themselves through sustained participation in such project-based activities though they noted that there is still a need for the reconsideration of the whole curriculum in line with a more transformative approach.

Keywords: Participatory tools, project work, language teacher education, ELT trainees

1. Introduction

With the conceptual shift from behaviourist and cognitive accounts of learning to social theories emphasising the effect of the learning environment on the individual, learning as a social phenomenon has been espoused from different perspectives. The Vygotskian sociocultural theory, which is ontologically constructivist and cognitive, focuses on scaffolding, mediation and the zone of proximal development, and interaction as a means for transmitting pre-existing knowledge in a model of “input, intake and output” from typically more expert to less expert one (Lantolf, 2000; Firth & Wagner, 2007). Other socialisation theories, which interpret knowledge as situated in a particular social setting through participation, strongly adopt a dialogic ontology which sees learning not as the mediated transmission of pre-existing knowledge but as embodied understanding of co-constructed, located and generated knowledge and part of our whole identity more than cognitive process (Wenger, 1998; Duff, 2007). The recognition of a dynamic, context-dependent and open nature of the learning process turned the quest for ‘universals’ into the endeavour to capture the thick descriptions of complex, cultural and ecological nature of learning like a multi-faceted ‘diamond’ - my metaphor- or Breen’s (2001) ‘coral gardens’. Instead of separating acquisition and use or cognitive and sociocultural positions, what one might hope for is to see the contrasting views as opportunities to stimulate rather than befuddle the field as Zeungler and Miller (2006) propose.

Parallel to the emergence of different social theories, second or foreign language education has undergone a shift to participatory models and principles of learner-centred teaching, learner

autonomy, the negotiated syllabus, collaborative learning, and task-based learning since the mid-seventies (Zakari, 2007). Likewise, project-based learning (PBL) has come along in second language education (SLE) as a way to reflect the principles of student-centred teaching for two decades (Hedge, 1993).

Contrary to a number of studies in general education about project-based learning or project work (PBL- PW) highlighted as an important teaching-learning and assessment tool to develop 21st century skills and competencies, there are a few research studies with mixed findings and discrepancies regarding the use of PW in second language education (Beckett, 1999 and Eyring, 1989 cited in Beckett, 2002; Campbell, 2012). Dooley and Masats (2010) integrated PBL into an EFL training unit and suggested that PBL would merit further research and implementation in EFL training programmes as student teachers are made fully aware of its benefits and are guided properly so that they could have clear expectations of the approach, effective training and support, and good models (and their own modelling through experience). PBL was mostly found to be a useful language teaching strategy to improve communicative and interpersonal skills of learners of English in different EFL contexts, while some problems related to the group dynamics and assessment criteria were pointed for further research (Lam, 2011; Abdul Khalek & Lee, 2012; Kettanun, 2015; Zhang, 2015; Yiyang, 2015; Habók, & Nagy, 2016; Vaca-Torres & Gómez-Rodríguez, 2017; Sirisrimangkorn, 2018; Abu Bakar, et al., 2019; Baghoussi & El Ouchdi, 2019). In Turkish EFL context, there are some perception studies (Subaşı-Dinçman, 2002; Gökçen, 2005; Kemaloğlu, 2006; Akkaş-Keleş, 2007), two of which focused on administrators' and teachers' assessments and, the other two of which researched on both teachers' and students' perceptions. The results of the rest of recent studies on student perceptions about PBL and its effect on their academic success and language learning (Çırak, 2006; Baş & Beyhan, 2010; Baş, 2011; Mutlu-Köroğlu, 2011; Yaman, 2014; Aşar, 2017; Duman & Kuuk-Yavuz, 2018) generally showed positive results in favour of PBL similar to the findings of the aforementioned studies.

In addition to a need for further research regarding the evaluations of students as project participators at both global and local level in EFL/ESL contexts, there is a scarcity of studies on English language teacher (ELT) trainees' experience in PW as a complementary approach to pre-service teacher education courses. Moreover, the view of language learning in the previous studies is based on communicative interaction to enhance mere comprehensible input and output production. The view of language learning and teaching espoused in this exploratory study does recognise elements of communicative approach, but it goes beyond them by shedding light on the ELT trainees' perceptions of project work at a Turkish university from a *sociocultural perspective*.

This article located within a broad interpretive and participatory framework draws on project work as a means of fostering professional development of pre-service teachers of English from a sociocultural theoretical lens through a questionnaire with closed-ended items and another open-ended questionnaire based on participants' own interpretations. The study sought to address the following main questions: What understandings about the use of project work as a participatory tool do EFL teacher trainees have during pre-service teacher training in the context of a Turkish university, and how do they interpret their participation in project work?

2. Literature Review

Before pointing out the theoretical underpinnings of sociocultural theory (SCT) and project-based learning, I should resonate considering the project-based learning experience and knowledge of ELT trainees as both *learners of English and pre-service teachers or trainees* from a SCT stance with the fact that teachers' unarticulated and deeply ingrained *everyday*

concepts about language learning and teaching are grounded in their own instructional histories as learners (Lortie, 1977). That is why it is essential to explore their experience and knowledge both as a learner and a teacher trainee. However, since these *everyday concepts* which are insufficient and even hazardous by themselves should be complemented by *scientific concepts* as Vygotsky differentiates between them, trainees may co-construct the theoretical framework they have conceptualised in teacher education courses out of the formal schooling context which is full of concrete practical activity that enables them to go beyond everyday experiences and knowledge and to link them with scientific concepts (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). The critical question as to how they internalise the concepts or more technically how human cognition is shaped in social activity is an issue of sociocultural theories as explicated in the following section.

2.1. The Sociocultural Theory

Unlike the understanding that ‘social activity influences cognition’, Lantolf and Johnson (2007: 878 cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2011) put it bluntly that ‘social activity is the process through which human cognition is formed’. Therefore, the holistic and interdependent nature of what is taught/learned and how is taught/learned or of cognition and activity comes into play in that they shape and are shaped by each other. In this respect, conceptual development is not a direct consequence of formal instruction but an emergence, the development of which is interdependent on the agency of the learner, the affordances and constraints of the learning environment and *mediational tools* such as activities, cultural artifacts and sustained participation.

Another Vygotskian concept, which has been the most adapted, investigated and celebrated becomes prominent in determining the quality and character of the mediation and scaffolding: the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as a metaphorical arena or space between one’s actual development or internalisation on one’s own- what you already know- and one’s individual potential cognition emerging through the mediation in social activity - what you can do with the assistance of all the other artifacts in the world- (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Johnson and Golombek, 2011).

In addition to recognising the importance of qualities of good mediation and roles people and artefacts play in the learner’s *interdependent* rather than individually autonomous learning journey, the problem about the pedagogical generalisation regarding the concept of ZPD is among the issues. Yet, the features of good scaffolding (Feurstein et al., 1980 cited in Williams & Burden, 1997) can still be traced in the sociocultural setting of the research study.

Another perspective of the sociocultural theory (SCT), Activity Theory, which analytically depicts a holistic view of human activities and human agency as a way to show the interconnectedness of different individual activities in social contexts (Engeström, 1987 cited in Haught, 2006), is also emergent in the project work of trainees in that the *object* and ultimate *outcome* of the lecturer of the methodology course is to develop trainees’ (*subject*) experience on exploratory classroom-based action research on practitioners’ problems as this project work will help them gain an insight on the possible affordances and constraints they will confront in their future classrooms and school communities.

The *twisting path* (Vygotsky, 1987: 156 cited in Smagorinsky, 2003) of inter and intra mental processes as part of acquisition metaphor (Sfrad, 1998) can be complemented by participatory models of classroom life, namely Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), identity construction and language learning (Block, 2007) and language socialisation (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986 cited in Poole, 1992). These stronger versions of SCTs posit that learning as an embodied and situated phenomenon is a process of enculturation and

socialisation entailing our identity and whole selves as emotional, physical and cognitive beings; moreover, a sense of belonging along with the dialectical relationship between the person and the community is learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Being a part of the practitioner community as newcomers with the support of old timers is through legitimate peripheral participation in sociocultural practices of the community (ibid.). Critical Theory builds the socially constituted identity, power and agency issues beyond dichotomous project of individual self, and a shift to poststructuralist views of identity (ibid.) emphasizes the multifaceted and dynamic nature of identity construction constituting and being constituted in the social world which learners are engaged with. This multiplicity and complexity of learning environment requires an ecological approach to create learning opportunities within the local context rather than one-size-fits-all and context-free approaches.

2.2 The Project Work within the Shifting Conceptual Framework

PBL was first conceived by the efficiency expert David Snedden to teach science in American vocational agriculture classes (Beckett, 1999 cited in Beckett and Miller, 2006) and popularised for educators by John Dewey's student (and later colleague) William Heard Kilpatrick as a whole-hearted purposeful activity on behalf of the learner (Brubacher, 1947 cited in ibid.). The inadequacies in Krashen's (1981 cited in Beckett, 2002) input hypothesis has led to Swain's (1985 cited in ibid.) proposal that students need communicative opportunities to produce comprehensible output, which has increased the popularity of Brumfit's (1984 cited in Beckett, 2002) project-based communicative language teaching methodology. Especially, the tradition of project work has become a part of the curriculum in many contexts with a growing interest in content-based second language education (Stoller, 1997), English for specific purposes (Fried-Booth, 2002) and the major emphasis on the buzz-word 'communicative' competence. This approach proves effective as it easily lends itself to: (a) authentic language use, (b) authentic materials, (c) authentic tasks, and (d) learner centeredness (Legutke & Thomas, 1991; Fried-Booth 1986, Legutke 1985, Haines 1989, Robinson 1991, cited in Stoller, 2002).

Experiential learning, which is closely related to project work, has provided new perspectives with the changing roles of teachers, learners and curricula in society. The overlapping educational paradigms, the orientations of which are transmission, transaction and transformation, show the changing status of teaching and education in society (Kohonen, 2001). This shift requires learners to be involved in school as a community with a specific culture in its own right and to practise living in community through the continuum from training as a narrower approach to 'education' as the broader approach. Experiential learning helps learners and teachers progress in this direction since it involves a rich variety of interactive practices whereby the participants have opportunities to learn from their own and each others' experiences. A holistic dialogue as the reciprocal relationship with the learner can be enhanced through teachers' professional growth in a collegial institutional culture (Kohonen, 2001). The transformative teacher growth is an experiential process that integrates the cognitive, social and emotional aspects of professional learning in a cooperative learning community as recent literature discusses its importance through the pre-service and in-service teacher education with an emphasis on the collaboration of teacher preparation programmes, school leaders, administrators, teachers and school-based educators (Liebttag & Vander Ark, 2016). Therefore, teacher learning should be connected with actual teaching in addition to ongoing reflection and theory building as Darling-Hammond (1998: 8) asserts:

Teachers learn best by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see. This kind of learning cannot occur in college classrooms divorced from practice or in school classrooms

divorced from knowledge about how to interpret practice. Good settings for teacher learning—in both colleges of education and schools—provide lots of opportunities for research and inquiry, for trying and testing, for talking about and evaluating the results of learning and teaching.

Being introduced into ESL education as a way to reflect the tenets of student-centred teaching (Hedge, 1993), project-based learning as a kind of experiential learning has been seen as a part of content- and task-based language teaching to create opportunities that allow ESL learners to interact and communicate with each other and native English speakers (Freid-Booth, 2002). In Beckett's doctoral study (1999 cited in Beckett and Slater, 2005: 108) on teachers' goals and evaluations of project-based instruction in ESL classes, various goals for the implementations of projects have been reported such as "challenging students' creativity; fostering independence; enhancing cooperative learning skills; building decision-making, critical thinking, and learning skills; and facilitating the language socialisation of ESL students into local academic and social cultures". Though there is a variety of terms to refer to project work with certain basic characteristics (Edutopia, 2014; Larmer, et al., 2015; Grossman et al., 2019), the concise definition of project work by Beckett (2002: 54) informs this study: "a long-term (several weeks) activity that involves a variety of individual or cooperative tasks such as developing a research plan and questions, and implementing the plan through empirical or document research that includes collecting, analyzing, and reporting data orally and/or in writing".

Project work can also be defined as "a set of tasks that require learners to do an in-depth investigation into a particular topic beyond the classroom via communication with texts and people, to produce their own outcomes out of this research, and to present them in written and/or oral form to a set audience in an extended period of time" (Haines, 1989; Eyring, 1997; Wrigley, 1998 cited in Kemaloğlu, 2006: 3).

Beckett and Slater (2005) describe a methodological tool called 'The Project Framework' which can be a cultural tool to help socialize into a new way of thinking about language and language learning through the integration of language and content and skills in an undergraduate ESL classroom. They additionally define project-based language learning as a student-centered, comprehensive and enriching pedagogical approach with a focus on the development of language, content, and skills in an integrated, meaningful and technology-mediated way (Beckett & Slater, 2018; Slater & Beckett, 2019). Though there is a positive attitude towards project work in mainstream classes, the fact that ESL students' evaluations of projects in academic ESL classes are not consistent led them to go deeper into this critical issue. When it comes to the use of project work in English language teacher (ELT) training contexts of higher education, there is not any research on the experiences and evaluations of the ELT trainees about project work as a tool for developing the language learning and teaching competence; therefore, the present study is the first attempt to look into pre-service teachers' knowledge of and experience in project work through which they learn teaching methodology in language teacher education from an SCT perspective.

3. Methodology

This exploratory study integrating cognitive and sociocultural perspectives aims at shedding light on the ELT trainees' views and interpretations of project work at a Turkish university through a questionnaire with closed-ended items and another open-ended questionnaire. A thick description of the trainees' experience in project work through pre-service teacher training courses has been displayed regarding whether participants have collaborative and supportive perceptions of project work with regard to the categories of eight goals and two roles (namely content goals, linguistic goals, research goals, goals regarding authentic outcome

production, affective goals, autonomy goals, technology and time management goals and two more items, the teacher's and the learner's role).

The study adopts the subjective reality as its ontology, personal knowledge as its social constructionist (Crotty, 1998) epistemology, phenomenology under its interpretivistic theoretical perspective and phenomenological research as its methodology covering a case study design of the particular context where both quantitative and qualitative methods have been utilised. It is important to display 'what it is like' to be in the mentioned situation as a good portrayal and a thick description of the case by letting the real life context and phenomenon speak for itself (Cohen et al., 2007: 254). Therefore, it is appropriate to explicitly express that the study was intended to serve to an "interpretive science in search of meaning, not an experimental science in search of laws" (Geertz, 1973: 5).

3.1 Methods, Participants and the Setting

In order to have a deeper understanding of the trainees' experience in and knowledge of project work, a piloted and highly reliable questionnaire whose Cronbach's alpha value is 0.85 (Kemaloğlu, 2006) was adapted to the context by adding both open and close-ended questions and applied as a preliminary tool to see how their outlook on project work is, and in connection with their explanations to these items, a second open-ended questionnaire prepared by the researcher was also given to volunteering trainees.

Since Kemaloğlu's (2006) study investigated the students' and teachers' assessments about Main Course project work applied at the English preparatory classes of Yıldız Technical University (YTU) School of Foreign Languages Basic English Department, it was changed according to the context of English language teacher education by the researcher and had two parts: a part about background information and a part with closed-ended items. Transferred to the project work in pre-service teacher training courses divided into language 'polishing' or developing courses related to speaking, listening, reading and writing and pedagogical and methodological courses, this study integrated both cognitive-linguistic aspect of project work through the first questionnaire and the sociocultural aspect through the second questionnaire. In the previous study on English learners' assessments, the goal of collaborative learning through joint decision making, found in most of the project definitions in literature was found to be missing in the YTU Main Course context as the individual learners are directly given the predetermined project topic lists related to language learning; therefore, there is a competitive rather than collaborative learning environment, the social aspect of which is missing. In contrast, in this study, the collaborative atmosphere among ELT trainees has been revealed through the second questionnaire with open-ended questionnaire. Because it was not convenient to meet face to face with groups of trainees from different classes during the time of research, an open-ended questionnaire was preferred rather than a semi-structured interview. To increase the probability of transferability of the study, it was important to reach different groups of trainees who have taken "ELT Methodology II" course, which has played a prominent role in enhancing the trainees' knowledge and experience in project work as a component of the teacher training course from a sociocultural perspective. The second questionnaire was complementary to the first one which focused on project goals, the rate of achievement of these goals, participant roles and types of project tasks in that it functioned as another important tool to get more experiential data revealing the group dynamics among the trainees. The following questions were influential in prompting more comments about the procedures of their participatory acts and tools:

- Describe the steps of your group tasks which you realised throughout the course.
- Do you find the project work beneficial for your professional development? Why?
- What do you think about the (dis)advantages of group work in this course?
- How were the group members determined?

- Do you prefer being with a close friend of yours in the same group or not? Why?
- What was/were the role(s) of the course lecturer during the project work?
- What do you think about your research process during the project?
- Answer these questions in terms of your professional development by associating them with the project work: “How was I? How have I become?”
- Please write anything you like related to the course.
- Please write anything you would like to change about the course.

It has been assumed that after four-year education, it is the best time and place to measure their knowledge and experience of project work. Also, third-year trainees participated in the study. Participants of the study were 48 ELT Trainees who will graduate from the ELT Department at a Turkish university. 12 of them (25%) were male, and 35 of them (75%) were female. The most frequent age group (20 participants) was at the age of 22 (42%). The study focused on participants in two aspects as learners of English and prospective EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers.

3.2 Data Collection and Explication

The third and fourth year trainees contributed to questionnaires according to the random sampling, and the particular context revealed that one of the courses, namely ELT Methodology II, which the trainees take during the third year has fostered the trainees' autonomy through an emancipatory approach the lecturer, Canan (a pseudonym) adopted. The researcher conducted many incidental on-campus interviews with the lecturer during the course term and could observe how she prepared the course and gave feedback to the trainees as an emic insider of the context.

All data were gathered by considering the ethical issues including informed participant consent, guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. All the names of trainees throughout the article are pseudonyms. The questionnaire with the closed-ended items was quantitatively analyzed by using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS 22.0). The frequencies, percentages and the mean values of the items were analyzed through descriptive statistics. The small-scale nature of the study due to the limited time set for conducting the research may impose some limitations on the transferability of the study; however, the quantitative and qualitative data were used to complement each other with regard to the trustworthiness of this study. Moreover, respondent validation was applied to check the data sources after the constant comparison of the emerging patterns during the content analysis of the open-ended items. I tried to use ‘a strategic and technical detachment approach’ (Holliday, 2001: 178) during the data explication of the semi-structured open-ended questionnaire as I was familiar with the institution. Since I wanted the participants to feel comfortable while giving feedback about the lessons, I let them answer the questions in their mother tongue, Turkish. This also led them to have a more conversational and informal tone in their comments, and the translations of the data of this second questionnaire from Turkish to English were checked by another language teacher so that our consensus of opinion could result in a coherent portrayal of the participants' views.

4. Findings and Discussion

In this section, after the results for each item in the first quantitative questionnaire stated by the teacher trainees are presented, interpreted and discussed, an overall comparison and discussion will be provided to the research question of the study, “How do EFL teacher trainees in the context of a Turkish university perceive project work as a participatory tool?” While trainees' perceptions about the achieved goals of project work as EFL learners were investigated through the closed- ended part of the first questionnaire, their knowledge and

experience as pre-service teachers were revealed through the seventh and eighth questions of the first survey and the open-ended questions.

As “collaboration” referring to instances when the partner is provided support about the related problem is used by Vygotsky in some writings on ZPD (Chaiklin, 2003), looking at the group dynamics and mediation within a trainee’s ZPD could be a key to understanding the role of project work in their development. Hence, emerging categories from the second open-ended questionnaire may yield to a deeper understanding of their experiences in group relations as a part of their project work. According to the trainees’ interpretations, project work as a mediatory, collaborative and creative process based on the interaction among the group members supported by their course tutor has marked such categories in terms of its contributions to their professional development:

- ✓ A mediational tool for enhancing concept development; uniting theory and practice together,
- ✓ Developing presentation and research skills, academic writing, reading and speaking skills and boosting self-confidence,
- ✓ Adapting the use of authentic language/materials,
- ✓ New insights and perspectives into the field; the influence of the role of group dynamics and the course lecturer on communication and collaboration.

4.1 Teacher Trainees’ Understandings of Project Work

Assuming that they have enough knowledge, the pre-service teachers who stated that they read about project work were asked to define project work without any help from any resource to see their understanding of project work. Definitions of the pre-service teachers were not different from the teachers in literature in terms of variety; however, they were not inclusive in terms of all the characteristics of project work. Most common and remarkable definitions of teacher trainees are provided below:

- Project work, to me, is related to tasks students or people collaboratively work on a subject and share ideas with each other.
- A task which students work on and create an original output.
- An assessment tool used to evaluate students’ knowledge of certain structures and vocabulary.

Deducing from the definitions, 19 participants (40 %) who stated that they heard about project work, can be said to be familiar with the concept of project work. However, only 14 of them (29%) have read books/articles directly about project work or books in which project work was mentioned. This may result from the fact that they are not explicitly informed by knowledge of conceptual framework of this area while fulfilling the tasks of project work in practice. In this respect, though the trainees are positively interdependent on the lecturer during the stages of project work, the contents of main tasks are directly given by the lecturer then e.g. they find a problem specified by the collaborative groups of trainees during the observations of teachers as a step of the exploratory action research project, according to their answers to the items of the 2nd questionnaire. Therefore, they are asked to find a dimension of the theoretical concept of each task in the real practice of teaching; however, they do not have a specific training on how to conduct project work in a separate course.

The overall comparison of the quantitative questionnaire is shown in Table 1 below. The extent to which the goals of project work represented by 32 items in the questionnaire were achieved was identified according to the mean values and percentages of the items analysed through the descriptive statistics. The goals can be defined as “poorly achieved” (1- 2.33),

“moderately achieved” (2.34- 3.66) and “highly achieved” (3.67- 5) according to the 1 to 5 continuum. Findings of the study revealed that participants had collaborative and supportive perceptions of project work. Participants of the study expressed their support for project work in terms of eight goal categories, namely Content, Linguistic, and Research Goals; Goals Regarding Authentic Outcome Production, Affective Goals, Autonomy Goals, Technology Goals, and Time Management Goals and two more items, Teacher’s and Learner’s Role. Application of questionnaires and interviews are still a goal to be expected to be developed for trainees to come at a higher level. As the dominant mean values of each item is very close to each other, general average means of the main headings ranging between 3,81 and 4,27 were displayed in order to compare the extents to which they are highly achieved easily. Moreover, the minimum and maximum mean values of each subtitles are 3,58 and 4,33, while the rest of them range between these two values.

Table 1. Overall results

Item No	Item Name	Questions-Subtitle	SDA		D		PA		A		SA	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Content Goals (Mean:3,81)	1) Acquiring knowledge about a given subject	0	0	3	6,3	11	22,9	23	47,9	11	22,9
		2) Liking the subject	0	0	5	10,4	9	18,8	27	56,3	7	14,6
2	Linguistic Skills (Mean:3,86)	3) Reading	0	0	6	12,5	7	14,6	22	45,8	13	27,1
		4) Writing	1	2,1	6	12,5	8	16,7	23	47,9	10	20,8
		5) Speaking	1	2,1	6	12,5	11	22,9	16	33,3	14	29,2
		6) Listening	1	2,1	8	16,7	10	20,8	20	41,7	9	18,8
		7) Integrated skills	0	0	7	14,6	4	8,3	23	47,9	14	29,2
		8) Oral presentation	1	2,1	3	6,3	10	20,8	16	33,3	18	37,5
		9) Learning vocabulary	0	0	3	6,3	8	16,7	17	35,4	20	41,7
		10) Using vocab.	0	0	3	6,3	9	18,8	24	50	12	25
		11) Translation	1	2,1	4	8,3	12	25	16	33,3	15	31,3
		12) Using grammar	1	2,1	5	10,4	5	10,4	19	39,6	18	37,5
		13) Improving grammar	2	4,2	7	14,6	7	14,6	15	31,3	17	35,4
3	Research Goals (Mean:3,92)	14) Using the Internet	2	4,2	2	4,2	3	6,3	14	29,2	27	56,3
		15) Other sources	3	6,3	4	8,3	14	29,2	15	31,3	12	25
		16) Analyzing data	1	2,1	4	8,3	7	14,6	26	54,2	10	20,8
		17) Synthesizing data	1	2,1	3	6,3	7	14,6	23	47,9	14	29,2
4		18) Creativity	0	0	4	8,3	10	20,8	17	35,4	17	35,4

	Authentic Outcome Production (Mean:3,86)	19) Personal vision	0	0	5	10,4	12	25	15	31,3	16	31,3
		20) Paraphrasing	1	2,1	5	10,4	14	29,2	16	33,3	12	25
		21) Commenting	0	0	5	10,4	13	27,1	16	33,3	14	29,2
		22) Supporting	0	0	4	8,4	10	20,8	17	35,4	17	35,4
5	Affective Goals (Mean:4,27)	23) Positive attitude	1	2,1	1	2,1	4	8,3	17	35,4	25	52,1
		24) Self-confidence	1	2,1	1	2,1	8	16,7	15	31,3	23	47,9
6	Autonomy Goals (Mean:4,10)	25) Feeling of responsibility	1	2,1	2	4,2	7	14,6	14	29,2	24	50
		26) Making decisions	1	2,1	2	4,2	10	20,8	18	37,5	17	35,4
7	Time Management Goals (Mean:4,02)	27) Using time effectively	1	2,1	2	4,2	11	26,9	20	41,7	14	29,2
		28) Submitting the assignments	1	2,1	3	6,3	7	14,6	15	31,3	22	45,8
8	Technology Goals (Mean:3,87)	29) Learning how to use technology	3	6,3	3	6,3	11	22,9	11	22,9	20	41,7
9	Teacher's-Learner's Roles (Mean:4,07)	30) Needing teacher's instruction	2	4,2	1	2,1	9	18,8	22	45,8	14	29,2
		31) Teacher's comments	2	4,2	4	8,3	4	8,3	16	33,3	22	45,8
		32) Doing assignments	2	4,2	2	4,2	4	8,3	16	33,3	24	50

10	Applying questionnaires/ interviews	33) Questionnaires	YES		NO			English		Turkish		Both	
			N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	N	%
			20	41,6	28	58,3		34)	10	50	8	40	2
35) Interviews	18	37,5	30	62,5	36)	7	38,8	8	44,4	3	16,6		

KEY: Bold figures represent the highest scores.

Note: N: Number of Participants; SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree; PA: Partially Agree; DA: Disagree; SDA: Strongly Disagree

The first goal category, “content goals” represented by the subtitles ‘acquiring knowledge about a given subject’ and ‘liking the subject’ were found to be relatively succeeded as revealed by agreement responses. Within the “linguistic skills” category, the integrated skills involving reading, writing, speaking and listening and language components such as vocabulary, grammar were found to be improved at a moderately high level during the project tasks involving presentation and translation.

According to Table 1, in addition to content and linguistic goals, the percentages distributed among agreement and strong agreement display that data processing goals, the goals regarding authentic outcome production, the category of autonomy and time management goals were

found to be met at a high level. Furthermore, the most highly achieved goals are related to the affective factors, the use of technology and the roles of their teacher and the trainees as learners. More specifically, the items that are highly achieved according to the trainees' views have been found to be about presentation skills, vocabulary and grammar within linguistic skills; using the internet during research process; creativity, the personal vision and the support of ideas as the authentic outcome production; affective goals like positive attitude, self-confidence; the use of technology, the punctual submission of the assignments, the teacher's role as a commenter and the learner's role in doing assignments.

When it comes to the items about conducting interviews and questionnaires, it can be seen that the percentage of the trainees who apply those instruments is quite lower in general. Trainees as learners of English during the skills improvement courses in the first two years of their education and later on did not realise successful projects involving outside-class interaction especially to improve English speaking skill though there is an almost balanced use of English and Turkish in the applied instruments. It is possible to say that the project tasks during the third and fourth year teacher training and methodology courses may compensate for the paucity in their experience of using such instruments to some extent as can be explored through their responses about the project work especially in one of their courses in the next section.

4.2 Teacher Trainees' Interpretations of their Participation in Project Work

Adopting the main premise that learning is co-constructed through socioculturally mediated activity, I have taken stock of the nature of the activity embedded in one of the methodology courses named "ELT Methodology II" in a teacher education program in Turkey as a reflection of expectations about the way pre-service teachers develop teaching expertise, and explored the collective attempt to accomplish project work about the methodological subjects through the assistance and mediation of both the lecturer and peer trainees. Critically looking at the social practices and situated contexts in which trainees are engaged is expected to shed light on how social interaction and participation in project work support and enhance the development of trainees' expertise on the content of the course.

Project work, a mediational tool for the trainees, serves as a cultural artifact or a goal-oriented activity that shapes their conceptual development as stated by Lale: "Our observations of real classroom environments provided us with a predisposition and knowledge of what sort of problems we can confront as a teacher and of how we can deal with classroom management in our future professional life."

Through the methodology course, the experiences of trainees who participated in an exploratory/ inquiry-based project work in a peer group display that the group dynamics have been very influential in their collective engagement in critical examinations of pedagogical quandaries that they have identified as present during their observations of teachers in real classroom settings. An ELT trainee, Erhan, stated his feelings as follows:

We told each other what we had observed during the sessions of different teachers, and this made us better observers because not every one of us could catch the same details as one another could, and we complemented what was missing in each other's puzzle and united what all of us knew, heard and felt about the observation together.

Therefore, group protocols operate as material tools to guide trainees' thinking and they are also conceptual tools and constitutional parts of the activity which are in the mind of the facilitator's/ lecturer's mind. Moreover, the compensatory tools that trainees transform from authentic materials such as newspapers, brochures, cartoons as alternative solutions to rote learning in some classrooms highlighted the sociality of materials rather than their physicality.

Furthermore, the scientific concepts they learned during the lecturing time in the training courses transformed their everyday concepts during their *apprenticeship of observation* (Lortie, 1977) into psychological thinking tools they use while problem solving across instructional contexts they observed. Overall, from a sociocultural theoretical perspective, the mediation that trainees receive through social relations, concepts and cultural artifacts or activities plays a critical role in the development of teaching expertise in language teacher education programs. In this respect, project work within the methodology course of the ELT Department has been a concrete exemplary hands-on experience for the ELT trainees to establish the relationship between the theoretical concepts and everyday knowledge of teaching in real settings rather than a discrete and de-contextualised kind of lecturing about or rote memorisation of abstract terms. In so doing, using project work in this course may bridge the long-lasting divide between the theory and practice in language teacher education by merging the subject matter knowledge about language, second language education in academic coursework with the pedagogical and procedural realities of classroom teaching. In other words, the ELT trainees co-construct and internalise the scientific concepts through the sociocultural ELT context of teaching environment by means of project work.

It is also necessary that strategic assistance should be given to novice teacher trainees during the course term by the teacher educator and fellow classmates; in this study, teams of three or four trainees carrying out the project work were guided by the lecturer of the course when necessary inside and outside the classroom both implicitly and explicitly. The type of feedback is revealed through words of the trainee, Emine: “The role of the course lecturer was to give detailed feedback on our observations about professional problems, different attitudes of students and teaching skills and techniques”.

Seeing the incongruence between the pedagogical theories and the actual classroom practices, the lecturer, Canan changed mere lecturing into a course design with five tasks, which allows the trainees to do field work about the content and language teaching skills of the course through first-hand exploratory research in the real classroom settings; therefore, groups of trainees could develop an agency and autonomy as a consequence of project work. It can be concluded that instead of a “banking model” teaching methodology (Freire, 1970 cited in Breunig, 2005) as a source of educational hegemony, Canan resorted to a problem-posing and experiential method of education to teach ‘ELT methodology’ course to the teacher trainees by employing project-based small-group work, seminar-style lecture, student presentation, discussion and creative expression. In this respect, according to the researcher’s observations, holding negotiation approach through open discussion and mutual trust, she changed traditional ‘pupil status’ into co-constructive groups of teacher candidates who find meanings of their own and take initiative in and responsibility for their own learning.

As stated in the description of ELT Methodology II, this course is based on the active participation of each individual within and beyond the team work as the content is an introduction to “classroom-based research, teacher directed research and action research, diagnosing learners' language related needs and problems and remedial teaching activities; principles of learner monitoring and role of learner assessment in lesson planning; national and international professional organizations (e.g. TESOL and INGED) and practical journals (e.g. English Teaching Forum, ELTJ, TESLJ and TESL Reporter)”. Among the aims of the course are “to detect the language problems that learners face and to provide teacher trainees with necessary knowledge and skills to develop appropriate activities”. As a part of the process-oriented assessment except for mid-term and final exams, the lecturer asks the students to keep language teaching portfolios and to perform micro teaching activities; besides, they discuss articles about methods in TESOL from those publications. In addition to lecturing, question

and answer sessions, discussions and microteachings through mediatory tools like Power Point slides, the projector, the internet and portfolios.

The preliminary weeks for the project work is mostly predicated on in-class reflective discussions about principles and priorities of EFL/ESL teaching methodology, the roles of a language teacher and descriptions of learning context from a classroom-based action research. The tasks for the rest of the term comprise “examining the physical conditions and opportunities/affordances of a state/ private school, interviewing school teachers about their professional problems (teaching students with special educational needs in crowded classrooms, trying to negotiate with irresponsible parents, seeking support from school administration etc.) and finding solutions to the language-, learner- and teacher- related problems they diagnosed and discussing the solutions in the classroom, examining the teacher and student interaction types and behaviours in a few hours of the lesson of a faculty instructor by using observation checklist and observing and evaluating their peers through Teaching Skills I & II courses or video-taping their own performance outside the class and reflecting on their performance to make effective self-evaluation reports”. After each task, trainees prepare a written report they collected in their portfolios and present them in the class during discussion and feedback sessions.

A detailed timetable of the tasks can be put into an order as follows. The first part/task of project work for teams of three or four trainees is related to diagnosing *language*-related needs and problems by doing field work and preparing checklists for interviewing with two or three state/private schools’ teachers at schools and writing formal reports. The following week during discussion and feedback session, trainees categorise primary and secondary school language classroom problems such as learner related, teacher related, administrative, parental problems and the problems under the direct control of the teacher according to their theoretical knowledge base formed during previous lectures and self-study. The second task of the project work is concerned about diagnosing *teacher*-related problems on communication by preparing checklists for data collection and by observing and evaluating their peers through Teaching Skills I& II courses or video-taping their own performance outside the class and reflecting on their performance to make effective self-evaluation reports. As the third task, the trainees have written formal reports and performed in-class discussions about the collected data on learner-related problems after doing two-hour observation by using the checklists prepared for preparatory classes of School of Foreign Languages and general English courses at the university. Fourthly, as a part of ‘testing and evaluation’ session, emphasising the importance of the evaluation procedure and the remedial work, trainees prepared remedial activities on learner related problems they observed during the field work and wrote a formal report on the fourth task. For the last task, trainees made presentations on learner autonomy, professional development and the importance of membership in international and national professional organizations.

Eleven-week course sessions have involved five project tasks, each of which teams of three or four trainees fulfilled through a range of activities and practices in real classroom environments as a complementary to theoretical pre-sessions of the course. Before conducting interviews with school teachers, doing observations and microteaching, the mediational means through which trainees burgeon and verbalise their understanding of the rationale behind language-, learner- and teacher-related problems may be reflective writing reports, microteachings and in-class discussions. The peer and self- assessments of each trainee (when they are individually presenting) or each team about their own microteachings as dynamic assessment (Poehner, 2008 cited in Johnson and Golombek 2011) also create opportunities for the teacher educator to suggest expert instructional responses according to the trainees’ actual

and potential capabilities within their ZPDs through dialogic cooperation. Some of the contributions of the project work to the professional life of trainees were stated as follows:

“I learned how and to what extent authentic language can be used in an EFL classroom setting” (Kaan).

“I understood that the characteristics of a good researcher are to be a good and careful listener, reader and observer who analyses and disseminates the research data according to the exact picture in the context” (Emine).

“It (project work) is beneficial for developing presentation skills, academic writing, reading and speaking skills and boosting self-confidence” (Erhan).

“New people mean new ideas, and this project work created opportunities to explore the unknown through group synergy” (Çiğdem).

The procedures of the course can be espoused by taking stock of the principles of Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory that development does not lead learning *from* inside to outside through input from the world; rather, learning from outside to inside through dynamic interaction between learner and significant other *in* the world leads development (Vygotsky, 1987). In their report of the eleven-week project which focused on integrating the research, practice and presentation skills needed for understanding and enhancing the roles of a language teacher and a practitioner researcher in the classroom, the trainees recognised the need to adapt different language teaching methodologies to the local context according to the needs, learning styles and diversities of the students. They also learned how to overcome the potential differences by seeing them as various opportunities during the collaborative team work as Çiğdem expresses:

Communication and collaboration among the group members have improved, also the distribution of group tasks among us contributed to our sense of responsibility, and we have overcome the potential impediments such as dilatoriness and procrastination through building team spirit and a sense of community. Generally, everyone becomes a part of a group formed right from the beginning of the program in the first year, and if everything goes well, that group acts together until the end of the last year. Likewise, our group of four people came together in the first year. It is very advantageous to be a part of the group in that it ensures our continuous improvement through good interaction among us.

Another trainee, Gökhan, espoused a different perspective regarding the group dynamics while fulfilling tasks:

Group forming was based on reciprocal and momentary willingness, as a result of which considerably committed groups came together as there was no ‘polarization’ among the class fellows and the degree of in-class relationship was good enough to encourage everyone to work in any group. It is not very attractive for me to work with closer friends in the same group because close friends know what they generally think about and how they behave and they may not see different perspectives by interacting each other all the time; however, to be in a group with newcomers and new acquaintances is an opportunity to become familiar with various views and experiences; that’s why I am very happy of developing new relationships during my project work through which we built a systematic and successful team and gained deep insights into new practices.

The project work approach the lecturer adopted as a mediational tool helped the trainees understand the goals and content of the ELT methodology from the theoretical and academic point of view to the on-the-job or reflection-in-action perspective associated with the metaphor about looking from the high hard grounds down to the swamp with its complex, unpredictable

and dynamic nature (Schön, 1987: 1). One of the trainees, Gökçen, supported the project work approach to this course by stating:

Bridging the gap between theory and practice was provided through the different tasks of project work, and this was a preliminary experience to have a taste of real classroom atmosphere before teacher practicum course; therefore, I would rather taking part in more project-based courses preparing us for the essential issues in our future professional lives awaiting us.

ELT trainees who realised project work for their ‘ELT Methodology II’ course as a combination of interrelated tasks including various stages like planning, conducting library research, observing, doing field work, synthesizing their data and presenting their findings; consequently, they felt very satisfied with the project approach to the one of the core teacher training modules of the department because they found the tasks worthwhile for their professional development as fledgling newcomers of the TESOL community.

5. Conclusion

The overall survey results of this study revealed that the goals of project work through which trainees acted as learners of English were highly realised according to their views except for their experience in the application of interviews and questionnaires, while the conclusions of the previous studies including various participants (students, teachers, administrators and student teachers) suggested mixed perceptions about project work in that some of them felt project work was too demanding owing to their workload while others found it pedagogically very valuable (Beckett, 1999 as cited in Beckett, 2002; Subası-Dinçman, 2002; Gökçen, 2005; Kemaloğlu, 2006; Çırak, 2006; Baş & Beyhan, 2010; Baş, 2011; Dooley & Masats, 2010; Lam, 2011; Mutlu-Köroğlu, 2011; Abdul Khalek & Lee, 2012; Campbell, 2012; Yaman, 2014; Kettanun, 2014; Zhang, 2015; Habók, & Nagy, 2016; Aşar, 2017; Vaca-Torres & Gómez-Rodríguez, 2017; Duman & Kuuk-Yavuz, 2018; Sirisrimangkorn, 2018; Abu Bakar, et al., 2019; Baghoussi & El Ouchdi, 2019). The particular context of the “ELT Methodology II” course has also provided us with different insights as to how concepts of a teacher training course can be socially constructed through the action research as part of the project tasks realised by cooperative groups of trainees.

All in all, the project work can be regarded as a means of realising the ultimate goal of any educational enterprise, which is improving the student learning, considering the trainees as learners of English during the English skills and competence courses of the first two years of ELT Departments. On the other hand, as a contribution to their professional development as would-be teachers of English, I believe project work is a good practice or praxis as a way of digging the context-dependent and participatory process of teacher learning. As the sociocultural theoretical perspective under teacher professional development has been conceptualised over three decades of research, there are still hidden areas within the complexity of the situated teacher learning process within the cultural, institutional and historical domains (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Among the uncharted territories of teacher education and especially language teacher education from a sociocultural perspective comes out project-based learning (PBL) as I posit that PBL may be examined from stronger social views of learning rather than theories merely about the comprehensible input and output production through mediated learning, and I believe this study has enriched the literature with its theoretical and practical implications from this framework. It is necessary to conduct further research studies to understand the role of project work in language teacher education in different contexts from a sociocultural perspective.

At the beginning of the complicated, prolonged, highly situated and deeply personal process of teacher professional development that has no start and end point (Johnson & Golombek, 2011), I consider project work that the pre-service English language teacher experiences as a part of academic coursework in teacher education programs tremendously contributes to his/her professional development. Pre-service teachers may take advantage of project work while being exposed to the broader social, cultural and institutional settings where teachers live and work in the methodological and pedagogical courses so that they can witness the praxis of sound instructional opportunities and the use of mediational means. In this sense, they shape their own professional teacher identities by looking through the window of in-service teachers and seeing their discursive practices.

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