

A Comparative Analysis of EFL and ESL Programs Regarding Curriculum Mandates and Program Directors' and Teacher Candidates' Perceptions: The Case of Turkey and the US

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Abstract

In researching the comparison of ESL and EFL programs regarding curriculum mandates and perceptions of program directors and Teacher candidates, this study addresses the following research questions: How different are the competencies that are covered in the curricula of ELTE programs in Turkey from those that are covered in the curricula of ESL teacher education programs in the US? How do the program directors in ELTE and ESL teacher certification programs perceive the situation of their programs in terms of the content of the curriculum? How do the teacher candidates in ELTE and ESL teacher certification programs perceive the situation of their programs in terms of the content of the curriculum? Data include semi-structured interviews of four program directors and eight ELTE and ESL teacher candidates as well as the curricula of eight ESL teacher certification and eight ELTE programs. These programs were selected among private and public institutions in different cities and States (US) to represent a more comprehensive structure of the ELTE and ESL programs in the two countries. Results clearly indicate that program directors and teacher candidates do not see curriculum as a well-written prescribed document; rather, they argued for the learning outcomes resulting from the implemented curriculum. Besides, some critically needed competencies such as *culture* and *assessment*, and *professional responsibilities* are neglected in EFL programs.

Keywords

Curriculum Evaluation, EFL Teacher Education, ESL Teacher Education, Program Directors'

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Perceptions, Teacher Candidates' Perceptions

1. Introduction

It is a professional mandate for people in the field of foreign/second language (L2) teacher education to determine what constitute a competent English language teacher (ELT). This is a prerequisite for the advancement of the field because it is hoped that once certain competencies are identified, they will become the bases for the knowledge, skills and dispositions that fuel the curriculum, the instructional practices, and the assessment and evaluation procedures. This notion seems to have hold ground in teacher education around the world because all program evaluation requirements follow the assumption that a program's curriculum has been designed in ways that it complies with certain factors, including the national standards, state (local) mandates, accreditation conditions, institutional core curriculum requirements, and available faculty resources. Nonetheless, how much each factor weighs in depends on the power and perceptions of decision makers about the particularities, practicalities, and possibilities embedded in the ELT or ESL teacher preparation contexts. This study involves a comparative analysis of the ELT education (ELTE) and ESL teacher certification program curricula in the US while also providing qualitative accounts of program directors and teacher candidates in these programs. In what follows, we provide a brief background of the project and review of current research related to fundamental domains and competencies in L2 teacher education, continuing onto research on the ELTE programs in Turkey. We, then, describe the research methodology of the study before we present our findings and interpret them in a Discussion section. We conclude the chapter with a brief section on the implications of our results.

2. Background of the Study

In studying the curricula of ELTE in Turkey and ESL teacher education programs in the US vis-à-vis the current research, we not only acknowledge the differences between the two contexts but also recognize variation within each setting. In addition, we acknowledge the need for a heterogeneous and comprehensive approach to L2 teacher education because we champion a socio-constructivist view of L2 teacher education that is based on Kumaravadivelu's (2001) elements of locality and notion of context particularities that cannot be separated from social, political, economic and cultural local factors and constituencies (Johnson, 2009). Thus, this study is positioned within a pedagogical framework that draws on *cultural realism* (Kumaravadivelu, 2008) that takes into account the contributions of proactive critical self-reflections and socio-cultural realities (Darling-Hammond & Branson, 2005).

Nevertheless, regardless of expected differences between ELTE and ESL teacher education, one can observe that some competencies traditionally required for L2 teacher candidates in ELT settings have historically been considered important for candidates in ESL teacher preparation programs too. More specifically, all L2 teacher education programs seem to cover competencies related to second language acquisition (SLA), methods of language teaching, and L2 assessment. Note that, to varying degrees, both the ELT and ESL teachers are expected to help L2 learners—whether in K-12 or adult settings—communicate in social settings, to achieve academically in content areas, and to live in socially and culturally appropriate ways in the L2 community (TESOL, 2010).

3. L2 Teacher Competencies

The fact that there is now a journal in the file entitled “*World Englishes*” is indicative enough of the expected variation in the English language that the L2 industry is trying to teach (Kachru, Kachru, & Nelson, 2006). Similarly, in line with socio-constructivist views of L2 teacher education (Johnson, 2009), the field is now more aware of the pedagogical implications of different social, economic, cultural, political and geographical realities. In addition, SLA research is quite well-established about the role of learner variables (affective, cognitive, and metacognitive) in success in L2 attainment (Dörnyei, 2005; Gass & Selinker, 2008). Thus, it is hard to determine basic competencies in L2 teacher education when the substance (English language) is varied, the settings are different, and the learners demonstrate remarkable individual differences. Nevertheless, previous research has produced some common grounds for the ELT and ESL fields that include certain competencies related to *language, culture, instruction, assessment, and professional responsibilities*. We can synthesize and categorize this

research from numerous perspectives in L2 teacher education, including socio-constructivism (Johnson, 2009), teaching methods (Burns & Richards, 2009; Richards, 2008; Tredick, 2004), identity (Clarke, 2008), cognition (Borg, 2006), knowledge-base (Bartels, 2005; Freeman, 2002), critical pedagogy (Hawkins & Norton, 2009), and so forth. Yet, for the apparent purposes of this study, we have used TESOL's categorical framework that is also used for national accreditation purposes (TESOL/NCATE, 2010) for the ESL teacher education programs in the US.

Acting as the Specialized Professional Association (SPA) for NCATE, TESOL has compiled an accreditation review manual (TESOL/NCATE, 2010) that outlines 11 standards outlined under five domains. ESL teacher education programs in the US are required to provide evidence as to how their teacher candidates meet these 11 standards. The manual not only provides current research and theory in the field, it also describes application indicators in the rubric for each standard listed under each domain. More specifically, this manual breaks down the competencies into measurable learning outcomes that accompany a rubric requiring evidence and explaining performance indicators to determine if a candidate's performance *approaches*, *meets*, or *exceeds* the standard. In sum, aside from potential differences in pedagogical practices, ESL teacher education programs in the US cover these basic competencies related to language and linguistics, SLA theories, learner variables, ESL methods, foundations of learning and teaching, socio-cultural awareness, curriculum and instruction, and assessment and evaluation. In the TESOL/NCATE (2010) manual these competencies are presented in five domains of *language*, *culture*, *instruction*, *assessment*, and *professionalism*.

Competencies related to knowledge and skills in basic linguistics and first (L1) and L2 attainment research are categorized under the *language* domain. Regardless of being in ESL or EFL setting, current research suggests that L2 teachers need to be proficient in the target language while also being competent in fundamentals of linguistics and language systems (Andrews, 2001; Freeman & Freeman, 2004). In addition, this domain requires that L2 teachers attain a substantial background knowledge regarding basic theories and concepts about L1 and L2 acquisition (Baker, 2006; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 2007; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Van-Patten & Williams, 2007). Furthermore, previous research concerning this domain underscores L2 teachers' understanding of the differences between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1984). It also highlights the interrelatedness of receptive, productive, and complementary language skills in L2 education (Commins & Miramontes, 2005; Horwitz, 2008).

The second domain, *culture*, covers background on individual and socio-cultural differences amongst L2 learners. Indeed, current research on the culture domain advocates competency building in culturally responsive education with high level of awareness towards the strong presence of linguistic and cultural diversity in L2 classrooms (Commins & Miramontes, 2005; Crawford, 2004; Díaz-Rico, 2008). This domain requires teachers to attain sociocultural competence while also learning about learner variables as categorized under affective, cognitive, and metacognitive factors by Horwitz (2008). More specifically, L2 teachers must internalize the role of learner variables, including motivation, attitudes, identity, anxiety, learning strategies, pedagogical belief systems, language socialization patterns in success in L2 attainment (Doughty & Long, 2003; Dörnyei, 2005).

The *instruction* domain, on the other hand, covers practice-related competencies such as the foundations of ESL curriculum, knowledge of methods, learning environment and instructional materials as well as integrative teaching of content and language skills. While this domain holds teachers responsible for designing safe environments that are conducive to successful L2 learning (Brown, 2006; van Lier, 2000) it also underscores the use of different ESL/EFL methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) without necessarily adhering to one particular method, also known as Kumaravadivelu's "*Beyond Method*" (2006), a notion characterized by Larsen-Freeman (2003) as "*principled eclecticism*". According to this domain, to be considered a competent ESL teacher, one must able to choose and implement the most effective curriculum (Nation & Macalister, 2010; Richards, 2001) and instructional materials that are appropriate a particular L2 learner group (McGrath, 2006; Richards, 2001). This competency aligns well with applications of the so-called learner-centered and developmentally appropriate instruction.

Assessment is the domain that requires competency-building in L2 testing and evaluation of learners' language development. Research categorized under this domain underscores background knowledge and skills about formative and summative assessment techniques related to the placement, diagnosis, achievement, and proficiency of learners L2 skills (Brown, 2004). This domain addresses ESL teacher education in terms off undamental concepts (validity and reliability) and approaches (criterion-based versus norm-referenced testing) (Hughes, 2003) and practices related to basics of test design, stages of test development, and interpretation of test results while

also highlighting background in item selection and adaptation as well as the development of assessment tools for different purposes (Fulcher & Davidson, 2006).

The last domain, *professionalism*, situates the profession as a whole within a coherent framework about professional and pedagogical responsibilities. For example, some research related to this domain has not only underscored competency and readiness in keeping up-to-date with innovations in educational research but has also strongly suggested following domestic and international issues related to L2 education policy and practice (Creese, 2000; Leung, 2009; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013; Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007). In addition, this domain advocates promoting instructional environments that value just and equitable resources for English language learners (ELL) in mainstream classrooms (inclusive education) where they have access to the same rigorous and challenging education with their native-speaker peers (Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003; Polat, 2010; Reeves, 2004; Valdes, 2001). Finally, this domain champions collaboration between mainstream and L2 teachers and demands partnerships with external constituencies, parents, and professional communities to support the education of ELLs (Arkoudis, 2006; Crawford, 2004; Creese, 2005; Davison, 2006; De Jong & Harper, 2005).

4. ELTE Education in Turkey

Until 1981, teacher training high schools, which were specialized as vocational schools, were in charge of preparing the teacher force in Turkey (Duman, 1998). As a result of the shift in decision-making power from the Ministry of Education (ME) to universities in 1981, EFL education became a 4-year undergraduate degree offered by the ELTE programs at public universities. This change was important because it suddenly gave the HEC, an elitist bureaucratic agency, more power than the ME that is run by political appointees. Despite this shift, universities, the ME, and the HEC were still expected to work collaboratively. For example, while the curriculum design and pre-service education were to be determined through collaborative efforts between the HEC and respective institutions, teacher recruitment and in-service professional development (PD) were within the purview of the ME. Unfortunately, this collaboration failed due to financial, political, pedagogical, and logistical factors. This failure became a national issue in 1996 when the ME and the HEC identified major problems in the system (Akyel, 2012).

The Teacher Education Project, initiated by the World Bank, was the second major reform of the 90's. The project called for more emphasis on practice-related activities. More specifically, inspired by institutions in Europe and the U.S., teacher education reform in Turkey revolved around reflective practices, research approaches to teaching, and self-assessment. The goal of this socio-constructivist reform was to produce teacher candidates with knowledge of experientially-relevant theories that they would use to develop a personal teaching philosophy that emanated from self-reflection and *apprentice of observation* (Lortie, 1975). This reform required strong collaboration between the ME and the HEC as well as immediate program constituencies such as the faculty, student cohort, mentors and field supervisors.

Later, a new project was launched to keep the teacher education programs up-to-date. The project aimed to create a new accreditation system for all faculties of education. The Fullbright Commission that was behind this initiative geared the Turkish ELTE industry towards producing more high quality EFL teachers and higher numbers of faculty members in ELTE programs with greater focus on practical skills that would involve strong cooperation between higher education institutions and K-12 schools (Grossman, Onkol, & Sands, 2007). These reforms aimed to ensure that the new teachers can meet the changing demands of EFL education in Turkey (Altan, 2006). Thus, the existing curriculum core was redesigned and new courses like instructional planning, classroom management, and computer and instructional technology were included (Simsek & Yildirim, 2001).

In an attempt for some decentralization, the HEC prompted to implement further changes in ELTE programs in 2006. The most crucial change among these was the flexibility that would give the teacher education departments around 30% control over their curricula (Kirkgoz, 2007). These reforms have undoubtedly led to some recognizable change in ELTE program curricula; yet there is still a great deal of work to be done. These areas of improvement vary from the current unsuccessful system of practicum collaboration between K-12 schools and universities to failing partnerships among bigger parties involved in policy (the HEC) and recruitment (the ME) (Akyel, 2012). In a recent study, Altan (2006) listed some of these areas of improvement in ELTE programs as innovation, pedagogical and technological background, competency in multiple skills, and resourcefulness. He emphasized that in order to be successful, ELTE teachers must build a high level of English language proficiency. In addition, Altan (2006) argued that, to ensure high-quality EFL education, the HEC must shift from a pre-

service only training to a lifelong professional advancement model in collaboration with the ME to facilitate and maintain improvement and continuity through meaningful in-service PD services.

5. Paths to Becoming an EFL or ESL Teacher

All ELTE programs in Turkey have to follow the basic HEC requirements in terms of the allocation of credit hours with the possibility of selecting certain numbers of elective courses. To comply with the HEC requirements, ELTE programs in Turkey cover competencies related to language and linguistics, foundations of learning and teaching, EFL methods, SLA theories, learner variables, practicum, instruction, assessment/evaluation, and educational/pedagogical subjects. HEC (2010) has grouped these competencies into three domains of Language Teaching Subjects, General Culture, and Pedagogical Formation. Admission into these programs is based on a standardized English proficiency test that includes reading, grammar, and vocabulary questions. Thus, students can join these programs substantially lacking a strong command of English in written and oral skills. In fact, some research reported that many ELTE candidates were not competent enough in English for most of their coursework (Coskun & Daloglu, 2010). To remedy this weakness, some schools either require more preparation before admission into the program or increase the number of required general English classes in the first year of the program.

Becoming an EFL teacher takes two possible paths in Turkey. The first path involves obtaining a four-year undergraduate degree from an ELTE department. In the second one, on the other hand, teacher candidates who hold a BA degree in English language and literature or American or British cultural studies are given an option to turn their degrees into an EFL teacher degree. To be able to do so, they must fulfill the additional HEC-required pedagogical formation requirements. This route, which has traditionally been allowed by the government due to the shortage of EFL teachers in Turkey, involves an education in literary studies rather than L2 teaching pedagogy. Yet, the assumption is that since they have built a strong foundation of the English language, they can teach it provided that they receive training in *how* (pedagogical formation) to teach it. The first path produces most of the EFL teachers in Turkey. Once a program has been approved by the HEC, they can begin functioning without almost any continuous review from the State and no independent accreditation agencies exist in Turkey.

As for becoming an ESL teacher in the US, several routes can be followed. These possible routes include emergency, temporary, initial, and endorsement certificates. Yet, ESL teacher candidates generally take one of two common routes: initial certification or endorsement. The initial certificate involves a four year undergraduate degree program and is a rarely available choice in the US. The most common choice is endorsement, also known as add-on, certificate programs. Many ESL teachers, especially those in States with small ELL populations, obtain their ESL specialist certificates as endorsement to their initial licensures. This is also a possible route in States with very big ELL populations, like Florida where mainstream teachers are required to receive the ESL endorsement when they start serving ELLs in their content areas. Typically, candidates take around 15 to 18 credits of coursework that primarily covers the afore-mentioned five TESOL domains and then add this graduate work to any initial certifications they might hold. These programs are reviewed and approved by a State's department of education. It is up to the institutions whether or not to seek NCATE accreditation for their programs, which is handled by TESOL as the SPA.

6. Methods

In this study we used some numeric data regarding the fundamental competencies covered in ELTE programs in Turkey and ESL teacher certification programs in the US while also providing interpretive qualitative data (Patton, 2002) concerning the rationalizations and critical self-reflections of both the decision-makers and the teacher candidates in these programs. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How different are the competencies that are covered in the curricula of ELTE programs in Turkey from those that are covered in the curricula of ESL teacher education programs in the US?
- 2) How do the program directors in ELTE and ESL teacher certification programs perceive the situation of their programs in terms of the content of the curriculum?
- 3) How do the teacher candidates in ELTE and ESL teacher certification programs perceive the situation of their programs in terms of the content of the curriculum?

6.1. Participants and Setting

Participants were from eight ELTE programs in Turkey and eight ESL teacher certification programs in the US ($n = 16$) whose curricula were comparatively analyzed. These programs were selected among private and public institutions in different cities and States (US) to represent a more comprehensive structure of the ELTE and ESL programs in the two countries. This sampling precaution was also necessary since the quality of ELTE programs in Turkey may vary remarkably due to geographical locations and faculty resources and so forth. Similarly, since each State has its own requirements and mandates, one can assume differences among the ESL teacher certification programs in the US as well. Using a purposeful random sampling technique (Patton, 2002), two ELTE program directors and two ESL teacher certification program directors as well as four ELTE and four ESL preservice teachers were interviewed.

One of the ELTE program directors was at a private university and the other one was at a public university while both ESL program directors, who worked at private institutions, were from two different States: a Southern and a Northern State. Both ELTE directors had received their doctoral degrees in Turkey and had research articles published in scholarly indexed journals. The ESL program directors were both tenure-track faculty with a growing scholarly publication record. The higher education work experience of the program directors ranged between 4 and 9 years (age range = 37 - 57). Two of the ELTE teacher candidates were from private and two were from public universities in different geographical locations (Eastern and Western Turkey) in Turkey. All ELTE candidates had completed the first three years of their undergraduate coursework and were enrolled in their last year in the program. All ESL teacher candidates were in endorsement certification programs in different States. In other words, they held initial certifications in other areas of education (e.g., early childhood) and were adding ESL certification as an endorsement to their initial licensure.

6.2. Data Sources

Data include semi-structured interviews of four program directors and eight ELTE and ESL teacher candidates as well as the curricula of eight ESL teacher certification and eight ELTE programs. The ESL teacher certification curricula were obtained from the program directors whereas the ELTE curricula were either downloaded from the programs' websites or were directly obtained from the program directors. Finally, the HEC requirements (2010) and the TESOL/NCATE standards manuals and State requirements (2010) were reviewed for comparisons between these programs.

The interview questions were constructed using the inductive codes emerged through the analysis of the curricula and the deductive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were determined based on the previous research concerning procedures of program evaluation in teacher education (Richards, 2007; Thomas & Loadman, 2001). The interview questions were: What is your take on the quality of ELTE (or ESL for US participants) program curricula in terms of their strengths, weakness, and opportunities? Why? How do you see the quality of ELTE (or ESL for US participants) program curricula in preparing competent teachers? Why? In terms of the curriculum, how do you think your program compares to the other ELTE programs in Turkey (or ESL for US participants)? What kind of factors do you consider (should be considered for teacher candidates) while making decisions about the competencies, courses, practicum, and the number of credit hours in your program curriculum? Why? Why do you think your program curriculum has this kind of focus (depending of previous analyses)?

6.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

We followed several steps in analyzing our data. We started by individually analyzing the curricula in our settings (Author 1: ESL programs in the US and Author 2: ELTE programs in Turkey) to identify common areas of educational focus within our country of residence. Next, we interviewed both the directors and the teacher candidates to comparatively examine their critical reflections regarding the strength of their curricula in preparing competent ESL or EFL teachers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The audio-recorded interviews took between 35 to 45 minutes. They were then downloaded on a computer, transcribed, and returned to the participants for possible corrections and/or clarifications. Finally, were reviewed the TESOL/NCATE manual (2010) and State requirements (for the States in which the ESL teacher certification program resided) as well as the HEC (2010) program requirements to determine the standards that constitute the bases for these programs.

7. Results

7.1. Comparison of ELTE and ESL Teacher Certification Programs Understudy

ELTE and ESL teacher certification program curricula were comparatively analyzed to address the first research question. The curricula of the ESL teacher certification programs understudy seemed to be structured around competency areas outlined in the [TESOL/NCATE \(2010\)](#) manual, comprising of 11 standards related to *language, culture, instruction, assessment, and professionalism* domains. All of these programs, which were from eight different States in the US, listed contents related to these five competencies in different courses in their curricula; however, the way these competencies were structured and aligned with the TESOL standards appeared to be rather different. To determine as to why such differences existed, we examined several institution, State, and accreditation sources. Results suggested that the variance primarily emanated from 1) NCATE accreditation, 2) university core curriculum, and 3) State requirements. While faculty expertise also seemed related to how these competencies were organized in the curriculum, this reason was not consistent across all programs.

Of these eight programs, 5 were NCATE-accredited, and they predominantly followed the [TESOL/NCATE \(2010\)](#) manual. Thus, their curricula were more coherent in terms of, for example, the content related to basic linguistics, theories and research on L1 and L2 acquisition being offered in one course. Note that the education departments of these States also accepted the NCATE evaluation for their continuous review. In the curricula of three programs that were not NCATE-accredited, it was hard to understand why the content of the courses were organized the way they were. For example, in a course on instructional design and implementation, there would be content about linguistic and basic assessment strategies. This content was organized in ways, from an outsider's perspective, that was hard to understand. Yet, when reviewing the State requirements manual and the way the required competencies were outlined there, this kind of content organization made sense. As reported by the program directors in both of these examples, they had to deliver the content in courses that could cover multiple competencies in some pedagogically sound way due to the university core curriculum and credit-hour restriction. In other words, since these programs offered all of these 11 competencies in 15 to 18 credits per the State mandates, they had to get creative.

As for the curricula of ELTE programs in Turkey, results suggested that eight categories of instructional coursework, including language skills, linguistics, methods, SLA, literature, practicum, foreign language, and educational core, existed in all eight programs. Contents related to these competencies were covered in methods of language teaching, SLA theories, English language skills, research, literature, linguistics, foreign language learning, general education, and practicum courses. Review of these eight competencies revealed that some variation existed in the weighted coverage of some competencies; yet, the curricula frameworks of the overwhelming majority of these ELTE programs seemed to be rather homogeneous regarding a program's total number of credit-hours (132) and the credit-hour allocation for different competencies.

Nonetheless, results also indicated that two of these universities (108 - 122) offered fewer numbers of weighted credit hours for a few competency areas, which in turn led to fewer numbers of total credit-hours. Results indicated that over 90% of these ELTE programs offered three credits of SLA. Approximately 80% offered six credits of linguistics and nine credits of literature while 60% offered eight credits of practicum and six credits of foreign languages. Moreover, over 50% of these programs offered 30 credit hours of methods of language teaching and 28 credit hours of basic education courses.

7.2. Program Directors' Perceptions about the Current Situation of Their Curricula?

Of the two ESL program directors who participated in the interviews one was from an NCATE-accredited program. Two common themes emerged in the interviews of the ESL program directors, suggesting that 1) the curriculum lacked depth in covering knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for a competent ESL teacher, and 2) NCATE/TESOL, state mandates, and institutional core curriculum requirements shaped the curriculum not their professional training. Although, the interview data revealed that the director of the NCATE-accredited program approached the questions in terms of curriculum's alignment with the TESOL standards and the other director seemed to be fixated on State mandates, both of them appeared to be consistently ambivalent about and displeased with having to respond to these two agencies.

While discussing the strengths/weakness, opportunities, and curriculum focus of her program, the director from the non-NCATE accredited program (Jennifer) complained about the limited number of credit hours that

are considered adequate by the State for a person to become certified in ESL. She also explained how arduous and time-consuming it was for her to juggle between the State mandates and the university curriculum while also expressing mixed feeling about NCATE accreditation. For example, she said:

It is inconceivable that the State presumes that one can become an ESL teacher by taking 16 credits about the field... like it's some sort of *phony* (Emphatic tone) profession... If the State wants to do something, other than asking us to fill in hundreds of senseless tables, they should pass laws and make certificate an undergraduate degree program. With only 16 credits, it is hard to make an argument for a quality education... It gets even worse when all we do is just constantly juggle between the State reqs. and the department curriculum.

Similarly, the notions of credit-hour inadequacy in endorsement programs and the role of faculty's professional training versus the obligation to comply with external mandates seemed to resonate with the NCATE-accredited program director as well, when he stated:

If curriculum strength equals being State and NCATE approved, we are... but if you ask me the add-on ESL certificate programs are weak by default because the credit hours are just insufficient. Instead of working on how/if the content about certain competencies can be built sequentially or integratedly, and use our professional training, we just put a check mark next to the information if it's *covered* (uses quotation marks with hand gestures) in other course in the department... I wish we didn't have to do either State or NCATE but if we could just do one of them, I'd choose NCATE because from my personal experience I know the reviewers at TESOL know about the field more than the State staff.

As for the EFL programs, the interview results suggested that both of the program directors agreed on the Turkish ELTE program curricula being remarkably weak in four major areas, including 1) lack of practical training that would give teacher candidates opportunities of application, 2) negative impact of the invalid admission test, which lacks oral and written proficiency identification, 3) the HEC mandates that dictate over 85% of the curriculum, and 4) excessive number of students, which makes it hard to provide certain practicum services. Some of these weaknesses were apparent in Seyfi's responses when he said:

The current situation of ELT program curriculum in Turkey shows a great weakness in terms of putting into practice the students' language and field knowledge... Students should practice how to put all of these methods and techniques into practice in real life. Another weakness of ELT programs is that after graduation, students cannot speak English fluently... The curriculum could have more practicum but with over 100 students, how can you do that?

Moreover, the programs directors reported to believe that no matter how strong the curriculum is teacher candidates would not benefit from it due to their lack of proficiency in some English skills. In the current system, teacher candidates are able to join ELTE programs by passing a test that includes only grammar, vocabulary, and reading skills, drastically lacking predictive validity as far as proficiency in written and oral English is concerned. They also complained about the HEC's top-down intervention in their curriculum. For example, in his interview responses Cemile commented:

...This reminds me of predictive validity. The content of a test implies that students will need to use the tested skills in the future. So, no writing and speaking on the entrance exam means students will not use those skills in ELT programs? Most most (repeated the word for emphasis) students come to us with extremely little proficiency in listening, speaking and writing skills... So, should we blame the government for the test or the HEC for not acknowledging this in the curriculum. It's the HEC's curriculum!

7.3. Teacher Candidates' Perceptions about the Current Situation of Their Curricula?

As for the ESL teacher candidates, like the program directors, they also agreed that their program curriculum was inadequate; yet their justifications were strikingly different from those of the program directors. Both teacher candidates underscored 1) the curriculum being loaded with dense knowledge for people with no background 2) while also complaining about the inadequate practicum opportunity in the curriculum. For instance, Kate, from the non-NCATE accredited program relayed:

I really struggled the first semester. It's kind of hard to take in all the information in the program in a short period of time. I'm a biology teacher and had never taken any courses on Linguistics, SLA and so on... It was really hard to process and connect the information with actual experiences of ELLs... I was expecting more focus on practical applications. I didn't get to practice what I learned in just one-credit practicum.

The perceptions of Judy, a teacher candidate in the TESOL-accredited program, about her program curriculum were rather similar to Kate's perceptions even though her program was in a remotely different State with a drastically different ELL population. She, too, wished for more practicum and conveyed her struggle with the dense curriculum. For example, she stated:

The curriculum covers a lot of things. I thought it would be easy... take 5 courses and get my certificate but the content was like from another planet. It was really challenging because I didn't have any prior knowledge... I wish half the curriculum was about knowledge and half was just practice, which was very (empathetic) little.

Results revealed that some of the perceptions of EFL teacher candidates about their program curricula were strikingly similar to those of their program directors, which included lack of 1) focus on building strong English language skills, particularly oral proficiency, and 2) opportunity to put into practice the knowledge and theory they gain in the program. In responding to the interview questions, one of the EFL teacher candidates at a private university, Feride said:

In my opinion ELT programs in Turkey are prepared to teach the knowledge *of* (emphatic) English rather than the knowledge *about* (emphatic) how it works or how to use it... Since there is a focus on theoretical knowledge of English, students have advanced skills in grammar; however, there is a need for practicing the language in order to be proficient speakers.

Teacher candidates' perceptions regarding the lack of practice opportunities in the curriculum were not only consistent across all interviewees but also echoed some of the accounts of their program directors. They complained about both the length and quality of the limited practice experience in the curriculum. Indeed, the issue of practicum that has recently been vociferously expressed in teacher education research around the world (Darling-Hammond, 2006) seemed to be justified both by the ESL and EFL teacher candidates in this study. For example, Husamettin, a teacher candidate in a public ELTE program stated:

I think that the importance of practice should be taken into consideration. The effectiveness of the courses is more important than credit hours. EFL students should be competent in how to use different teaching methods. To learn about each method in the field is important but the information becomes unimportant if we don't know how to apply them during lessons. I think we must divide the hours for theory and application.

8. Discussion

8.1. ELTE and ESL Program Curricula

All of these add-on ESL teacher certification programs in the US covered content related to the 11 standards listed under the five TESOL domains in their curricula with some variation in the organization and alignment of the content primarily due to the university core curriculum, NCATE accreditation, and State mandates. The courses were offered in 15 to 18 credit hours with one or three credits involving some sort of practicum. The ELTE programs in Turkey, on the other hand, commonly offered instructional coursework related to eight main competency areas, including language skills, linguistics, EFL methods, SLA, literature, practicum, foreign language, and educational core. The credit hour allocation for each competency and the total number of credit hours required for program completion (132) seemed to be rather homogenous across the ELTE programs due to the strict HEC mandates.

In terms of how the curriculum was organized around different courses, the ESL teacher certification programs in the US seemed to show some variation depending on whether or not the program was NCATE accredited. Given controversies around national accreditation in teacher education (Johnson, Johnson, Farenga, & Ness, 2005), this result is interesting in that it indicates that NCATE-accredited programs appeared to be more coherent as they aligned courses directly with TESOL standards. This result was further corroborated with our

review of the structure of major competencies in the [TESOL/NCATE \(2010\)](#) manual as compared with the State manuals, which seemed to be rather haphazardly organized. Note that for the non-NCATE accredited programs, State mandates constituted the basis for structure and alignment.

The Turkish ELTE program curricula included very little to no content about three of the five TESOL domains, including *culture*, *assessment*, and *professionalism*. While one can understand possible reasons behind some of these differences (e.g., most EFL teachers need to improve their English; thus ELTE programs offer language classes), it is hard, for example, to argue that EFL teachers do not need to a strong background in the role of culture in L2 development, or basic knowledge and skills related to L2 assessment and evaluation, or professional and pedagogical responsibilities. In fact some of these areas have been identified in some previous research as weaknesses of ELTE programs in Turkey ([Akyel, 2012](#); [Altan, 2006](#); [Kirkgoz, 2007](#)).

8.2. Perceptions about ESL and ELTE Program Curricula

Perceptions of the ESL and ELTE program directors were centered around rather different concerns while discussing weaknesses of their curricula. The ESL program directors reported discontent that the curriculum was a product of obligations to comply with the accreditation and State agencies not their professional expertise while also pointing to the fact that 15 to 18 credits should not be enough to certify someone as a teacher. The concerns of the ELTE program directors in Turkey were somewhat more comprehensive than those of the ESL directors in that they varied from the validity of the government-mandated program admission test to the size of student population to the amount of practical training and the HEC control over the curriculum design. One notion that the program directors and the teacher candidates in both settings, consistently underscored was the lack of practical application in the ESL and ELTE curricula.

An area that the program directors in both of these settings unanimously problematized was the obligation to report to external accreditation or government agencies, which they interpreted as time-consuming and lack of respect for their professional training. This finding supports previous research on the role of accreditation in ESL teacher education in the US ([Johnson et al., 2005](#)) as well as ELTE programs in Turkey ([Akyel, 2012](#); [Altan, 2006](#); [Kirkgoz, 2007](#); [Simsek & Yildirim, 2001](#)). As far as the perceptions of the ESL program directors versus those of their teacher candidates were concerned, no similar themes emerged. It seemed that each group only approached the strengths and weakness of their curriculum from personal experience perspective with almost no empathy for the other. Thus, it was interesting that the ESL teacher candidates consistently expressed lack of practicum and their struggles with taking 15 to 18 credits in one year without background in the field whereas their program directors wanted more power over the curriculum while also asking the endorsement nature of the programs to be altered into a 4-year undergraduate degree.

On the other hand, some perceptions of EFL program directors regarding their program curricula were quite similar to those of their teacher candidates. For example both of these groups, the service providers and the clientele, agreed that their curriculum offered inadequate number of practicum hours, a weakness previously identified by some researchers both in the Turkish context ([Coskun & Daloglu, 2010](#)) and other international teacher education settings ([Darling-Hammond & Branson, 2005](#)). In addition, both groups acknowledged that the teacher candidates did not have high levels of English proficiency. These findings corroborate some previous research that teacher candidates are admitted into the ELTE programs without adequate English proficiency ([Coskun & Daloglu, 2010](#); [Kirkgoz, 2007](#); [Sert, 2010](#)). Nonetheless, the two groups' perceptions differed when stating justifications for English deficiency; the teacher candidates blamed the program for it whereas the program directors held the grammar and reading-oriented admission test.

9. Conclusion and Implications

Results of this study offer some implications that could potentially strengthen the curricula of EFL and ESL teacher education programs. For example, it is rather obvious that both ESL and EFL programs need more practicum hours. Although some of these implications include policy change by the respective governments others involve the teacher education institutions and K-12 schools. These constituencies may seem independent of each other; however, it is clear that a seamless collaboration among them is central to ensure quality in L2 teacher education regardless of the setting-related factors. Indeed, results of this study clearly indicated that program directors and teacher candidates do not see curriculum as a well-written prescribed document; rather, they argued for the learning outcomes resulting from the implemented curriculum. Nonetheless, some of these implications

may be peculiar to an ESL or EFL program.

As per the critical accounts of both the service providers and their customers, it is clear that the ESL teacher education programs need more credit hours, especially for practicum, to prepare competent teachers. Indeed, turning these programs into 4-year undergraduate degrees may be a good option to consider. There needs to be a more balanced and coherent system in place amongst the State and the accreditation mandates and the faculty expertise in terms of how the contents of the curriculum are determined and how they are aligned with the required domains and competencies. As for the EFL program curricula, first, more coverage regarding the three substantially neglected competencies, which include *culture*, *assessment*, and *professional responsibilities*, is critically needed. Second, the admission test must be reconsidered to include writing and oral components. Third, the HEC should allocate more power to the programs in terms of curriculum design while also initiating an accreditation system that monitors the quality of these programs on continuous bases. Fourth, the ELTE programs should offer more effective English learning courses to help improve oral proficiency of their candidates. Finally, the number of practicum hours should be increased and a strong collaboration between EFL programs and the K-12 schools must be built to make the experience more meaningful for the teacher candidates.

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