

Chapter 9

A Follow-Up Inquiry on the Evaluation of an English Language Teaching Master's Program in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides evaluation of an English language teaching master's program and investigates the changes the program has gone through since. The program at issue is offered by the Graduate School of Educational Sciences at a foundation (non-profit, private) university in Istanbul, Turkey. The study particularly questions the preferences of the students about joining this program as well as analyzing their perceptions along with the course instructors and program coordinator. The sample population was comprised of 50 students, 5 instructors, and 1 program coordinator. Data was obtained through a questionnaire and reflective essays. The findings revealed that the program was effective regarding the content as well as the role of instructors which contributed to the professional development. However, the range of elective courses and balance between course loads needed more consideration for the redesign of the existing program. This follow-up inquiry tackles the adjustments implemented after the initial evaluation and discusses the changes made in accordance with its results.

INTRODUCTION

Learning and teaching English language has been highly appraised all around the world, placing greater emphasis on the effectiveness of language teacher education programs and their share on raising qualified language teachers (Block & Cameron, 2002; Freeman, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Harmer, 2008; Hinkel, 2011; Cook, 2013). As foreign language skills are profoundly important in any realm like education,

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industry, medicine, technology, or science; quality of language education programs plays a big role in keeping up with the worldwide advancements as it is actually a prerequisite to be on the same wavelength with others in the international arena. As with everything, language education programs need to be revised and improved in time to be able to keep up to date and not end up being obsolete and inadequate. Since learner needs, motives, and styles change constantly, it is a must for language education programs to meet all these requirements and stay effective. To ensure required quality in existing language education programs, systematic evaluation in multiple steps should be conducted.

The field of program evaluation has evolved over the past half century, referring to the thoughtful process of focusing on questions and topics of concern, collecting appropriate information, and then analyzing and interpreting the information for a specific use and purpose (Brown, 1995; Lynch, 1996; Posavac & Carey, 2003; Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). As in other fields, program evaluation has an important role in teacher education programs showing the necessary steps to be taken to fix and enhance current programs besides helping program designers create safe guidelines for future programs. According to Wallace (1991), teacher education programs should have steady and established principles which are followed throughout the implementation of the curriculum and any application done within the program. While defining these principles which basically constitute the goals of the program, program features and instructional setting should be taken into account as well as students' needs, preferences, characteristics and attitudes (Mede, 2012). Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1998) support and further this statement indicating that it is a very fundamental part of the program and takes place at the center of it. Briefly, any practice within instruction should be shaped accordingly, to reach wanted competence and proficiency level.

Since evaluation has gained attention in education, a great deal of evaluation studies that differ in terms of their purposes, emphasis and methodologies have been conducted in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The primary emphasis of these studies was mostly on evaluating perceptions, needs, feelings and attitudes of the students and teachers engaged in undergraduate or language preparatory programs (Basturkmen & Al-Huneidi, 1996; Ekici, 2003; Sarı, 2003; Mutlu, 2004; Erozan, 2005; Ors, 2006; Ozkanal, 2009; Akyel & Ozek, 2010; Tunc, 2010; Mede, 2012). However, as graduate studies are of upper degree and basically require the most contemporary and outstanding quality education, evaluation in these types of programs should not be ignored. As stated by Richards (2005), for an English language teaching master program to be effective enough, there are some points to be queried such as whether the goals are fulfilled, stakeholders in education are contented, it is compatible with setting in which teaching occurs, and it is any better than its equivalents.

Taking all these into consideration, there is an apparent need to conduct evaluative studies concerning graduate programs in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) since they play a crucial role in teacher education and preparing candidates to become more effective teachers or teacher educators. Therefore, the present chapter aims to present a further inquiry to systematically evaluate an ELT master program at a foundation (non-profit private) university in İstanbul, Turkey by investigating the major preferences and the encouraging determinants of the students about joining the program, examining how far it addresses their needs in relation to program goals, content, instruction, resources and outcomes, teacher roles, major strengths and weaknesses of the program. In addition to that, the chapter analyzes the recent changes made to the program based on the findings of initial evaluation process.

The findings of this research were used to provide in-depth information regarding the effectiveness of the program suggesting sound guidelines for further improvement. The results were examined in detail and adjustments have been made to the program considering the weaknesses and strengths highlighted

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