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## **EPOSTL: REVISITING THE ROLES OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS AT A RECENTLY ESTABLISHED ELT DEPARTMENT**

*Research Article*

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# EPOSTL: REVISITING THE ROLES OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS AT A RECENTLY ESTABLISHED ELT DEPARTMENT

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## Abstract

The present study investigated the self-perceptions of student teachers on the role of language teachers stated in the EPOSTL at a recently established ELT department in a public university. The descriptors in the Role of the Language Teacher part of the EPOSTL were adapted into five-point Likert-type items changing from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The quantitative inquiry was employed to the data through computer software. The first research question was answered through percentages (%) and frequencies (f); the other two research questions were answered through Independent-Samples T-Test by comparing the means ( $\bar{X}$ ) and standard deviations (SD). The results were reported descriptively at the end. According to the results, some of the student teachers of ELT had difficulty in relating theory and practice, giving constructive feedback and accepting feedback, conducting action researches to solve classroom problems, and following the scientific documents in language teaching. Based on the results, several pedagogical implications that can be implemented for the forthcoming ELT classes at the department were suggested.

*Keywords:* EPOSTL, teacher roles, ELT, EFL.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The EPOSTL

The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) brought together the items on self-assessment regarding language teaching qualifications which aim at student teachers of languages. Though some of the items in the EPOSTL are questionable (Arıkan, 2016), it has been widely accepted in education programs of language teachers as a standard self-assessment tool regarding language teaching practices. Since the attention to teacher training programs began to hold an indispensable role in education policies of the countries which strictly follow advancements across the world, the application of standard documents of this kind gained importance in order not to fall behind developed counterparts.

The EPOSTL as a standard document not only addresses to student teachers of languages to assess their didactic knowledge and competences, skills but also helps them to monitor themselves and record their experiences throughout their education in language teaching to become autonomous teachers (Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008; Newby, 2012). Developed as an end product of a program conducted by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) of the Council of Europe (CoE) and published in 2007, the EPOSTL consists of six main sections:

- *Personal Statement*
- *Self-Assessment*
- *Dossier*
- *Glossary of Terms*
- *Index*



- *Users' Guide (EPOSTL; p.5)*

Personal Statement part requires student teachers to reconsider themselves on common questions in connection to teaching prior to their education; Self-Assessment Part presents descriptors in the form of 'can-do' statements for student teachers to assess themselves; Dossier part requires student teachers to provide examples from their teaching practices to make their self-assessment more transparent; Glossary part defines the key terms operated in the EPOSTL; Index part shows the locations of the terms to help student teachers; and lastly, Users' Guide provides comprehensive information to student teacher about the EPOSTL (EPOSTL; p.5). The competences required from a language teacher are reflected through 193 descriptors under seven broad categories, which are namely: Context, Methodology, Resources, Lesson Planning, Conducting a Lesson, Independent Learning, and Assessment of Learning. These categories further are divided into sub-categories consisting of descriptors which address a language teaching principle (EPOSTL; p.6). The following are some of the examples in the EPOSTL for student teachers:

- *Aims and Needs: "I can take into account differing motivations for learning another language." (EPOSTL, descriptor 3, p. 16).*

- *Listening: "I can help learners to apply strategies to cope with the difficult or unknown vocabulary of a text." (EPOSTL, descriptor 7, p. 25).*

- *Grammar: "I can use grammatical metalanguage if and when appropriate to the learners' needs." (EPOSTL, descriptor 4, p. 27).*

- *Using Lesson Plans: "I can finish off a lesson in a focused way." (EPOSTL, descriptor 6, p. 39).*

## **1.2. The roles of a language teacher**

Our century witnessed critical changes in terms of the roles of language teachers in a way that affecting whole teaching and learning processes. The developments in technology and their reflections in conventional classrooms, in which we can see smartboards in most of them, have been tremendous. In this circumstance, transformations in teacher behaviors in classrooms seem inevitable fact. Nowadays, the roles of language teachers are quite different from those colleagues who taught 30 years ago. Controller, prompter, participant, resource, and tutor etc. whatever we are, either consciously or subconsciously we need to make decisions continuously to provide the most appropriate teaching and learning contexts for our students (Harmer, 2007).

The EPOSTL provides ten descriptors on the role of a language teacher for student teachers of languages, and, through these descriptors, they can reflect upon their language teaching competences. The descriptors provide a general description of the roles expected from language teachers, and they can assess their teaching practices accordingly. Promoting the importance of language learning to the parties, appreciating the value of cultural diversity in classrooms, approving the previous language learning experiences of students, relating theory and practice in teaching, assessing teaching in terms of experience, feedback and outcomes, assessing teaching in terms of theoretical principles, accepting feedback from colleagues and providing feedback to colleagues on teaching, reaching important scholarly documents on teaching and learning, and conducting action researches to enhance teaching practices are among the roles of a language teacher defined in descriptors of the EPOSTL (EPOSTL, p.17-18).

The current study is an important one in terms of both its scope and target group studied. The student teachers of a recently established ELT department at a public university and their perceptions of themselves in the shoes of a language teacher hold crucial importance in terms of evaluating the contents of the courses in the department in order to enhance quality of the practices not to fall behind the ELT departments which are relatively more experienced considering their foundation years. For this reason, three research questions of this study, which are based on perceptions, gender, and preparatory class education (PCE), can be sequenced as follows:

1. What are the self-perceptions of pre-service ELT teachers on the roles of language teachers in terms of EPOSTL descriptors?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference between the male and female participants' self-perceptions on the roles of language teachers stated in the EPOSTL descriptors?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between the self-perceptions of the participants who attended one year of PCE and those who did not in terms of the roles of language teachers stated in the EPOSTL descriptors?

## 2. Literature review

The EPOSTL has been applied in many countries such as Japan, Turkey, Kazakhstan though it was intended for the student teachers of languages across Europe (Mirici, 2015; Newby, Fenner & Jones, 2011; Seitova, 2017; Takagi, 2015). As this is the case, the researcher tried to provide some research results from different language teacher training contexts.

Cindrić, Andraka, and Bilić-Štefan (2015) reported the results of the EPOSTL implementation as an integral part of ELT courses carried out at a teacher training program for several years. They presented the findings from student teachers' feedback in relation to the application of the EPOSTL and reported the problematic aspects for the student teachers. Also, Mirici and Hergüner (2015) discussed and provided several useful suggestions regarding the functions and efficiency of implementation of the portfolio in two different language teaching programs, German and English, at a public university. The results indicated that the implementation of the EPOSTL contributed to the development of metacognitive strategies of student teachers to become autonomous learners and this can be sequenced among the important factors which lead language teachers to adopt the principles of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in their teaching practices. Similarly, Hoxha and Tafani (2015) described the application of the EPOSTL in a university in Albania and shared the experiences of student-teachers and lecturers. They collected the data through two questionnaires implemented before and after the application of the EPOSTL. They reported that students had difficulties at the beginning of the EPOSTL applications and they consulted experts. Also, they expressed that while half of the student-teachers found the EPOSTL beneficial. Furthermore, some student-teachers stated that academic staff had insufficient knowledge of the EPOSTL. Additionally, Scahuber (2015) studied the role of dialogical reflection in the EPOSTL application for awareness-raising in teacher training at a university in Switzerland. The results reported that the EPOSTL not only enhanced the valuable didactic knowledge for dialogic and reflection processes, it also presented more scaffolded reflection opportunities through its components.

The studies also focused on the nature of the EPOSTL itself and its application beyond the pre-service teacher training programs. For example, Bergil and Sarıçoban (2017) studied 4th-grade student teachers' self-efficacy levels at an ELT department of a public university. They

adapted the EPOSTL into a Likert-type scale with 5 points and applied it 38 student teachers. They suggested the integration of the EPOSTL to teacher training programs to have more reflective and efficient processes for student teachers. Additionally, Seitova (2017) investigated in-service ELT teachers' opinions on the EPOSTL practice in advocating professional development at an international university in Kazakhstan. The qualitative data of the study were collected through interviews and analyzed via thematic analysis. The results came up with the positive views of the participants on the EPOSTL in connection to self-assessment and self-reflection features. The results also recommended the EPOSTL implementations for in-service language teachers.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

The study comprised 32 participants in total. The details with regard to the demographic profiles of the participants were presented in the following table (Table 1) as follows:

Table 1. *Demographic Profiles of the Participants*

Profiles		n	%
Gender	Male	6	18.8
	Female	26	81.3
	Total	32	100.0
Age	22	13	40.6
	23	13	40.6
	24	5	15.6
	25/above	1	3.1
	Total	32	100.0
PCE	Yes	24	75
	No	8	25
	Total	32	100.0
Graduated School Type	Anatolian High School	18	56.3
	Teac. Tra. A. H. S.	5	15.6
	Other Types of H. S.	9	28.1
	Total	32	100.0

There were 6 male participants (18.8%) and 26 female participants (81.3%); 40.6% (n=13) of the participants were at the age of 22, 40.6% (n=13) of the participants were at the age of 23, 15.6% (n=5) of the participants were at the age of 24 and 3.1% (n=1) of the participants were at the age of 25 and above. 75% (n=24) of these participants attended one year of extensive PCE at the school of foreign languages prior to their faculty education. 18 participants (56.3%) graduated from Anatolian high schools, 5 participants (15.6%) graduated from teacher training Anatolian high schools, lastly, 9 participants (28.1%) graduated from other types of high schools.

### 3.2. Data collection

The data were collected from the pre-service teachers of a recently established ELT department of a public university. The data were collected after all of the exams in the department were finalized and before their graduation ceremony. At this point, the data obtained from the participants were extremely valuable as the students were the first ones who would graduate as language teachers of English. Responses of the students would both reflect the language education program at the faculty and enable the lecturers to see whether there were problematic points in their processes.

### 3.3. Instrument

The researcher adapted the ten items in the Role of the Language Teacher part of the EPOSTL (2007; p. 17-18) into five-point Likert-type items ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree to see the student teachers' views on the self- assessment items. The researcher graded the items as 'strongly agree=5', 'agree=4', 'undecided=3', 'disagree=2' and 'strongly disagree=1'.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The researcher employed a quantitative inquiry into the data through computer software. Percentages (%) and frequencies (f) regarding the responses of the student teachers were presented via descriptive statistics to answer the first research question. Independent-Samples T-Test was implemented to the data in order to compare the means ( $\bar{X}$ ) and standard deviations (SD) to answer the second and third research questions of the study. Finally, the results were reported descriptively.

## 4. Results

The self-perceptions of student ELT teachers on the language teacher roles in terms of EPOSTL descriptors were investigated in the first research question. The results regarding the self-perceptions of the pre-service ELT teachers were presented in the following table (Table, 2) as follows:

Table 2. *Pre-service ELT teachers' self-perceptions on the role of language teachers*  
(SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, U=Undecided, A= Agree, SA=Strongly Agree)

Item	SD		D		U		A		SA		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1.Item	-	-	1	3.1	-	-	25	78.1	6	18.8	32	100
2.Item	-	-	-	-	2	6.3	24	75	6	18.8	32	100
3.Item	-	-	1	3.1	5	15.6	23	71.9	3	9.4	32	100
4. Item	-	-	2	6.3	7	21.9	18	56.3	5	15.6	32	100
5. Item	-	-	-	-	6	18.8	19	59.4	7	21.9	32	100
6. Item	-	-	1	3.1	6	18.8	21	65.6	4	12.5	32	100
7. Item	-	-	2	6.3	5	15.6	15	46.9	10	31.3	32	100
8. Item	-	-	-	-	8	25	15	46.9	9	28.1	32	100
9. Item	-	-	3	9.4	9	28.1	16	50	4	12.5	32	100
10. Item	1	3.1	-	-	7	21.9	20	62.5	4	12.5	32	100

The first item investigated the preservice ELT teachers' perspectives on whether they can encourage all parties to learn a language. The results showed that most of the participants agreed with the statement (A=78.1%, SA=18.8%). Only one of the participants disagreed

with the statement (D=3.1%). The second item investigated the participants' perspectives on the appreciation of the value given to the classroom by students coming from different cultures. Most of the participants agreed with the statement (A=75%, SA=18.8%). Only two of the participants expressed that they were undecided (U=6.3%). The third item investigated the participants' views on whether they can estimate the learners have already background knowledge of a language or languages and they can benefit from this prior knowledge in learning a new language or languages. Most of the participants agreed with the statement (A=71.9%, SA=9.4%). Only one of the participants disagreed (D=3.1%) and five participants were undecided on the statement (U=15.6%). The fourth item investigated the participants' views on whether they can relate their language environments to the language learning theories etc. Eighteen of the participants agreed on the statement (A=56.3%) and five of the participants strongly agreed on the statement (15.6%). Seven participants were undecided on the statement (U=21.9%) and two participants disagreed with the statement (D=6.3%). The fifth item investigated the participants' views on whether they can reflect their teaching experience critically and adapt their teaching practices accordingly. Nineteen of the participants agreed on the statement (A=59.4%) and seven participants strongly agreed on the statement (SA=21.9%). Six participants were undecided (U=18%). The sixth item investigated the participants' views on whether they can critically evaluate their teaching practices within the light of the principles of related theories. Twenty-one participants agreed (A=65.6%) and 4 participants strongly agreed on the statement (SA=12.5%). One participant disagreed with the statement (D=3.1%) and six participants were undecided (U=18.8%). The seventh item investigated the participants' views on whether they can value the feedback of their colleagues to reflect them in their teaching practices. Fifteen participants agreed (A=46.9%) and ten participants strongly agreed with the statement (SA=31.3%). Five participants were undecided (U=15.6%) and two participants disagreed with the statement (D=6.3%). The eighth item investigated the participants' views on whether they can observe their colleagues' teaching practices in terms of methodological perspectives and provide them with feedback. Fifteen participants agreed (A=46.9%) and nine participants strongly agreed with the statement (SA=28.1%). Eight participants were undecided on the statement (U=25%). The ninth item investigated participants' views on whether they can search for scientific studies regarding language teaching and learning practices. Sixteen participants agreed (A=50%) and four participants strongly agreed with the statement (SA=12.5%). Nine participants were undecided (U=28.1%), and three participants disagreed with the statement (D=9.4%). Lastly, the tenth item investigated the participants' views on whether they can carry out action researches regarding with their teaching practices. Twenty participants agreed (A=62.5%) and four participants strongly agreed with the statement (SA=12.5%). Seven participants were undecided (U=21.9%) and only one participant strongly disagreed with the statement (SD= 3.1%). Overall, the results showed that the first item was most agreed item in the scale (A=78.1%, SA=18.8%), the ninth item was the most undecided item (U=28.1%) and only one of the participants chose strongly disagree option (10. Item).

The second research question investigated whether there was a significant difference between the male and female participants' self-perceptions on the role of language teacher in terms of the EPOSTL descriptors. The results regarding the second research question were presented in the following table (Table 3) as follows:

Table 3. *The participants' self-perceptions on the role of language teachers in terms of the EPOSTL descriptors*

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	S	SD	t	p
Male	6	3.85	0.47	30	0.64	.52*
Female	26	3.95	0.34			

\*p&gt;0.05

According to the table (Table 3), there was no statistically significant difference between the female participants and male participants in terms of their views on the role of language teacher  $t(30)=0.64$ ,  $p>0.05$ . The mean score of female students' views on the role of a language teacher ( $\bar{X}=3.95$ ) was higher than the mean score of the male participants' views on the role of a language teacher ( $\bar{X}=3.85$ ). This showed that gender did not affect students' views on the role of a language teacher.

The third research question investigated whether attending one year of PCE was a contributor to the participants' self-perceptions on the role of language teacher in terms of the EPOSTL descriptors. The results of the analyses regarding this research question were presented in table (Table 4) as follows:

Table 4. *The participants' self-perceptions on the role of language teachers in terms of the EPOSTL descriptors*

PCE	N	$\bar{X}$	S	SD	t	p
Yes	24	3.91	0.36	30	0.66	.51*
No	8	4.01	0.36			

\*p&gt;0.05

According to the table (Table 4), attending one year of extensive PCE before ELT department at the education faculty did not affect participants' views on the role of language teacher  $t(30)=0.66$ ,  $p>0.05$ . The mean score of the participants who attended PCE before ELT department at the education faculty ( $\bar{X}=3.91$ ) was lower than the mean score of the participants who did not attend PCE before ELT department at the education faculty ( $\bar{X}=4.01$ ). This showed that attending or not attending one year of extensive PCE before ELT department at the education faculty did not affect students' views on the role of a language teacher.

## 5. Discussion

The current study investigated the student teachers' self-perceptions on the role of the language teachers through the descriptors proposed in the EPOSTL. Detailed analyses regarding the participants' responses revealed the student teachers' self-perceptions on the roles of language teachers at a recently established ELT department. It can be stated that the current study contributed to the previous studies by handling an aspect of the EPOSTL, which was not dealt with previously. For example, Burkert and Schwienhorst (2008) expressed that the descriptors can enhance student teachers' awareness towards teaching. Likewise, Mirici and Hergüner (2015) suggested the application of the documents of CEFR and ELP in addition to EPOSTL in language teacher education programs to encourage learner autonomy, multiculturalism, and self-assessment. Similarly, Hoxa and Tafani (2015) stated EPOSTL as a fundamental guide in training student teachers of languages. Schaubert (2015)

and, later on, Bergil and Sariçoban (2017) mentioned its importance as a reflection tool in teacher education programs. Lastly, Seitova (2017) reported the application of the EPOSTL as an instrument in enhancing in-service language teachers' professional developments. With this study, a neglected aspect of the EPOSTL, the roles of language teachers, was searched and discussed in order to increase the efficiency of the course contents at the ELT department to eliminate the problematic issues within the light of the findings.

## **6. Conclusion**

The present study can be regarded as an important one dealing with the roles of language teachers, one of the neglected aspects of the EPOSTL, since the literature did not indicate a similar study beforehand. Previous studies focused on the aspects of the EPOSTL such as autonomy (Burkert & Schwienhorst, 2008), efficiency of the EPOSTL (Mirici & Hergüner, 2015), self-assessment (Seitova 2017), culture (Arıkan & Zorba, 2016), application of the EPOSTL in electronic setting (Mirici & Demirbaş, 2013). The findings of the current study can contribute to forthcoming studies to be conducted in the area.

Three main issues, which seem to be problematic and need to be dealt with according to the views of several prospective ELT teachers at the end of their faculty education, can be concluded from the results. Firstly, finding appropriate theories regarding language teaching and learning that can help teaching practices can be regarded as a point that several student teachers were in need of help in their future career. Secondly, accepting feedback from the peers or providing feedback to the peers in terms of the teaching practices can be considered another important factor that several student teachers did not express positive views. Lastly, conducting an action research to enhance the pedagogical processes in teaching and relating the didactic issues with the current literature were among the problematic issues for several students.

In conclusion, relating theory and practice in language teaching appropriately, providing constructive feedback on the procedures, and reaching and following the scientific publications in language teaching and learning were the competencies that several prospective teachers were not satisfied in terms of the roles a language teacher proposed in the EPOSTL.

## **7. Pedagogical implications**

Several suggestions can be proposed for the departments which have similar problems. Primarily, the nature of language theories and their reflections on the language teaching and learning in terms of activities or practices can be handled in numerous ways in the classes at ELT departments to provide deep insights for the student teachers. Also, the effect of feedback on the efficiency of a language course can be acknowledged and student teachers' tolerance both to provide feedback to peers and accept feedback from peers or colleagues can be enhanced through sample activities provided in the classes. Lastly, how to carry out an action research to identify a pedagogic problem can be introduced in classes and several sample practices in language classes can be presented for the prospective language teachers.

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