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*Araştırma Makalesi ● Research Article*

# The Meaning of Research: Perceptions and Experiences of English Language Teaching (ELT) Students Regarding the 'Research Skills' Course*

## *Araştırmanın Anlamı: İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı Öğrencilerinin 'Araştırma Becerileri' Dersi ile İlgili Görüşleri ve Deneyimleri*

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ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, 2. sınıf ELT öğrencilerinin 2006 Müfredatında bulunan 'Araştırma Becerileri' dersi hakkındaki görüş ve deneyimlerini öğrenmektir. 2013-2014 Akademik Yılında, 101 öğrenciye açık uçlu soru formu uygulanmıştır. Veri, araştırma ve araştırma becerilerinin tanımı, dersin en etkin ve etkin olmayan yönleri olmak üzere 4 başlıkta tematik olarak analiz edilmiştir. Öğrenciler, araştırma ve araştırma becerilerini 'bilgi toplama' ve 'problem çözme' olarak, dersin etkin yönlerini 'makale ve örnek araştırma araçlarını analiz etme' ve en etkin olmayan yönlerini de 'soyut ders içeriği ve dersin dili' olarak tanımlamışlardır. Konunun değerlendirmesiyle ilgili görüşler ELT Müfredatıyla ilişkilendirilerek önerilmiştir.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to investigate the 2 nd year ELT Students' practices and perceptions about the 'Research Skills' Course in 2006 ELT Curriculum. Open-ended question form was employed and 101 students participated in the study in 2013-2014 Academic Year. Data were analysed thematically and 4 categories were emerged; namely, definition of research and research skills, the most and the least effective parts of the course. Students defined research and research skills as 'getting information', and 'solving problems'. They identified the most effective parts of the course as 'analysing articles and sample research instruments' and the least effective parts of it as 'the abstract content and language of the course'. Implications are suggested in relation to ELT Curriculum.

## 1. Introduction

Turkey has undergone two big teacher education reforms in 1998 and 2006. The earlier reform was basically about the increase of compulsory education from 5 to 8 years, where English language teaching started from the 4th grade and the other target was to lessen the theoretical load on teacher education courses. In the 1998 ELT Curriculum, 'Communicative Approach' fostering group or pair work which are focusing on information gap activities was heavily suggested (Kırkgöz, 2016). 1998 program also heavily emphasized the teaching practicum by introducing 3 courses, namely, 'School Experience I', 'School Experience II' and 'Teaching Practice' (YÖK, 1998). The second biggest

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restructuring in teacher education was introduced in 2006 ELT Curriculum. As a result, some new courses were added, and some removed, while some courses' terms were changed, and some courses' class hours and credits were increased or decreased. General culture and elective courses were increased and developing students' critical thinking, problem solving and lifelong learning skills were emphasised within the notion of Constructivism (YÖK, 2007).

2006 ELT Curriculum has been investigated by researchers (Coşgun Ögeyik, 2009; Coşkun and Daloğlu, 2010; Hismanoğlu, 2012; Karakaş, 2012; Akcan and Tatar, 2010; Kızıltan, 2011; Yavuz and Topkaya, 2013; Bayyurt and Akcan, 2016). In Coşgun Ögeyik's (2009) study, 3rd year pre-service English language teachers were asked about their opinions regarding the content of the program, course contents, course characteristics, and sufficiency of courses. The data revealed that while the practical aspects of the new program and the development of teaching and linguistic competences were identified as a positive change, the integration of culture specific courses was found problematic. In Coşkun and Daloğlu's (2010) study, student teachers did not find the pedagogic aspects of the new program adequate and the lecturers complained about the lack of linguistic components. Hişmanoğlu's (2012) study highlighted that new Curriculum failed to address higher thinking skills such as problem solving, creative thinking, and critical thinking. Karakaş's (2012) study, on the other hand, elicited that the program should be updated with a well-defined philosophy of teacher education and the introduction of culture-specific courses. The findings also revealed that microteaching activities should be increased, and reflective practice components should be incorporated into the program.

Kızıltan's (2011) study indicated that the pre-service teachers had positive opinions about the importance of language acquisition for their career. Akcan and Tatar's study (2010) found out the incompatible expectations and needs of the student teachers, school teachers (mentors) and faculty tutors regarding critical and reflective feedback. Akcan and Tatar (2010) suggested a closer relationship between schools and education faculties. Bayyurt and Akcan (2016) developed a course pack for ELT Curriculum to raise awareness of the teacher candidates, school teachers and teacher educators regarding the topics of English as Lingua Franca (ELF) and English as an International Language (EIL) which could be embedded in teaching practicum course either as an elective or compulsory component in the curriculum. Apart from ELF and EIL concepts; Akcan (2005) and Kırkgöz (2016) argue that multiple intelligences, content and language integrated learning, art and craft activities especially for young learners can also be addressed and alternative testing and evaluation methods such as portfolio keeping need to be emphasised in ELT Curriculum as these components were introduced in 2006 National Curriculum for mainstream teaching.

In 2006 ELT Curriculum, new courses like Effective Communication', 'Teaching Language Skills I and II', 'Drama', 'Public Service', and 'Public Speaking and Presentation' were added, some courses such as 'Turkish Sentence Structure' and 'School Experience' were removed while some courses' terms were changed or modified such as 'Contextual Grammar I and II', some courses' class hours or the sequence were increased or decreased namely, 'Second Language Acquisition' and 'Approaches in ELT I and II' and 'Research Skills'. Also, the courses were coded as Field Knowledge (FK), General Culture (GC) and Pedagogical Knowledge (PK) (YÖK, 2007). As Yavuz and Topkaya (2013) state; the courses in the first two year in the Curriculum, for instance 'Advanced Reading and Writing I and II', 'Contextual Grammar I and II', 'Language Acquisition', are allocated to the learning of content and pedagogical knowledge in theory while pedagogical content knowledge, i.e. how to teach English, is delivered in the 3rd and 4th years, teaching practicum being totally located in the 4th year.

In Yavuz and Topkaya's (2013: 71-74) study, the positive issues raised by the teacher educators were namely, the modified and new courses (Approaches I and II, 'Public Speaking and Presentation' and 'Public Service Course'); the convergence of the courses ('Course Book Analysis and Material Evaluation); the content of the courses and the increase in the teaching hours of some courses ('Specific Teaching Skills' and 'Contextual Grammar I and II). The negative issues were identified as the sequence of the courses; structure of the courses; removed courses; convergence of the courses; credit of the courses and the content of the courses. Participants reported that the 'Second Language Acquisition' course in the Spring Term, 2nd year, should have been placed before the 'Linguistics I' and 'Approaches and Methods in ELT I' in the Autumn Term, 2nd year, since theories of second language acquisition provide a background for linguistics and approaches and methods in ELT.

Removal of the 'School Experience I' and 'Advanced Writing Skills' from the 1st year and the convergence of 'Reading' and 'Writing' skills in the 1st year, allocating only 3 credits for the 'Listening and Pronunciation' course instead of 4 credits (2 Theory + 2 Practice) in the 2006 program were perceived negatively by the participants. The general issues were, on the other hand, about the lack of communication between faculties of education and the Higher Education Council (HEC); top-down approach to program preparation and evaluation; and problems about the student proficiency and standardization.

In Yavuz and Topkaya's (2013: 73) study the 'Research Skills' course received special attention from the teacher educators. They stated that this course should have been placed in the 3rd or 4th (the final) year with 4 credits (2 Theory+2 Practice) rather than in the Spring Term of the 2nd year with 2 credits (2 Theoretical hours) since *'students are not cognitively ready for this course in the early stages of their training and this course also requires practical hours to prepare small-scale research designs'* as one of the participants suggested. Another criticism concerning this course was about the coding of the course as a 'General Culture' rather than a 'Field Knowledge' course. As participants underlined *'the current code would suggest that it can be taught by non-ELT lecturers'* but as teacher educators highlighted teaching specific jargons and issues in English related to ELT is significantly important.

The scarcity of the relevant studies about research skills course and criticism received from the participants in the study mentioned above triggered the researcher's interest as

the course instructor and consequently, a qualitative case study is conducted aiming at investigating the 2 nd year ELT Students' practices and perceptions about the 'Research Skills' Course in 2006 ELT Curriculum. Hence, the research questions below are asked to enlighten the emergent issues:

RQ1: How do the 2nd year ELT students perceive the rationale and the procedures of the 'Research Skills' course in the ELT Curriculum?

RQ2: How do the 2nd year ELT students define the notions of 'research' and 'research skills'?

RQ3: How do the 2nd year ELT students evaluate the content and the procedures of the 'research skills' course?

a) The most effective parts of the research skills course? (If there are any)

b) The least effective parts of the research skills course? (If there are any)

In order to answer the questions above, open-ended question form was employed and 101 students, who were enrolled to the particular course participated in the study in 2013-2014 Academic Year, spring semester. In sections 1.1 and 1.2 below, the content and the procedures of the course will be introduced in order to present a concrete picture about the course content and implementations. In section 2, the rationale and the data collection procedure of the study will be explained. Section 3 will present the important highlights from the data and in section 4, the findings will be discussed by referring to related studies and 2006 ELT curriculum and some implications will be suggested regarding ELT teacher education program.

## 1.1. Approaches and Basic Designs to Educational Research

In this section the two research paradigms and basic research designs will be covered briefly as they are the primary focus of the 'Research Skills' course content. The meaning of research is summarised as *'seeking through methodical processes to expand knowledge and solve problems and systematic way of asking questions'* (Bell, 1993: 2). As Bell (1993: 5-6) states there are two competing research paradigms; namely Quantitative and Qualitative research. The former one seeks for one objective reality through predetermined design or model in order to test and replicate the theories and findings to generalise the results. The variables such as gender, education level and age can be compared among the groups. In Qualitative research, on the other hand; multiple realities, factors and social interaction, cases, events and participants' point of views and practices within more flexible and undetermined design or model without the aim of generalisation are investigated. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argue; '*qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings trying to make sense of and interpret in terms of people's point of view since relatability due to the context-bound nature of the data is much more important, whereas quantitative researchers are less concerned with such things and they seldom study the phenomena directly'* (Yavuz, 2012: 59; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

After discussing the meaning, advantages and disadvantages of the research paradigms; basic research designs, such as ethnography and case study are defined with examples. The ethnographic style examines society, culture or group in detail within process and therefore requires lengthy periods of time for data collection. This style highly depends on observation, field notes and interviews and if possible recordings and in some cases complete or partial integration of the researcher (Bell, 1993: 10). As they are highly qualitative, relatability rather than generalisation is the issue. Nunan (1992: 56) identifies 6 characteristics of ethnographic research; namely, contextual, unobtrusive as the researcher tries to avoid manipulating the phenomena under investigation, longitudinal because the research is relatively long-term, collaborative since the research involves the participation of stakeholders other than the researcher, interpretive due to context-bound nature and organic as there is interaction between questions and interpretation.

Büyüköztürk et al. (2016) argue that case studies are highly associated with qualitative paradigm and hence share common characteristics with ethnographic studies as they examine specific instance or situation, context, program, social group or a system. They collect detailed information to describe, evaluate and develop the life cycles and realities of participants (see also Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). Therefore, they are highly contextual with no aim of generalisation but relatability of circumstances where relevant.

Surveys are typically quantitative as they seek for generalisation with representative number of the participants regarding the specific topic. They are predetermined in their nature as questionnaires, schedules and checklists are used to collect data for finding the facts and to compare the variables among groups of participants. As Bell (1993) states, the Experimental Style deals with measurable phenomena through establishing a control and an experimental group which are matched for age, gender, grade and the number of participants. In a typical experimental study, pre-test and post-test are employed to measure, evaluate or compare the impact of the treatment (*i.e.* training program, course material) which is applied to the experimental group. This design is time sensitive and factor bound as they can affect the treatment process and/or the results (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016).

Action Research is mostly associated with the notion of teacher as a researcher because of the problem-solving nature of the design. Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) in Nunan (1992: 17) identify three aspects of action research which are '*it is carried out by practitioners rather than outside researchers, that is collaborative; and thirdly, that is aimed at changing things'*. The research questions arise from definition and analysis of the problems of the practitioners. This would result in collecting data, making adjustments and reflection which lead to improvement of practice and results are disseminated and the project itself forms an ongoing cycle. For example, a teacher researcher might focus on problems concerning learning-teaching process, teaching methods, learning strategies, classroom management and individual differences. Teacher-researchers can potentially solve out their own problems, produce knowledge and therefore they are engaged in reflective practice and professional development (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Mills, 2003; Büyüköztürk et al., 2016).

### 1.2. Methods of Data Collection and Constraints

After discussing the approaches and basic designs to educational research, the most common methods of data collection namely, interviews, observations, diaries and questionnaires are introduced in the course content and the notions of reliability and validity are also covered with examples from authentic research articles. The relationship between approaches and data collection methods is also highlighted. For example, interviews are typically qualitative with rich data and high response rate. They have advantages regarding following up ideas, probing responses, investigating motives and feelings through tone of voice, facial expressions and hesitations of participants. Yet, they are time-demanding and might be potentially subjective and because of the context-bound nature, generalisation is unavailable. They can be structured so the topic and questions are predetermined. In the semi structured ones, topic and questions are given but interviewer can change the topics and sequence, add new questions and use prompts. In the unstructured type loose topic is used as a framework (Bell, 1993; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Creswell, 1994).

Similarly, observations are also heavily qualitative with their context-bound nature. Observers can spot the significant events, characteristics of group or individuals and what is actually happening in practice. They are useful to analyse the content or process, interaction between individuals, nature of contributions and a specific aspect such as classroom interaction. Hence, they are used in ethnographic studies, qualitative case studies and action research. Like interviews, they are timely and subjectivity might be an issue especially if the observer is also a participant or a member of the life cycle (Creswell, 1994; Nunan, 1992).

Diaries share the similar characteristics with observations regarding the qualitative component. They are used to analyse a dilemma and critical incidents, enhance professional development and reflection, promote critical analysis in teaching and practice reflective inquiry in order to understand what has occurred in the teaching process through writing and keeping portfolios. They can potentially bridge the potential gap between theory and practice since they can provide time and space for reflection and confrontation with reasons, problems, feelings and thoughts (Bell, 1993; Creswell, 1994).

Questionnaires are typically quantitative therefore; generalisation is available through collecting data from a representative group of participants. Determining question type and order such as, verbal or open, list (selecting items), category (categories are given), ranking (ordering the items), scale, quantity (number is required) and grid (table or grid is given to record the answers) is highly important. Avoiding ambiguity and assumption, overlapping categories, double, leading, presuming, hypothetical and offensive questions are inevitable for piloting and administering the questionnaires (Bell, 1993: 77-78).

Apart from the data collection methods, notions of reliability and validity are discussed briefly with concrete examples from the research articles. As Bell (1993: 64) describes *"reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions"*. Three types of measuring reliability are covered in the course. The first one is the 'Test-retest' technique which is run by administering the same test sometime after the first. 'The alternate forms', on the other hand, is used where equivalent versions of the same items are given and results are correlated. Lastly, 'Split-half method' is administered where the items in the test are split into two matched halves and scores then correlated (Bell, 1993: 65). The 'Inter-reliability check' is about item analysis by two different raters which is used to cross-check the reliability of the topics or themes analysed by two researchers. Item number, clear and explicit instructions, wording, test takers' motivation, anxiety, attitudes, time of the day, place, physical conditions and attitude of the test givers can be important factors affecting reliability.

Bell (1993: 65) states that *'Validity tells us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe'*. If an item is unreliable, it also lacks validity. But a reliable item is not necessarily also valid. Content validity tries to find out answer to if test items are representing the attitudes or behaviour that is being measured. Büyüköztürk et al. (2016: 116-119) report that in the construct validity, the testing scores are cross-checked if they can measure the desired and planned concepts; such as the relationship between the test items and concepts (i.e. attitudes, motivation, skills). In the criterion validity, the test scores and criterion tests are correlated to see the relationship. Face validity, on the other hand, concerns with if the title, instructions and the layout of the test are reflecting the content of the test or not. Test items, rater bias, physical factors like noise, time of the day and test reliability are the important factors affecting validity (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016: 120).

Multi-method triangulation such as gathering data through interview and observation or multi-perspective triangulation through eliciting data from teachers and students, rating the tests by at least two raters, consulting expert views and most importantly employing pilot study in order to test the instrument prior to the main study are important phases for reliability, validity and objectivity (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008).

## 2. Methodology

The evaluation of the 2006 ELT Curriculum is studied by several researchers through teacher educators and students' opinions and practices. Yet, individual courses such as 'Research Skills', were not the subject of the studies if they were not specifically addressed by the participants. 'Research Skills' Course is one of the altered courses in 2006 ELT Curriculum. The particular course is allocated in the 2nd year, Spring Semester with 2 credits which used to be a course in the 3rd year, Spring Semester with 3 credits. This course is also coded as General Culture (GC) which suggests that it is not one of the main Field Knowledge (FK) courses which is regarded as a problematic issue by the participants in Yavuz and Topkaya's (2013) study. The scarcity of the relevant studies about research skills course and criticism received from the participants in the study mentioned above triggered the researcher's interest as the course instructor and consequently, a qualitative case study is conducted.

The aim of the study is to investigate the 2nd year ELT students' practices and perceptions about the 'Research Skills' Course such as the meaning of 'research' and

'research findings', content, construct and sequence of the particular course and also the goals, process of learning and teaching, evaluation of the course in terms of 2006 ELT Curriculum and teacher education. In the 'Research Skills' course, after discussing the meaning of research and approaches to educational research and general aspects of qualitative and quantitative research; other components of research such as generalisation, reliability and validity and ethics; research methods like observation, interview and diaries; designing and administering questionnaires; planning and conducting interviews, diaries, and observations are discussed (see Section 1.1 and 1.2). Research designs for instance, case study and ethnography, experimental studies are also covered. In the practical part of the course, sections and content of a research article or project such as the research topic, research questions, introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion and implications are investigated. Towards the end of the course; quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodology articles are analysed with special focus on research design and questions, findings, referencing and quotations.

Open-ended question form was employed at the end of the course, so that; students could express themselves freely in a more flexible manner. They were free to answer the questions in Turkish (the native tongue of the students) so that they could feel comfortable in expressing themselves. 101 ELT 2nd year students, who were enrolled to the particular course participated in the study in 2013-2014 Academic Year, Spring Semester. Majority of the students (84/101) filled out the questionnaire in Turkish. Data gathered in Turkish were translated into English and analysed thematically and students were consulted for member check reliability (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). As Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 134) define, the *constant comparative method* requiring inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning is used while categorising and coding. The categories were drawn from the questionnaires through *inductive coding* and *member check* (student feedback) in order to understand whether they were described accurately (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). The questions below were asked to students in order to understand and evaluate their practices and perceptions about the 'Research Skills' Course which embodied 4 thematic categories for the analysis of data.

Q1: Definition of research? Please explain.

Q2: Understanding of required research skills for conducting a particular research study? Please explain.

Q3: The most effective parts of the research skills course? (If there are any)

Q4: The least effective parts of the research skills course? (If there are any)

## 3. Findings

Questions in the open-ended question form embodied the natural themes and data were analysed thematically and 4 categories emerged; namely, definition of research and research skills, the most and the least effective parts of the course. The recurring data were grouped and presented in the table below. Table 1 below presents the recurring themes gathered from the data.

### 3.1. Definition of Research

Students defined research as 'getting information about a specific topic', 'finding out reasons regarding specific issues or problems', 'gathering and exploring data', 'solving problems in teaching or related issues', 'deep thinking', 'personal and cognitive development', 'understanding participants' ideas and experiences, 'checking up the reliability of knowledge', 'systematic study to get feedback regarding a certain topic' and 'learning process'. One of the students underlined the importance of research as *'…if I have a problem in my class, I can conduct an interview or a questionnaire and learn about the reasons of the problem and I can solve it'.*

**Table 1.** Recurring Themes Gathered from the Data

| Definition of research | Definition of research skills | The most effective parts of the course | The least effective parts of the course |
|---|---|---|---|
| 'Getting information' | 'Preparing and using appropriate data collection instruments' | 'analysing articles and sample research instruments such as questionnaires and interviews | 'the abstract content of the course' |
| 'Finding out reasons' | 'Setting clear goals' | 'knowledge about qualitative, quantitative data, objectivity, ethics, pilot study' | 'limited introduction of concrete samples of research studies and research instruments' |
| 'Gathering and exploring data' | 'Being objective, understandable and reliable, ethical, sensitive, patient' | 'knowledge about research design, objectives while reading articles' | 'the difficult language of the course-book' |
| 'Solving problems' | 'Ways to conduct research such as using internet, searching books' | 'lecturer's teaching and research experiences' | 'indirect relevance of the course with teaching' |
| 'Deep thinking' | 'choosing the appropriate methodology and participant group and timing' | 'learning how to conduct research in teaching' | 'the course is relevant if students pursue post-graduate studies or they work as researchers' |
| 'Personal and cognitive development' | 'researchers need to have effective communication and observation skills' | 'learning how to conduct action research for effective teaching' | 'course hour (2) is insufficient for understanding details and conducting small-scale research' |
| 'Understanding participants' | 'preparing and conducting interviews, observations and questionnaires' | 'learning about research terminology and types' | 'the course needs to be in the 4th year' |
| 'Checking up the reliability of knowledge' | 'analysis, reading and writing about the topic' | | 'the medium of instruction can be Turkish (native tongue of the students) rather than English' |
| 'Systematic study to get feedback' | | | |
| 'Learning process' | | | |

### 3.2. Definition of Research Skills

Students defined research skills as 'preparing and using appropriate data collection instruments', 'setting clear goals', 'being objective, understandable, reliable, ethical, sensitive, and patient', 'ways to conduct research such as using internet, searching books', 'choosing the appropriate methodology and participant group and timing', 'researchers need to have effective communication and observation skills', 'preparing and conducting interviews, observations and questionnaires' and 'analysis, reading and writing about the topic'. One of the students emphasised the role of problem solving as a definition of research skills as *'…we can prepare or design an instrument to understand and solve the problems such as a questionnaire or scale'.*

### 3.3. The Most Effective Parts of the Course

Students identified the most effective parts of the course as 'analysing articles and sample research instruments such as questionnaires and interviews, 'knowledge about qualitative, quantitative data, objectivity, ethics, pilot study, 'knowledge about research design, objectives while reading articles', 'lecturer's teaching and research experiences', 'learning how to conduct research in teaching', 'learning how to conduct action research for effective teaching', and 'learning about research terminology and types'. One of the students defined lecturer's own learning experiences very useful: *'when you were talking about your doctorate thesis regarding the interviews and observations, I understood what you meant by qualitative research as they were about the teachers' practices and relationship between their students'.*

### 3.4. The Least Effective Parts of the Course

Students mentioned the least effective parts of the course as 'the abstract content of the course', 'limited introduction of concrete samples of research studies and research instruments', 'the difficult language of the course-book', 'indirect relevance of the course with teaching'. Students also stated that the particular course is 'relevant if students pursue post-graduate studies or they work as researchers'. They suggested that, 'course hour (2) is insufficient for understanding details and conducting small-scale research, and therefore; 'the course needs to be in the 4th year' and 'the medium of instruction can be Turkish (native tongue of the students) rather than English'. One of the students explained the situation: *'why don't we do this course in Turkish? The terminology is very difficult to understand and remember for example validity and reliability. I think it can be easier for us to study the course and the book in Turkish'.*

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

It can be suggested that students could define research as 'getting information about a specific topic', 'finding out reasons regarding specific issues or problems' and 'solving problems in teaching or related issues' and research skills as 'preparing and using appropriate data collection instruments', 'ways to conduct research such as using internet, searching books' and 'choosing the appropriate methodology and participant group and timing'. Data showed that they had initial understanding of quantitative and qualitative research and research instruments and components as these issues were covered in the course syllabus. Students stated that they learned about research terminology and research types and how to conduct research in teaching. They frequently mentioned 'appropriate methodology', 'objectivity', 'reliability', 'sensitivity', 'being ethical', 'effective communication', 'observation skills', 'conducting interviews and questionnaires' and 'data analysis', which would indicate that they were actively engaged in thinking about research skills. 'Problem solving' through research or conducting research study were repeatedly emphasised. This would suggest that students acknowledged the basic function of research and research skills.

Students identified the most effective parts of the course as 'analysing articles and sample research instruments such as questionnaires and interviews', having 'knowledge about qualitative and quantitative data, objectivity, ethics, pilot study, research design', 'learning how to conduct research in teaching', 'learning how to conduct action research for effective teaching', and 'learning about research terminology and types'. Their statements would show that they learned the initial knowledge about conducting research and most importantly, they could relate the notions of 'effective teaching' and 'action research' which would mean that they were aware of the relationship between the research and effective teaching. They also identified lecturer's teaching and research experiences useful since they provided more concrete understanding for the abstract research paradigms and issues such as qualitative and quantitative studies and the notions of validity and reliability. Similarly, students found useful to analyse articles and sample research instruments as they could understand the research methodology, analysis of the findings and discussions more concretely. Yet, they thought that they needed more samples and research article analysis for better understanding.

Drawing upon data, students generally found the content and the language of the course (English) and the language of the course book (English) difficult mostly because of the abstract nature of the research paradigms, research designs and specific terminology. It can be also inferred that students were not ready to have such a course as they were not cognitively mature enough to understand complex and abstract issues or because of their English proficiency level, they could not easily follow the course. Majority of the students preferred to complete the questionnaire in Turkish, which might also be regarded as incompetency in using English to express themselves.

In parallel with the teacher educators' opinions in Yavuz and Topkaya's (2013) study; students also suggested locating the course in the final ($4^{th}$) year with additional (2) credits for practical study as a reasonable solution to the problem. This would give the opportunity to conduct small-scale research and to relate research skills with teaching practicum as $4^{th}$ year students observe and practise teaching at schools. This would give them an opportunity to engage in action and classroom research as they work with students and more experienced subject teachers. This could lead to collaborative action research for self-improvement and increase in knowledge of the curriculum, teaching, and learning; consequently, students would understand the potential relevance between conducting research and teaching (Kırkgöz and Yaşar, 2016).

Students could hardly relate teaching with conducting research, although they could define the relationship between the two. They thought that there was an 'indirect relevance of the course with teaching' and 'the course is relevant if students pursue post-graduate studies or they work as researchers' which would suggest that they did not perceive the research skills as primary skills in teaching. However; research skills and using reflection and evaluation are identified as important teaching skills among other skills like lesson planning and preparation, lesson presentation, classroom management and organization, testing and evaluating student learning, using of information and communication technology and establishing a positive classroom climate (Kyriacou, 1995). Besides, Shulman (1986) identified seven areas of teacher knowledge as 1- content knowledge, 2- general pedagogical knowledge, 3- curriculum knowledge, 4- pedagogical-content knowledge, 5- knowledge of learners and their characteristics, 6- knowledge of educational contexts ranging from the workings of the group or classroom, the governance and financing of schools, to the character of communities and cultures and 7- knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values, and the philosophical and historical grounds. These knowledge bases require collecting data through classroom and action research especially regarding different educational contexts and learner characteristics.

Apart from that, teacher's thinking and decision-making process before, while and after teaching and teacher's set of actions either as an outcome of teaching or the ones he or she uses while teaching either explicitly (desired and deliberate) or implicitly (routine and intuitive) need to be examined in the process of making the implicit action explicit through analysis and questioning of the decision-making process via classroom and action research (Kyriacou, 1995; Bandura, 1990; Yavuz, 2007). Consequently, as argued in Wyatt (2016: 5) *'teachers engaging in classroom research gain from the development of research skills, increased awareness of the teaching and learning process, renewed enthusiasm for teaching, greater collaboration with colleagues, enhanced self-efficacy beliefs and continuing commitment to professional development'.* This would enable teachers to be more concerned with student achievement and motivation and be more critical about their own teaching (Yavuz and Zehir Topkaya, 2013).

Research skills course seems to be an underestimated subject in ELT Curriculum, as studies focusing on research skills in ELT is scarce. Therefore, the findings of three studies describing the impact of research skills in medical school curriculum will be highlighted. In the first study, scientific research skills were integrated in medical curriculum implemented at a non-Turkish university to assess the effect of integrating scientific research skills on research practices and perceptions among senior medical students. A questionnaire was distributed to all the 6$^{th}$ year medical students and 60% of them responded. About 51% of the students stated that they started their own research projects and 17% completed and published their articles, 14.7% of them got accepted manuscript for publication. Career progression (75%) was the main motive to conduct research and the lack of dedicated time for research was the most reported obstacle to participate in research (73.4%). Students reported that research publication would improve their postgraduate acceptance chances (95.1%). Providing dedicated time for conducting research, more research opportunities and devoted supervisors were recommended to foster greater involvement in research (Ayuob et al., 2016).

In another study, abstract research was integrated as an important subject in medical curriculum. In one of the universities, it is compulsory to complete a research work during final year while in second university; students are required to complete a community-based project in third year. A cross-sectional study using validated questionnaire involving fourth and final year students of both universities was carried out to compare the attitude of medical students on research. Overall 43.3% students of the first university and 47.2% students of the second university reported that research would be an aspect of their future career as a physician. Time, availability of research mentors, formal teaching of research methodology and the lack of acknowledgement for research project appeared to be barriers for students to become involved in research in medical school. The study showed that medical students had positive attitudes towards research in both universities although there were some barriers that needed to be improved for the involvement of students in research activities (Mohd et al., 2014).

Similarly, undergraduate medical students completed a research skills questionnaire developed at a British University. The questionnaire assessed students' research-specific skills, research experience and attitude and motivation towards doing research. The majority of students were motivated to pursue research. Graduate entrants and male students appeared to be the most confident ones regarding their research skills competencies. Although all students recognised the role of research in medical practice, many were unaware of the medical research activities within their university. Of those who reported no interest in a research oriented career, a common perception was that researchers were isolated from patients and clinical practice. Students had a narrow definition of research. An explanation for why research competence did not align more closely with research motivation was derived from students' lack of awareness of the research activity being undertaken by their teachers and mentors (Burgoyne et al., 2010).

Data elicited from the medical students showed that they had positive attitudes towards research skills especially regarding future careers but they still reported some barriers such as dedicating time, availability of mentors or lack of understanding of the nature of a research activity (case 3) and perceived gap between research and practice. Therefore, raising the awareness of the students about research skills and activities, devoting time for conducting and publishing research studies as an outcome of the course, organising individual or group tutorials with mentors, attending research conferences, emphasising the future career opportunities especially within the notion of practitioner-researcher would be crucially important in undergraduate programs.

Therefore, notion of 'teacher as a researcher' needs to be a part in the ELT Curriculum and research skills can be a part of the other courses when suitable such as Academic Reading and Writing, Specific Teaching Skills, School Experience and Teaching Practice. As students suggested, more concrete samples of research studies can be examined and small-scale studies can be conducted especially if this

course is placed in the 4th year with 2 theoretical and 2 practical hours of teaching (4 in total). The practical hours, then would give more space and time for conducting and designing research and analysing research data. Besides, students can better relate research skills with other teaching skills such as lesson presentation, planning and use of information and communication technologies as they observe school teachers and practise teaching in the 4th year of their programme. It can also be assumed that their cognitive maturity and English proficiency would develop in the 4th year to read, write and think critically in English. Group or individual tutorials can also be offered to students when needed for the research assignments or projects especially regarding the abstract components of the course. Seminars and training programmes can be organised regarding the nature and the benefits of the research skills, such as; future career opportunities and professional development. Students can also be a part of the joined projects and research papers and they can participate in conferences and symposiums as co-researchers with their tutors and peers. Student conferences can also be organised so that they can discuss and present their research proposals and projects. These activities would certainly give them a clear understanding of rationale and reasoning of research and a context to present the research findings and hence, to see research and teaching relationship.

Consequently, studies which are primarily focusing on the perceptions, experiences and practices of the undergraduate students regarding research skills need to be conducted in specific departments including ELT. Moreover, studies regarding the research and practice relationship with graduate students and practitioners can also be conducted in order to convey the relationship between theory and practice and career opportunities. So, the aims and objectives (why), the content (what), the process of learning and teaching (how) and the evaluation (to what extent) processes of the ELT Curriculum with reference to individual courses and their future impacts need to be revisited and evaluated.

Finally, it should be mentioned that this study is limited to 101 ELT 2nd year students' perceptions and experiences about the particular 'Research Skills' course and cannot be generalised for all ELT contexts as the content and the procedures of the particular course might vary in different ELT programmes due to the course tutors' priorities and teaching methodologies at different university departments. Another limitation may arise from the data collection method, as multi-method (interviews and questionnaire) or multi-perspective (teacher educators and students) triangulation or compering the questionnaire data from 2nd and 4th year students, who are already engaged in mainstream teaching at schools, could have raised richer and more heterogeneous data (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

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