



Effects of study abroad on pre-service English teachers’ professional development

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the influence of a specific case of study abroad program, namely Erasmus+ Student Mobility on pre-service English teachers’ belief systems about learning and teaching. For the purposes of the study, qualitative data collected from 20 pre-service English teachers in pre and post research design. Also, a focused group interview was administered. The results were divertive revealing some noteworthy conceptual change after the student mobility program. Additionally, professional development and multicultural awareness were found to be key aspects in this change. Yet, participants’ interpretation of effective learning showed no difference between pre and post study abroad program phases, which might be related to immense exposure to this concept in the curricula of teaching programs.

Keywords: Student mobility, pre-service English teachers, study abroad, undergraduate experience, conceptual change.

Introduction

The effect of international student mobility programs on pre-service English language teachers remains as one of the understudied areas of scientific inquiry due to a number of reasons. Nonetheless, language learners and teachers were one of the groups that engage in such exchanges most actively. In specific, such programs are easily accessible to them frequently thanks to their advanced foreign language proficiency. Still, the influence of such programs on their professional life calls for further scrutinization as this could shed light on the way EFL pre-service teachers might conceptualize these notions. Hence, the aim of the current study is to investigate the transformation of key concepts as effective learning and

teaching by pre-service EFL teachers before and after the study abroad program called Erasmus+. In the following section, the historical background as to the program will be discussed, which then will be followed by the literature review of studies that were conducted in similar contexts. Accordingly, the current study will be explained revealing key findings in the end.

International exchange programs offer a number of opportunities for Turkish university students. In particular, many of them believe that studying abroad for a while is one of the best ways to practice a foreign language, mostly English in an international setting. Yet, pre-service ELT teachers have other motives than practicing their foreign languages. First of all, when compared to other university students, they are proficient English users predominantly. Secondly, since language and culture are highly entangled notions teaching a foreign language further adds to their cross-cultural awareness. That's, there might be some changes in their conceptualization of key aspects of ELT stemming from their cross-cultural experiences in teacher education in an international setting. In particular, Erasmus+ Mobility is one of these programs the effects of which require thorough analyses and interpretation.

In line with the political, social, and economic foundations of European Union (henceforth EU), there have been constant attempts to form unified higher educational setting in Europe for the last few decades. The pilot studies of these attempts date back to 1987 while actual student and instructor exchanges within EU started in 1995 (European Union, 2005). The Bologna Declaration signed by 29 European countries in 1999 aimed at equipping future citizens of EU with similar and up-to-date sets of skills that would help them to adopt the upcoming era (Luttikhot, 1989) and to foster "European consciousness" in EU (Michael, 2001). Later on, this act has expanded to 47 countries including Turkey. Growing interest in "internationalization of higher education" has been interpreted as "the most significant reform movement since 1970s" Aba (2013).

In the same vein, the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (henceforth Erasmus) has been a further extension of this agreement which targets unity specifically in the research and teaching contexts in EU. Additionally, Teichler (2005) states that Erasmus program was designated to foster European identity and citizenship by raising awareness on European culture and history via cross-cultural interactions.

Among other programs such as Comenius, Grundtvig, and Youth; Erasmus Student Mobility Programme has been more popular than others. Thus, there appeared a need to focus more on Erasmus mobility while remedying those parts that need modification. This movement launched Erasmus+ which is the name given to mobility programs that will last from 2014 till 2020. This movement led Erasmus+ to be a broader program consisting of five major areas (Turkish National Agency, 2019). Within this new framework, the first major area is to promote exchanges which would help individuals to acquire a new set of skills in distinct areas. Thus, Higher Education Exchanges are listed under this category and KA-103 has been determined as the new label for student exchanges at a university level within program countries.

Just like other candidate countries, Turkey has been in progress of developing strategies to cooperate with EU in terms of education. The beginning of the exchange programs coincides with the foundation of Turkish National Agency as a subbranch of Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı (DTP) in 2003 (Topçu, 2011). Additionally, in her review of literature, Aba (2013) notes five significant "internationalization findings" in Turkey since then. First of all, despite the limited

time within this process, Turkish institutions such as Turkish National Agency, Turkish Ministry of Education, and Turkish Higher Education Council made great efforts to keep up with the requirements of Bologna Process (Aba, 2013). Secondly; contrary to many other nations, mobility in Turkey has been based on both “policy and demand-driven” factors. More specifically, not only Turkish institutions were eager to update their policies in line with EU requirements but also Turkish citizens were highly volunteered to take part in mobility programs. In line with this, the third aspect highlights that this interest in mobility programs has been predominantly on outgoing student exchange programs (Aba, 2013). To illustrate, within OECD region Turkey had one of the highest rates of outgoing students (i.e. 44.201 in 2001) (Aba, 2013, p. 105). Aba (2013) further discusses that this has to do with the prestige that is associated with the international studies. More explicitly, both students and possible employers believe that international study experience is advantageous in finding a job (Aba, 2013, p. 106). Lastly, in line with the updates in the program, Turkish institutions have modified the structure of the higher education in Turkey to a great extent. To illustrate, European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and Quality Assurance processes at universities have been regarded as key elements since then.

Taking these modifications a step further, Council of Higher Education has come up with National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Turkey (henceforth NQF-HETR) for teacher education and educational sciences by describing multidisciplinary, cross-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary knowledge, skill and competence based qualifications (Council of Higher Education, 2010). These descriptions were aimed to lead to the acquisition of competences that were identified clearly and related to learning outcomes directly. Thus, the discrepancy among graduates will be diminished while qualifications which bring both national and international norms together in both theory and application will supposedly help to train competent teachers.

When we analyze up-to-date statistics for Erasmus+ mobility practices in Turkey, it is evident that the growing interest is still valid. To illustrate, from 2004 till 2019 170.000 students and 36.000 instructors went abroad (Turkish National Agency, 2019). The most preferred three countries were Poland, Germany and Spain subsequently. The numbers for the incoming students and instructors are 61.000 and 21.000 respectively (Turkish National Agency, 2019). Most of them were from Germany, France and Poland. Lastly, the total amount that is granted to Turkish National Agency from 2004 till 2019 for KA103 Program is 516.000.000 Euros (Turkish National Agency, 2019). Hence; it is clear that Erasmus+ in Turkey has a prominent role in the design of higher education, which will in return have an effect on the qualities of teachers and students of the upcoming decades.

Thus, the current study aims to highlight the effects of Erasmus+ mobility on pre-service English teachers’ conceptualization of teaching and learning in specific. The following section will provide background information mentioning key studies on the issue while the rest will provide details of the participants and data collection tools. Lastly, findings in relation to research questions will be discussed in discussion and conclusion sections.

Literature review

Although research on this issue is still in its infancy there are some attempts to understand the effects of the program from a variety of perspectives. While the majority of them were on the outgoing students, only a few of these targeted students from Faculty of Education.

In their study, Ersoy and Günel (2011) investigated the effects of Erasmus programme on individual and professional development of incoming pre-service teachers at a Turkish university. Data gathered from eight participants who came from different EU countries via three consecutive interviews. The qualitative analysis of data showed that they became more aware of multicultural aspects in teaching. Furthermore, they all claimed that this would help them to be more prepared to teach at a culturally diverse setting. Also, some noted that Turkish culture has its own unique codes for teaching and learning environment. In addition to these, they also highlighted individual development such as becoming more openminded and overcoming their prejudices against Turkish culture. Overall, the study indicated that incoming students benefitted from Erasmus more in a positive way particularly in their personal and professional development.

A different study focusing on the Turkish outgoing Erasmus students was conducted by Yağcı, Ekinci, Burgaz, Kelecioğlu, Ergene (2007). In their study, 75 participants were employed to identify their satisfaction levels for academic and social life and student services provided. Data collection tool was a questionnaire developed by the researchers and the satisfaction level was determined based on the difference between their expectation and satisfaction levels. The results indicated that in terms of the social life participants were content with the housing facilities most while medical issues were the least satisfying. With regard to academic issues, academic advisors' being very well prepared for the courses and classrooms' being equipped with high teaching facilities were noted as most satisfied areas. However, the difficulty in accessing to the advisors when needed and their being less knowledgeable on the Erasmus process were stated as the least satisfied items. Lastly, in terms of the student services participants were highly satisfied particularly with EU officers' readiness to help them when needed. In brief, the study reveals that participants were predominantly happy with their academic, social life, and students' services experiences despite some problems.

In another study; Mutlu, Alacahan, Erdil (2010) compared and contrasted Turkish and EU Erasmus students who were studying at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland in terms of cultural and personal changes stemming from Erasmus experience. Data collected via questionnaires and interviews from 257 students 24.5% of whom were Turkish. The comparisons revealed that Turkish Erasmus students "became more tolerant to the unseen" and "aware of their prejudices" more than EU students. Additionally, Turkish students noted that "they learned to cope with the problems that they face in different spheres of life" (96%) while the percentage of EU students' responses was 54.5% to this item. However, both Turkish and EU students rated Erasmus exchange as not a significant contribution to their career. In brief, the study indicated that Erasmus experience in Poznan helped Turkish students to change their mindset more drastically than EU students of the same university.

Tekin and Hiç Gencer (2013) investigated the effect of Erasmus program on 44 university students (i.e. three of them from Educational Sciences) who participated the program in Germany. Data collected via observation, interview and survey showed that there are some pros and cons of the program. While students were content with learning different cultures, cheap and easy travel, academic and professional contributions they were troubled with incongruences between home and host university curricula and target language proficiency mostly.

As being one of the scarcely studied issues, pre-service EFL teachers' reflections on the contributions and problems of the Erasmus program in Turkey was investigated in Aydın's

(2012) study. In specific, qualitative analysis of data consisting of 23 pre-service EFL teachers' background questionnaires, interviews, group discussions and essays revealed that they benefitted from Erasmus in terms of their language skill, personal and professional development while they suffered from difficulty in communicating with locals basically (Aydın, 2012). Furthermore, Aydın (2012) states that it contributed to their self-confidence as well as "creating an awareness of contextual use of English as a second language" (p. 14). However, Aydın (2012) noted that some had problems due to cultural differences and mismatches between curricula of home and host universities. All in all, by highlighting the potential problems and advantages of the Erasmus program on pre-service EFL teachers, the study demonstrates the factors that may be used to guide higher educational policies in Turkey.

Bektaş-Çetinkaya (2013) questioned whether Erasmus exchange had a positive impact on pre-service English teachers' cultural awareness. Eight preservice English teachers who had Erasmus exchange experience were interviewed. The qualitative analysis revealed that all participants agreed that knowing English language was advantageous and prestigious. It was also found out that they consider European culture as one entity disregarding its multicultural aspect. Thus, Bektaş-Çetinkaya (2013) concludes that these pre-service teachers should be trained to acquire Intercultural competence so that they become aware of cultural diversity and modify their teaching in accordance with it.

In a more recent study, Unlu (2015) searched for the gains of Erasmus program for outgoing Turkish preservice teachers in terms of academic, cultural and personal aspects. Eight participants who had been exchange students in 2012-13 and 2013-14 academic years in different EU countries were interviewed. Data revealed that participants commented on the academic gains more than others. Some of these academic gains were noted as "multi-dimensional thinking", "awareness on different testing strategies", "time-management" and "interactive learning" (Unlu, 2015, p. 228).

As all these studies reveal, Erasmus+ Mobility is a multi-dimensional process and it has an immense impact on university students. Although some of them targeted the influence on pre-service teachers, there is no study that investigates Erasmus+ Mobility's effect on pre-service teachers' mindset change related to concepts such as teaching and learning in-depth. Besides, the implications of such studies are critical in terms of professional development of pre-service ELT teachers. That's, any foreign language teaching taps some aspects of target culture inevitably. Cross-cultural experiences via international study abroad programs have greater significance for ELT professionals than many other professions. Hence, the current study aims to provide broader perspectives by answering the following research questions:

- 1) How do pre-service English teachers conceptualize teaching and learning before and after Erasmus+ Mobility? Are there any differences in terms of the definitions provided for these two concepts before and after Erasmus+ Mobility?
 - a) If yes, what are some possible reasons?

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted at a state university in Istanbul, Turkey. The participants were employed via purposive sampling. There were 20 pre-service English teachers who were born

in Turkey and had not been abroad for more than six months. They were granted with Erasmus+ scholarship and spent a semester (i.e. either in spring or in fall) in EU in 2017-2018 academic year. Participants differed with respect to host university, study level, and etc. A unique participant number was created for each participant (i.e. initials for country, a number indicating the order and lastly the task type) to achieve anonymity. Additionally, country was made explicit to trace any effects that might be related to characteristics of the host university. For instance, SE01PRE means that the sample response belongs to a participant who went to Sweden and s/he is the first student who filled in online questionnaire which was employed as a pre-task. Informed consents were signed by all participants. The following table provides detailed information related to participants.

Table 1: Participant profile

Number	Countries	City	Department
1	Italy	Venice	Languages
4	Poland	Gdansk	Education and Social work
2	Poland	Szczecin	Language Teaching
3	Portugal	Evora	Languages
1	Portugal	Braga	English Language
2	Spain	Cordoba	Faculty of Education
2	Sweden	Falun	Languages
5	Sweden	Sundsvall	Faculty of Education

As it is obvious with the table, universities as well as departments differed in participants' study abroad program. However, their academic background is quite similar to one another since they were all undergraduate students in Faculty of Education in Turkey. Curricula for these faculties are determined by Higher Education Council of Turkey allowing very little flexibility.

Data collection tools

As for the purposes of this study two instruments were used. The first one was an online questionnaire with three subsections while the second one was a focused group interview. Online questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first part targeted the demographic info such as the name of participant and the university. The second part asked whether they had a school experience course and they were spending some time at schools in addition to university. The last part involved four questions that would tap the difference on their conceptualization of effective learning and effective teaching. Pre-service teachers' belief system is not stable and under constant restructuring throughout their training (Chi, 2008; Vosniadou, 2018). This change is based on "substantial revision of prior knowledge" (Vosniadou et. al, 2020, p.1). Thus, questions that would reflect pre-service English teachers' prior knowledge within their belief systems were as follow:

- 1) What is "effective learning"? Please describe it in a detailed manner.
- 2) What is "effective teaching"? Please describe it in a detailed manner.
- 3) What are your expectations from your study abroad program?
- 4) How would this exchange affect your teaching career as a prospective English teacher?

The same online questionnaire with slight modifications was also administered when participants returned. In the post-study abroad version, only the third question was changed as “Were your expectations met by this program?”. All other questions were remained the same to see any possible distinctions that might reveal clues related to conceptual change in their belief systems.

Another data collection tool was a focused group interview which was conducted after the majority of participants (i.e. 90%) completed their study abroad module. Four participants who studied at different universities participated this session. The interview lasted about 45 minutes and was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Some of the questions were as follow:

- 1) What are the advantages and disadvantages of participating Erasmus+ Mobility?
- 2) Do you think that program would contribute to your career? If yes how?
- 3) What were the strengths and weaknesses of the educational curricula in the host university?
- 4) If you were given a chance, what would you do to transform learning/teaching context into a more effective one?

Due to the difficulty in employing such particular group of participants, there was no pilot study. Yet, a researcher with a strong background in ELT studies provided constructive feedback in the design.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed qualitatively by following principles of phenomenological studies. In specific, emerging themes for post and pre questionnaire and interview were figured out. Furthermore, following constant comparison analyses as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) predetermined codes were searched and identified by two researchers. To assess the consistency among raters for interrater reliability the Kappa statistics was run in SPSS (Kappa= 0. 76, $p < 0.05$). Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007, 2008) further argue that focus group interviews like many other qualitative data type could be analyzed via constant comparison which requires data to be chunked into meaningful units that would form the basis for the emerging themes.

Findings

The results of the study were discussed in line with the emerging themes for each instrument. The online questionnaires which were administered in pre and post design were highly structured targeting particular themes such as effective learning, effective teaching, expectations and effects on their career. In each section pre and post comparisons were reviewed. Then, in accordance with results of the focus group interview two emerging themes as professional development and multicultural awareness were revisited.

Effective learning

The first theme was about effective learning. It was found out that the majority of the participants (i.e. 70%) believe “effective learning” is related to learning by doing or experiential learning. Participants associated it with the effort that learners devote to learn and their hands-on practices in classes. Below are some descriptions:

SE01PRE

Effective learning means achieving active involvement of students. Also, if they are given chance to learn things by doing, to deduce, to think critically and interpret then effective learning will take place.

PL03PRE

Effective learning is experiential learning. There should be references to hands-on, real life experiences so that students stay motivated to learn.

As it is obvious with participants' reflections, another key word is motivation. Participants imply that motivation is the underlying force behind "effective learning".

SP02PRE

Effective learning is a type of learning which enables students to learn things without losing their motivation.

IT01PRE

Effective learning is students' coming to a class as motivated, listening to the content attentively, managing effective communication with peers and the teacher, lastly being able to remember the content covered in the class.

Thus, all the above statements make it clear that participants think learners are responsible for making their learning processes as effective as possible and it is highly tied to real life experiences and motivation. Their post questionnaire answers were not different from earlier version. More specifically, these two themes were repeated in their descriptions as well.

PL02POST

Effective learning is a type of learning where students come to a class getting prepared for the course and take part in their learning process actively.

In brief, the results indicate that although participants differ in terms of the universities that they spent a semester, their conceptualization of "effective learning" remained the same. Furthermore, they relate it to active participation and motivation predominantly even though they also think that it is has to do with some higher order thinking skills as critical thinking and comprehension. Lastly, there were few participants who defined it as a system that would attract students' attention and provide a variety of learning experience in line with the individual differences of students.

Effective teaching

The second question in the questionnaires tapped their definitions for effective teaching. The analysis revealed distinction between the pre and post versions different from the definition of the effective learning. More explicitly, the replies in pre-version were geared towards teachers' roles in the classroom and teachers' being aware of students' needs.

SE03PRE

Effective teaching is creating a learning environment that would help students not to learn information but to grasp the meaning of the content, lead them to ask questions

and arouse interest. In fact, there is no teaching but learning. Thus, teachers should lead students to feel the need to learn something new.

SP01PRE

Effective teaching is letting students study the target issue on their own, helping them to be creative, enriching their real-life learning experience and lastly guiding them through the whole process.

IT01PRE

It is the inclusion of every student by using a variety of methodologies.

Different from the descriptions for effective learning, themes for “effective teaching” changed to some extent. For instance, all above statements denote some active role to the teacher as both the decision maker or guide of the teaching context. However, the descriptions in post versions were more linked to contexts where individual differences of students were appreciated. The following statements are some examples.

SE02POST

It is the teaching style that is based on students’ needs. Students should have a say on their own learning process and they should express their ideas freely.

PR01POST

It is the type of teaching that is taking place in a context where individual differences of students appreciated, and where teachers are aware of the fact that not all the students are at the same level.

All in all, this shift from more teacher dominant definition to learner dominant one may result from their study abroad program in addition to other intervening factors. Yet, it is noteworthy to state that motivation was another issue that was believed to play an important role in effective teaching.

Study abroad expectations

The expectations were centered around two themes as professional and language skill based. Majority of them (i.e. 85%) reported that their primary aim was to understand how English language is used and taught in these contexts so that they benefit from it for their future career. Additionally, improving their language skills was their secondary objective. However, some stated that their aim is to improve their English skill while some others (especially those who went to Spain and Italy) said that they want to learn a new foreign language other than English.

SE01PRE

My aim is to experience North European countries’ education system by living there and to notice differences so that I could use them to improve my English language teaching skills.

PR01PRE

To experience different teaching contexts, to meet international scholars and colleagues.

SP02PRE

To gain multicultural awareness and skills and use them while teaching English in Turkey and improve my Spanish.

Their post evaluation with respect to their study abroad experiences revealed not many differences. They evaluated the effectiveness of the program based on its contribution to their professional development mostly.

SE02POST

My expectations were met by all means. Specifically, courses that I took helped me to gain deeper insights on ELT. Also, my school experience in two different schools helped me to evaluate pros and cons of English language teaching in classes.

Yet, although their expectations with professional development were met majority of them (i.e. 65%) were not happy with their language skill improvement either being forced to speak English instead of the local tongue or talking Turkish more than any other language since they met other Turkish students there.

Hence, it might be concluded that participants had more professionally and language skill-oriented goals. Even if those who had no school experience course due to the curricula of the host university, they claimed that even being a student at a multicultural setting enabled them to observe distinct teaching and learning styles. Thus, this reminds of “apprenticeship of observation” phenomenon (Borg, 2004; Lortie, 1975) which seems to be boosted at these universities. In a way, participants had the chance to observe the classes and this enabled them to have a critical view on both teachers and learners as a prospective English teacher in the same setting.

Effects on teaching career

The analyses revealed that all participants believed that Erasmus+ program would widen their perspectives on EFL. More explicitly, in the post questionnaire all of them stated that their experience in different education systems with a variety of learners and teachers would enrich their teaching repertoire. Actually, all of them were content with their professional development. Some of the responses were as follow:

SE04FGI

Thanks to this exchange program, I added experiences in two different schools and in one university in Sweden to my CV. I witnessed different styles and priorities in these teaching contexts, which I plan to integrate into my teaching repertoire when I start teaching.

PL01FGI

When I was in Poland, I met a number of people with different backgrounds. Some of them were my teachers. Their approach to their students and behaviors towards their students taught new perspectives on EFL. I am sure that there will be moments that I will think differently when I remember the days I spent in Poland.

SP01FGI

Witnessing English language teaching skills of instructors from different cultures widened my perspectives on the techniques and methodologies that I could use in my career. I feel lucky since there was a school experience course in my exchange program. I found the opportunity to observe distinct and multicultural educational systems and this enabled me to deduce new ideas. I am sure that this would have an immense impact on my teaching and provide me new career opportunities.

Professional development and multicultural awareness

The content analyses of the focused group interview revealed two key themes. The first one is the professional development that stems from the exposure to different teaching styles both in university and school experience courses. Even the participants with no school experience in their exchange program believed that their professional life was affected positively just because of the exposure to different educational systems at a university level. This was also frequently mentioned in the effects of program on their teaching career in the questionnaire. Thus, in line with these findings, participants seemed to be aware of the possible advantages of observing a variety of teaching and learning contexts, which is also referred to by the “apprenticeship of observation” phenomenon (Borg, 2004; Lortie, 1975). Even if teaching opportunities are limited in these contexts, preservice teachers have been gaining firsthand experience as students. In line with many changes in their belief systems, their descriptions and perceptions of “effective teaching and learning” have evolved. More explicitly, they become a part of teaching and learning system in which they have the opportunity to try out their hypotheses which are predominantly derived from prior content knowledge. Thus, this exposure yields adjustments in their belief systems as a result of a change in the construct itself.

The second theme that was repeated was the multicultural awareness. They claimed that multicultural and multilingual learning experiences as university students changed their ideas as to “a foreign language learner”. In specific, they stated that students in classes differ with respect to language and cultural background, which functions as a noteworthy factor that language teachers need to take into consideration. Thus, participants as prospective English language teachers stated that they became more aware of diversity in their classes. Bayyurt, Kurt, Öztekin, Guerra, Cavalheiro & Pereira claimed that English teachers are highly aware of cultural diversity in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language while they usually fail to find ways to integrate variety in their English classes (2019, p. 197). Erasmus+ experience does not only add to their awareness on cultural diversity but also model the context where English is taught and used in multilingual and multicultural contexts. This may result in possible teaching perspective differences between EFL students with student mobility experience and with no such experience.

Discussion

The current study was mainly guided by how participants conceptualize effective teaching and learning as prospective EFL teachers before and after student mobility program. Also, the study further investigated possible differences between these two periods. The results were varied in line with the themes discussed.

As for the description of effective learning, participants referred to “learning by doing” and “motivation” predominantly. Besides, no difference was found between pre and post questionnaires. This might stem from their similar academic background. In specific, since they were all undergraduate students who took the same courses of EFL program at the same university, their conceptualization of effective learning might be unaffected by the exchange program.

The second concept that was investigated was “effective teaching”. Different from “effective learning”, there was a shift in their definitions of the concept in before and after the questionnaire phases. For instance, while in the pre-version answers were centered around teacher roles in the post version they evaluated it from a learner perspective. Explicitly, they attributed “effectiveness” of teaching to contexts where learner differences were recognized. In addition to other factors, this shift might be associated with their study abroad experiences.

Along with these key concepts, two more themes which revealed probable before and after study abroad program effects were reviewed. These were expectations and teaching career questions. Before program expectations focused more on professional development and foreign language improvement, which were stated to have been met at the end of the program. Likewise, all of them were quite aware and content with the program’s contributions to their teaching career.

These findings were also supported by the repeated themes in focused group interview. Participants believed that their professional development was highly supported by this exchange program. Lastly, multicultural awareness was another particular theme that was uncovered. Unlike Bektaş-Çetinkaya (2013) who found that pre-service English teachers stick to “stereotypical sociocultural knowledge of the target community”, this study indicated that participants gained some awareness as to multicultural teaching and learning settings. Participants mentioned that attending schools as both exchange university students and trainees helped them to accommodate their “teaching perspectives”.

In short, the current study revealed that although participants had some stable conceptualizations for such terms as “effective learning” which remained unaffected by the student mobility program, their experiences as both language learners and prospective English teachers altered their awareness to some extent. Categorically, their descriptions for “effective teaching” transformed from teacher-based account to a learner based one, which might be influenced by their study abroad programs. Similar to what Aydın (2012) found out, pre-service ELT teachers stated that the program contributed to their professional life and made them more aware of learners with different cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

The current study questioned whether pre-service English teachers who participated study abroad program underwent any conceptual change in their belief systems. The results indicated that not all key concepts are prone to changes stemming from such programs. For instance, definitions for “effective learning” which was highly repeated and highly studied in curricula of faculties of education remained almost same. Yet, it was also found out that pre-service EFL teachers differed on their descriptions for “effective teaching” switching to a more learner centered perspective from a teacher dominant one. Furthermore, they stressed that they were equipped with tools that would help them in their future teaching career. They also signaled that their awareness on cultural and language-based differences was raised thanks to

opportunities to observe classes as both language learners and pre-service EFL teachers. In brief, this study showed that such programs have positive impacts on professional development of pre-service EFL teachers while some frequently repeated concepts might remain unchanged.

It could have been far better to compare this group to a pre-service EFL teachers with no such mobility experiences, which might be handled in future studies. This could allow to compare and contrast any effects stemming from other factors. Additionally, country-wise and program-wise impacts could also be further investigated to figure out fine distinctions among participants.

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