

# Critical English Teachers and Criticizing Pre-servicing

*Studies on pre-service English teachers have been on the rise since 1980s. However, some terms have been rarely discussed in detail, although critical pedagogy has produced significant insights into language teaching and learning. Scholars in the field have been repeatedly using the term 'pre-service English teachers'. However, this term is problematic in nature because it hardly refers to English teachers' conception of action and transformation. This study aims to examine the views of 10 prospective critical English teachers because labeling a group in social science can be transformative and emancipatory. Therefore, instead of using pre-service English teachers, we prefer to use prospective critical English teachers. A semi-structured interview form including 10 questions was composed, and the participants were also asked to keep a diary for four weeks. In addition, 20 articles published between 2010 and 2018 were also included into the study to show the frequency of the terms labeling them. The results show that the participants' ideas were scarcely taken seriously and that they were hardly involved in the process of preparing curriculum and syllabus. They also believe that a more democratic and participatory approach should be adopted so that they can transform the discipline of English language teaching.*

**Keywords:** *ELT departments, critical English Teachers, critical approach, criticism of pre-service English teachers*

## Introduction

Discourses frame and manipulate individuals in social life in a certain direction. Experts in a given discipline generate terms and terminologies that are labeled on individuals and that are hard to reverse the meaning of these terms and concepts. A hierarchy is mechanically and automatically formed by academics, researchers or experts in power that tend to guide and control discourses. These terms and terminologies may tend to be buzzwords or to fossilize in time. In addition, power relations emerge as a result of determination of these meanings. Unfortunately, the term pre-service in English language teaching and applied linguistics has a similar story because academics have seen pre-service teachers as objects or objects of their studies rather than subjects or transformative individuals. This term has been a buzzword for researchers in English language teaching in recent years. Researchers in this field often study beliefs, views, reflection, self-efficacy, language proficiency of pre-service teachers (Farrell, 1999; Johnson, 1992, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Liou, 2001; Lucas, Villegas & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Seferoğlu, 2006; Topkaya, 2010; Topkaya & Uztosun, 2012). However, few studies have dealt with transformative practices of pre-service teachers. In most of the studies mentioned above perceive pre-service teachers as passive objects to be studies.

### Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy aims to liberate learners and educators from neoliberal policies, disadvantaged conditions and oppressive educational systems that impose only certain ideologies on them. Therefore, Giroux (2020) claims that teachers should also act as intellectuals that can create transformative change in their school settings as well as outside their education spheres. McLaren (2015) also articulates that student teachers should be critical and radicalized teachers so that they can feel empowered to produce social changes in their immediate environment by noticing the dangers of ideological curriculum and neoliberal policies because both Giroux (2020) and McLaren (2015) are very much aware that schools in general across the globe have been shaped by neoliberal policies and national ideologies that leave no room for transformation and changes that address individuals' autonomy with no reference to neoliberalism. Neoliberal policies and those in power in favor of ideologies constitute convincing discourses lest learners and teachers criticize existing systems (Apple, 2013).

In line with this framework, critical pedagogy within the paradigm of post-structuralism can help create new discourses regarding senior students that will be English teachers. Non-skeptical acceptance of a specific order of discourse poses a serious risk towards empowering individuals that aim to be English teachers. Studies in Turkey tend to use the term pre-service teachers. However, we believe that this term disempowers senior students from developing critical perspectives since they are often studied as objects of the study. Senior students can have the chance to carry out research with teachers or academics, which can help them to feel empowered. In addition, direct democracy and participatory approach can be adopted to involve them in the process of forming curricula and syllabi. We hardly see these approaches and tendencies in the departments of ELT in Turkey (Eren & Çetin, 2019; Kirmizi & Tosuncuoglu, 2019; Köksal & Ulum, 2019; Ördem, & Ulum, 2019; Saricoban, 2013; Teo, Faruk Ursavaş & Bahçekapili, 2011; Zehir Topkaya & Yavuz, 2011). We believe that this parameter can be changed by involving senior students in the process by adopting the tenets of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000) because critical pedagogy deconstructs the myth of teachers in power and instead adopts student-teacher and teacher-student terms, which can be interpreted that students and teachers act on equal platforms. Instead of choosing the term pre-service teacher without any negotiation or social dialogue, it seems better to open new debates with senior students. Falzon (2006) notes the fact that discourses that manipulate individuals can be deconstructed through social dialogue that refers to dialogic relations. Using prefabricated terms that are conventionally constituted can be criticized by adopting the main principles of direct democracy, critical pedagogy, participatory approach and the culture of negotiation.

This study aims to challenge the use of the term pre-service teacher by asking the senior students to criticize these terms and eliciting their views

regarding this issue. In order to support these ideas, 20 articles published between 2010 and 2018 were also included into the study. This study is crucial and meaningful in that it aims to empower senior students by challenging and criticizing a specific order of discourse constituted and produced by those in power in the department of English language teaching.

## Method

This study rests on a descriptive single case study in a specifically contextualized setting. Case studies allow researchers to conduct an elaborate analysis of a given case, to comprehend complexities in social life that is likely to be difficult to handle in other research types (Yin, 2003). Some of the weaknesses of case studies are biased views, inability to make generalizations and a substantial amount of analysis or documentation (Duff, 2018). Therefore, the results of single case studies are not nomothetic but inherently idiographic.

This study describes a limited number of participants' views on a specific topic within the context of a Turkish university and involves both critical reflection for action and on action as well as semi-structured interview that aimed to unearth the views of critical English teachers about their active roles in shaping curriculum or syllabus in their universities (McDonough & McDonough, 2014). Critical reflection for action has emerged as an effective paradigm that helps researchers approach a certain topic with critical lens (Hickson, 2011; Schon, 1987; Van Woerkom, 2010). Two main data collection tools were used. A semi-structured interview form was prepared, and a diary was kept by the participants. In addition, in order to support the findings of the participants' views, 20 articles that were published in Turkey between 2010 and 2018 were included into the study. These articles contained topics regarding practicum.

## Participants

This study involved 10 senior participants in English language teaching departments. Their average age was 23. They all learned English as a primary foreign language with an upper intermediate level based on the scores of a national English exam conducted in Turkey. They all completed their practicum in different schools and had varying experiences. Although the class of the seniors was composed of 30 participants, only 10 of them volunteered to take part in the study. The participants were told that they would be involved in the process of each step in the study.

## Procedure

The participants were given information about the nature of the study. They were explained that this study did not perceive them as objects and that they could be critical thinkers. After making the necessary explanations, only 10 of the seniors agreed to take part in the study. A focus-group interview was made. The researchers prepared a semi-structured interview form that asked them to criticize some terms and ELT departments as well as their roles in preparation of the curriculum and syllabus. In addition, they were asked to keep a diary for four weeks. The themes obtained from the data were shared with the participants so that they could also be involved in the research process so as not to objectify them because their subjective experiences were prioritized. When the data and findings were categorized under themes, the participants were asked whether the coding was appropriate and reflected their ideas. If the coding system and themes were incompatible with their findings, then the new version of the codes and themes were corrected by asking the participants.

## Findings

The findings of the study is comprised of the terms used in academia for the informants, their roles in ELT departments and Ministry of Education/ Turkish Council of Higher Education, their subjective experiences in ELT, and their transformative power in ELT. The overall findings show that the participants have little impact on curriculum, syllabus and policies. Therefore, they tend to believe that they are unable to transform the community that they study and work with.

### *Findings related to terms used in academia for critical teachers*

The following part represents the findings related to the terms used in academia for future critical teachers. Table 1 clarifies the frequencies and percentages of themes related to the mentioned issue.

**Table 1.** *Terms Used for Pre-service Teachers in Articles*

Theme	f	%
Pre-service teacher	25	33
Prospective teacher	20	27
Student teacher	18	24
Candidate teacher	15	20
Total	75	100.00

One can clearly understand from Table 1 that, with respect to the terms used in the articles, the most frequently used terms were pre-service teachers and prospective teachers (60 % in total). Another frequent term used was student teacher (24%). The least preferred term was candidate teacher (15 %).

1 It can be said that the term pre-service teacher has been more frequent. When  
 2 asked about these terms, the participants were told to develop a critical  
 3 approach towards these terms. The following remarks were made.

4 I think we do not have big roles in the university. We just go to schools  
 5 and make observations. Then, we give feedback for the sake of practicum.  
 6 There is indirect and implicit oppression or suppression. They do this by using  
 7 a nice language because we just want to graduate. We know that nobody will  
 8 take us seriously. (P1)

9 To be honest, we have no active role in anything. We do not believe that  
 10 we can change something in this discipline. No lecturer asks us anything about  
 11 defining ourselves. We are students. We are pre-service teachers or something  
 12 else. We cannot change anything. In Turkey, I do not believe these things. (P3)

13 I really have no idea why academics use the term pre-service English  
 14 teachers. I think we are insufficient. What is pre? Why are we pre? I wish they  
 15 would really listen to us both at practicum school and in our departments. They  
 16 are not listening. (P8)

17 The statements of the participants show that terms are trivial because they  
 18 have pessimistic views about what they change in schools and their  
 19 departments because there seems no mechanism that can empower and involve  
 20 them in the system of education. Based on the discourses of the participants,  
 21 we can say that direct democracy or participatory approach is ignored and  
 22 excluded from language policies, although English language teaching  
 23 departments are often said to be modern since they can follow democratic  
 24 cultures in Europe. However, ELT departments in Turkey function in a non-  
 25 democratic way in that the system hardly allows these critical English teachers  
 26 to be actively involved in each stage of language education. In addition, they  
 27 lack any opportunity to define themselves in academia. Therefore, what they  
 28 do as active teachers and critical intellectuals seems more important than how  
 29 they are called or labeled. Thus, the participants prioritize function rather than  
 30 discourses and labels themselves.

### 31 32 *Findings related to pre-service teachers' roles in ELT departments and* 33 *Ministry of Education*

34  
35 With respect to the roles of the informants in ELT departments and  
 36 Ministry of Education/Turkish Council of Higher Education, eight of the  
 37 participants stated that they are ignored in the overall process of their training,  
 38 while only two of them mentioned that they participated in teaching actively.  
 39 However, all of the participants reported that they were unable to make  
 40 changes in curriculum or syllabus because they were never involved in the  
 41 process of preparing such tasks in either ELT departments or in public schools.  
 42 In addition, they reported to have taught only once in the classroom for 2  
 43 hours, which was perceived as totally insufficient because they believed that  
 44 they were seen as both secondary and excluded both in the practicum school  
 45 and their departments. In principle, they reported to have expected to take more  
 46 active roles in the school where they worked as an intern. However, in later

stages they noticed that passive roles as observers and note-takers were assigned to them. Some remarks of the informants are illustrated below:

Our department occasionally asks for our comments on our training program. However, they only listen to us and never get into the required actions. We just observe classes. (P6)

We are never involved in the process of forming and preparing curriculum or syllabus in our department. We go to school, sit in the classes at the back and listen to the teacher to take notes and observe them without even talking to our mentors who are not trained well. (P8)

Since we are generally ignored, we feel passive individuals in the teaching and learning process. We are really used to this process in Turkey. My friends do not want to go to schools but they have to. This, I think, explains the whole situation. (P10)

In terms of roles assigned to the participants, active roles were hardly allowed in their practicum schools and ELT departments. Perceiving themselves as passive, observers or passivized was prevalent in their discourses because they were expected to follow some pre-determined roles such as taking notes, observing the mentors and learners. In addition, insufficient teaching as an active role was assigned to them. They were also expected to prepare a file or portfolio to present it to both the mentor and the supervisor so as to be successful and graduate from the school. They reported to have seldom been involved in any stage of curriculum, syllabus, and task or activity preparation. Their main roles were observing and completing the forms that were given to them, which caused them to feel excluded and passive individuals that had no roles in education.

#### *Diary findings related to their subjective experiences in ELT*

This section brings a light to the subjective experiences of the informants in ELT. The results of the diary show that insufficient mentoring, lack of feedback from supervisors and mentors and absence of solutions to problems that they encountered during their practicum were among the systemic problems that they constantly experienced. Table 3 illuminates the frequencies and percentages of themes related to the mentioned issue.

**Table 3.** *Subjective Experiences of Informants in ELT*

Theme	f	%
Lack of mentoring	5	50.00
Lack of feedback	3	30.00
Lack of solutions	2	20.00
Total	10	100.00

It is simply perceived from the table that all the informants put forward to have taken insufficient mentoring. Further, majority of the informants stated to have no feedback (50.00%). Lastly, 30.00 percent of the participants stated they get no related solution. Remarks exemplifying the views of the informants are given below:

Unfortunately, we are not able to get sufficient mentoring at training schools, which makes us unmotivated to attend the courses. (P5)

We are not getting enough feedback from both university and training school mentors since they are always busy. Everybody is busy. We are really excluded. We just learn from our own experiences. We need authentic listening from them. I am learning but we can do more. (P7)

We shared our related problems to our department but could not see any solution. We cannot even see our supervisors. They always want our feedback but in reality this feedback never turns into action. It is all paper work and portfolio obsession. (P9)

The statements indicate that the participants encountered insufficient mentoring and feedback because some of them reported that both the mentors in the school and supervisors at the university were also busy, which caused them to feel excluded from this societal stratum. In addition, although they conveyed their problems to the department, solutions were not found because they felt that they were ignored. Another serious problem that the participants faced was that efficient and authentic listening did not take place in face to face to communication with their supervisors, which led them to disbelieve the system in its literal meaning. The participants reported that they desired to make some changes from what they learned in the school because as outsiders they realized that some components regarding English language teaching and learning should be changed. However, the absence of sufficient mentoring and feedback discouraged them from taking action and moving further.

#### *Diary findings related to the transformative power of the participants in ELT*

The last section clarifies the transformative power of the informants in ELT based on their diary notes. The findings of the diary in this section were more related to transformative practices and power in their teaching settings in both ELT departments and public schools. Table 4 illustrates the frequencies and percentages of themes related to the mentioned issue.

**Table 4.** *Views on Transformative Power in ELT*

Theme	f	%
Lack of transformative power regarding curriculum and syllabus	6	60.00
Lack of transformative power regarding policies	4	40.00
Total	10	100.00

One can easily comprehend from the table that, with respect to the transformative power of the informants in ELT, all the participants suggest that they own no transformative power in the design of the curriculum. Moreover, majority of the respondents (60.00%) state that they also have no transformative power in the shaping the related policies. The related remarks exemplifying the views of the informants are displayed below:

Although we have different views, we have no effect on the design of the curriculum and policy. I do not know what we can change. Nothing. This is impossible in Turkey. I was able to write a little because things are boring. (P4)

1 Nobody cares for our experiences at the university and training school. I  
2 like to change a lot of things. They are in a different place. We are in a  
3 different place. There is a very strict hierarchy. I feel like a soldier. (P6)

4 I do not believe that we can really transform anything regarding the  
5 curriculum and syllabus. We really have no role. We just talk. That's it. (P8)

6 To learn the participants' views regarding transformative practices, they  
7 reported that it was almost impossible for them to make transformative changes  
8 in the educational system in Turkey because the hierarchy was reported to be  
9 very strict and imposing. For them, power was dominant in both the school and  
10 the departments where they had the fear of failure and the anxiety of failing to  
11 be appointed to a public school in the future. They desired to create significant  
12 changes based on their first hand experiences during their practicum and school  
13 years. However, a pessimistic atmosphere seemed dominant in their discourses.

## 16 Discussion

18 This study aimed to treat participants as active subjects by using the  
19 methodology of critical reflection for action because the term pre-service is  
20 used to subordinate senior participants because they are perceived as objects of  
21 study and excluded from the main roles to take action in ELT departments,  
22 Turkish Ministry of National Education and Turkish Council of Higher  
23 Education. The participants emphasized that they were unable to participate in  
24 preparation of curriculum, syllabus and tasks and that they were often regarded  
25 as passive objects. This study criticizes studies that view senior subjects as  
26 only passive objects because what is often is done is to unearth their ideas,  
27 beliefs and reflection about teaching. It is often these subjects that are studied.  
28 They are objects to be studied. Other studies also tend to see pre-service  
29 teachers as objects and do not enable them to be involved in the process of  
30 preparing curriculum or syllabus and other related administrative and academic  
31 tasks (Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Seferoğlu, 2006; Topkaya, 2010; Topkaya &  
32 Uztosun, 2012). These studies generally focus on beliefs, reflection, views and  
33 personal constructs regarding pre-service teaching. However, direct democracy  
34 and participatory approach can be applied to these senior individuals because  
35 what is important in teaching is to train transformative subjects that can  
36 directly affect their addresses and audience (Freire, 2000). Therefore, in line  
37 with the findings of the study, it can be said that the buzzword pre-service  
38 teacher should be replaced by prospective critical teachers so that they can  
39 emancipate themselves from fixed ideologies and policies (Giroux, 1981)

40 In addition, these senior individuals themselves can do research together  
41 with academic, Ministry of National Education and Turkish Council of Higher  
42 Education in its literal sense. In this sense, a social constructivist, critical  
43 theory and critical pedagogy can be developed if the aim is to produce  
44 transformative teachers and academics (Pennycook, 1999). Therefore, the term  
45 pre-service can be avoided to protect senior individuals from being perceived  
46 as objects of studies. In Turkey, the term pre-service has been highly hailed

1 without criticizing this term (Seferoğlu, 2006; Topkaya, 2010; Topkaya &  
 2 Uztosun, 2012) because pre-service teachers have been perceived within the  
 3 paradigm of positivism, although most of the studies have been descriptive and  
 4 qualitative in nature. The political atmosphere of Turkey may also drive  
 5 Turkish researchers to exclude future teachers from being active participants  
 6 because in Turkish politics, Turkey and ELT departments lack the culture of  
 7 direct democracy and participatory approach. Therefore, senior individuals also  
 8 become victims of these policies. It can be said that new policies and terms  
 9 need to be developed so as to create a liberal and critical environment (Giroux,  
 10 1994, 1997) Otherwise, conventional methods will be continued to be used,  
 11 and these individuals will have difficulty fostering emancipatory approaches in  
 12 their future teaching. Therefore, ELT departments, Ministry of National  
 13 Education and Turkish Council of Higher Education should adopt new terms  
 14 and approaches by developing critical thinking skills (Facione, 1990).  
 15 Therefore, social dialogue can be used as a tool to liberate future teachers from  
 16 fixed policies and discourses (Falzon, 2006).

17 The studies regarding practicum in Turkey have been unable to develop a  
 18 critical approach towards the use of certain terms such as pre-service teachers,  
 19 student teachers and candidate teachers. We believe that it is better to develop  
 20 new terms that could empower these individuals. Critical English teachers can  
 21 be used to reinforce their strength, capacity and potential. Giroux (1994)  
 22 believes that teachers should act as critical intellectuals in a certain society  
 23 because it is teachers that shape societies. In addition, we also believe that  
 24 critical teachers should criticize curricula and syllabi imposed on them by  
 25 English language teaching departments. Besides this critical approach, they can  
 26 also be allowed to do action research both in schools and universities in their  
 27 senior year so that they can feel empowered and endorsed. Otherwise, the  
 28 conventional terms used for these future critical teachers may cause them to  
 29 feel subordinate or secondary. It is pivotal to develop a new discourse for  
 30 teachers that can help them gain more critical perspectives. Those in power in  
 31 academia can be more cautious while labeling them because a specific order of  
 32 discourse created by experts in the field often frames and manipulates  
 33 individuals. Therefore, Falzon's use of social dialogue can be a useful tool in  
 34 changing this understanding because in social dialogue within the paradigm of  
 35 post-structuralism, individuals affect each other in a constructive way (Falzon,  
 36 2006). In addition, Freire (2000) also addresses this issue because if terms are  
 37 used only in a certain direction, then a hierarchy that is hard to transform is  
 38 constituted. Therefore, student-teacher and teacher-student can be better terms  
 39 that place teachers, students and academics on an equal continuum. Creating  
 40 binary relations in a hierarchy may affect perceptions, views and even future  
 41 acts because discourses are performative and manipulative in this sense. It  
 42 seems better to negotiate terms used for senior individuals in English language  
 43 teaching departments. Otherwise, future critical teachers may remain as lost  
 44 continent in English language teaching departments. In the changing world,  
 45 departments that train English teachers should revise and review these terms

that have been used in the last three decades because terms refer to power relations that can be distributed equally across individuals.

## Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This study aimed to bring critical reflection for senior individuals or future critical teachers and deconstruct the buzzword pre-service English teacher because the term pre-service-teacher has been studied as objects of studies rather than active subjects of research process. The overall findings of this study show that the participants were never involved in the process of forming and preparing curriculum or syllabus in ELT. Thus, they were never perceived as active individuals in teaching and learning process. They also expressed their concern about the term pre-service teacher used for them. In addition, their subjective experiences, subjectivity and transformative power were ignored during their educational process. Therefore, this study has important pedagogical implications for practitioners, mentors, policy makers and academics. First, higher public institutions such as ELT departments, Ministry of National Education and Turkish Council of Higher Education should include and involve critical teachers into both research and preparation of curriculum as well as even other-related administrative tasks. Second, future critical teachers should perceive themselves as researchers as well. Thus, they can avoid being studied as objects of studies. Third, prospective critical teachers should foster their critical perspectives and be empowered to emancipate themselves from fixed ideologies and policies. If liberal and active subjects are expected in Turkish society, then macro and micro policies need to be changed radically so that direct democracy and participatory approach can be applied.

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