Voices Of EFL Teachers as Assessors: Their Opinions and Needs Regarding Language Assessment[*]

Değerlendirici Rolüyle İngilizce Öğretmenleri: Dilde Ölçme Değerlendirmeyle İlgili Görüşleri ve İhtiyaçlari

Elçin Ölmezer-Öztürk[**]

Belgin Aydın[***]

Abstract. Employing a qualitative research design, this study aims to investigate the opinions of EFL teachers regarding their language assessment knowledge and identify their general and skill-based needs in this domain. The participants included 11 EFL teachers who were determined through purposeful sampling and working at different universities in Turkish higher education setting. The data collection process included the participants' responses to seven open-ended questions that focused on their evaluations regarding the findings of a larger study investigating the language assessment knowledge of EFL teachers in Turkey and asked their needs in language testing and assessment. The data were analysed based on the qualitative content analysis by code-labelling and identifying the emerging themes. The findings indicated the insufficiency of trainings in both pre-service and in-service teacher education as the major reason of the low level in language assessment knowledge of EFL teachers. The teachers preferred hands-on trainings given by testing practitioners, and designed to improve them in assessing each skill separately. In the light of these findings, the study offers several suggestions for pre-service and in-service teacher education programs on language testing and assessment.

Keywords: Language assessment knowledge, EFL teachers, language assessment needs of language teachers.

Öz. Nitel bir araştırma desenine sahip bu çalışma, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğreten öğretmenlerin dilde ölçme değerlendirme bilgileri üzerine görüşlerini araştırmayı ve bu alandaki ihtiyaçlarını belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmaya amaca dayalı örneklemle belirlenmiş ve Türkiye'de yükseköğretim bağlamında çalışan 11 İngilizce öğretmeni katılmıştır. Veriler, katılımcıların Türkiye'deki öğretmenlerin dilde ölçme değerlendirme bilgilerini araştıran daha geniş ölçekli bir araştırmanın bulguları ile ilgili değerlendirmelerini ve dilde ölçme değerlendirme alanındaki ihtiyaçlarını soran yedi açık-uçlu soru yardımıyla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler içeriğin kodlama ve temalandırılması yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, dil öğretmenlerinin dilde ölçme değerlendirme bilgilerinin eksikliğinin temel sebebinin hizmet-öncesi ve hizmet-içi eğitimlerin yetersizliği olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Çalışmaya katılan öğretmenler, dilde ölçme değerlendirmenin uygulamasına hakim kişiler tarafından verilen ve kendilerini her bir beceriyi ölçmede geliştirebilecek uygulamaya yönelik eğitimleri tercih ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Çalışma, bulguların ışığında, dilde ölçme değerlendirme eğitimlerine yönelik hizmet öncesi ve hizmet içi eğitim programlarına bazı öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dilde ölçme değerlendirme, İngilizce öğretmenleri, dil öğretmenlerinin dilde ölçme değerlendirme ihtiyaçları.

Introduction

Good assessment practices are crucial because the quality of the assessments that are utilized is a prerequisite for the quality of the instruction and learning (Stiggins, 1999). As stated by Shepard (2000), through good assessment practices, more valid decisions can be made in order to adapt instruction and appeal to learners' needs more. Thus, Marzano (2000) argues that for the betterment of student achievement, comprehension and the application of effective assessment practices are crucial. According to Brown (2003), periodic assessments not only aid the reinforcement and retention of information, they also increase motivation by serving as indicators of student progress since they pinpoint areas of strength and areas that need further work. Brown also argues that assessment can promote student autonomy by encouraging students' self-evaluation of their progress and encouraging them to set goals for themselves.

Assessment covers a wide range of assessment activities such as developing paper-pencil tests, grading and interpreting the results (Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003). As teaching and assessment are the concepts affecting each other, they inform and improve each other (Malone, 2013); thus, teachers have great roles in bridging between these two concepts. The role of teachers is made salient in the assessment process with the utterances of many scholars in the literature (Stiggins, 1999; Popham, 2009) who pointed out that when teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills for assessment, it becomes more possible to talk about effective assessment activities. With this great role in language assessment, teachers' knowledge of assessment has a big impact on the quality of education (Malone, 2013). Regarding this, Calderhead (1996) stressed that the power of assessment relies on the knowledge and practices of teachers. As a result, it is necessary for teachers to utilize assessment strategies to make decisions, to decide on the most suitable instruction for learners and to get an idea about teaching and learning progress. In other words, effective teachers are conscious about what, how, and why they are making use of assessment practices (Stanford & Reeves, 2005).

The importance of teachers in assessment practices leads to the term assessment literacy (AL) which was coined by Stiggins (1995) who defined it as "knowing the difference between sound and unsound assessment" (p. 240). For Falsgarf (2005), assessment literacy "is the ability to understand, analyse, and apply information on student performance to improve instruction" (p.6). According to Mertler and Campbell (2005), teachers' assessment knowledge is extremely important since it informs decision making and guiding practice. Rooted in the term assessment literacy, language assessment literacy (LAL) which was defined as "language teachers' familiarity with testing definitions and the application of this knowledge to classroom practices in general and specifically to issues related to assessing language" by Malone (2013, p. 329) has flourished. Inbar-Lourie (2008) argues that language assessment knowledge is a separate entity combining both knowledge of language specific competencies and assessment literacy skills in general. To sum up, while assessment literacy is the combination of assessment knowledge and knowing how to apply this knowledge into practice, language assessment literacy is the combination of language assessment knowledge and utilizing this knowledge in practice. In other words, language assessment knowledge is the core of language assessment literacy without which no practice is possible.

As language assessment literacy is a field which "is in its infancy" (Fulcher, 2012, p. 117), the studies are limited in number. There are some studies focusing on assessment literacy of different stakeholders. For example, O'Loughlin (2013) analysed the needs of university administrators' assessment needs from two large metropolitan Australian universities because these administrators were responsible for admission decisions. The learners had to take IELTS for admission to these

universities, and the administrators were administered a survey as IELTS score users including questions related to IELTS use, evaluation, etc. It was concluded that the administrators needed training for the valid and reliable interpretation of test scores. Similarly, Beverly, Tsushima, and Wang (2014) focused on determining the stakeholders' specific LAL needs. The findings revealed that the participants were really aware of the importance of LAL, and they had the willingness to develop their LAL. The researchers, then designed trainings to meet the needs stated by the participants. Another study belongs to Tsagari and Vogt (2017) investigating the teachers' perceptions of LAL and their individual needs related to language testing and assessment. The participants were teachers who had undergone standard training and who were teaching foreign languages at state tertiary institutions, colleges, and schools without any additional assessment roles from Cyprus (n=16), Greece (n=22) and Germany (n=25). The results demonstrated that the participant teachers' perceived LAL was not sufficient, and they did not feel themselves prepared effectively for assessment-related practices. It was found that teacher education programmes were not giving the efficient and sufficient education and training in language assessment to the pre-service teachers; as a result, these programmes were not enough to prepare the pre-service learners for their future careers. Finally, the tendency towards preparing tests was dominant in most of the teachers, which in turn formed a kind of resistance in the teachers toward innovative assessment practices.

In Turkish context, fewer studies exist focusing on language assessment literacy of teachers. One of them belongs to Öz (2014) who examined the perceptions and practices of Turkish EFL teachers towards formative assessment. 120 teachers took part in his study, and participants were required to complete an online self-report Likert scale. The results indicated that teachers differed in their perceptions and practices related to formative assessment, and that they heavily relied on traditional methods, more than formative assessment. Based on this, it was concluded that as the participants were not educated through formative assessment methods, this change for the teacher to adopt a more formative perspective will take time. In addition to this, in Hatipoğlu's (2015) study, there were 124 pre-service teachers at Middle East Technical University in Turkey. She aimed to find out what pre-service teachers knew about assessment and what their expectations were from their course of English Language Testing and Evaluation. The results indicated that the participants expected to evaluate, select and write exams and prepare their learners for all types of exams. The learners' having limited assessment knowledge after four years in ELT department was a noteworthy finding of this study. Mede and Atay (2017) also made use of the online language testing and assessment (LTA) questionnaire with the aim of finding out the training needs and practices of Turkish EFL teachers. There were 350 teachers participating in this study from seven different universities in Turkey. The findings showed that the teachers had limited assessment literacy, and they needed training in many areas of testing and assessment, especially in classroom-based assessment. They also stated that teachers were not competent with testing productive and receptive skills.

All the studies mentioned above have contributed greatly to the field of language assessment literacy, more specifically language assessment knowledge. However, there is scarcity of research on the investigation of Turkish EFL teachers' opinions and needs regarding language assessment knowledge and how they perceive themselves as assessors. In order to help them gain more knowledge in the area, their needs and perceptions should be identified as the first step. To enlighten these issues, this study poses the following research questions:

1. What are the opinions of EFL teachers in Turkish higher education setting regarding EFL teachers' LAK level in Turkish setting?
2. What are the needs of EFL teachers in language testing and assessment?

3. What are the preferences of language teachers for in-service training?

Methodology

Research Design

The current study presents the qualitative part of a PhD dissertation by Ölmezer-Öztürk (2018) which aimed to find out EFL teachers' language assessment knowledge through a questionnaire called "Language Assessment Knowledge Scale". Based on the quantitative findings, qualitative data aiming to provide insights into how EFL teachers evaluate the assessment level of EFL teachers in general as well as their own level. Teachers' opinions on their needs for language assessment were also gathered in the study. Qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions to get in-depth data and present extended findings on the phenomena under investigation. All the findings derived from the qualitative data were interpreted in the light of the literature and the contextual factors.

Research Context

Turkey is an EFL context in which English does not have an official status. It is taught as a foreign language at primary, secondary and university levels. With the English preparatory programmes, schools of foreign languages at universities are the institutions in which English is taught in a systematic and intensive way in Turkey (Aydın, et. al., 2017). In some of the programmes, there is an office called testing office, and language teachers can volunteer to be members of the testing office or the language teachers are assigned responsibilities by the director of the programme (Aydın, et. al., 2017). In most of the programmes, testing offices may include language teachers who have no or little experience in testing. As members of testing office, language teachers are expected to construct items for separate language skills, conduct exams, evaluate the answers of learners and give a score for the answers, and no extra skill is required to take part in testing offices. While testing office members are encouraged and supported to gain more knowledge by attending various training opportunities in some universities, most of the time EFL teachers are not knowledgeable enough to assess their learners, as identified in the PhD thesis conducted by Ölmezer-Öztürk (2018). Therefore, this study addresses further opinions of how teachers evaluate this situation.

Participants

This study used a purposeful sampling strategy to gather in-depth and more detailed data from the participants. For this, 20 teachers were chosen from 10 universities in Turkey. 5 of these were selected from state universities and the other 5 from private universities. 10 of these participants were selected from testing unit members and 10 from non-testers. These teachers were purposefully determined from this sample so that they could provide more and richer data for the foci of the questions to get a micro-level understanding of the research focus. Seven open-ended questions, which were focusing on language assessment knowledge and needs of EFL teachers in language assessment, were sent via e-mails to 20 teachers. They were asked to answer the questions in detail giving personal and context-specific explanations. Among them, 11 teachers responded to the email and answered all the questions completely. Six of these teachers were the members of the testing office. Out of these six teachers, three of them were working at state universities. Five of these teachers were not the members of the testing office, two of whom were working at state universities.

Data Collection Process

Open-ended questions were prepared focusing on the language assessment knowledge level of EFL teachers and their needs in language assessment. These questions were in Turkish so as to get richer and more detailed data from the participants, and help them feel more relaxed while expressing their opinions in their mother tongue. The questions were checked by three experts in the field of ELT to ensure content validity. Moreover, three language teachers were also asked to check the orthography of the items. The questions were presented in the following table. While the first 5 questions aimed to answer the first research question, question 6 aimed to find out the answer of the second research question and question 7 focused on identifying teachers' preferences.

Table 1.

The Open-ended Questions Used for Data Collection

NO	The Question
Q-1-	According to "Language Knowledge Assessment Scale" developed within the scope of this study, language assessment knowledge level of the teachers working at the schools of foreign languages was identified as 25 out of 60. How do you evaluate this situation? What might be the underlying reasons of this situation?
Q-2-	There are four sections in the scale, assessing reading, listening, writing and speaking, each consisting of 15 questions. In terms of assessing the skills, the highest knowledge level was found in assessing reading (7.05) whereas the lowest level was in assessing listening (4.75). The knowledge level in assessing other skills was found as 6.80 in speaking and 6.57 in writing. How do you evaluate this situation? What are the possible reasons of this?
Q-3-	In the study, whether language assessment knowledge of the teachers changed according to different demographic characteristics that are years of experience, educational background, the BA programme being graduated, working at a private or state university, having a testing course in BA, and attending trainings on testing and assessment was investigated, and it was seen that none of them had an influence on their knowledge. How do you evaluate this?
Q-4-	The only significant difference was found between the participants who worked as testing office members and who did not. How do you interpret this difference and the potential reasons of it?
Q-5-	The relationship between the participants' perceived self-competency and their actual knowledge level was searched, and it was seen that most of them perceived themselves as competent or very competent although their actual score was 25 out of 60. How do you evaluate this difference? What can be the potential reasons of it?
Q-6-	What do you think your needs are in terms of your knowledge in assessing each skill?
Q-7-	What kind of an in-service training module do you think will meet your needs?

Data Analysis

The qualitative data derived from the open-ended questions were analysed based on the qualitative content analysis scheme of Creswell (2012). The answers of the participants were broken into chunks and code-labelled by the researcher. Finally, certain themes based on these initial codes were identified. At the end, the emerging themes were presented in frequencies. The following figure presents a systematic representation of the qualitative data analysis process.
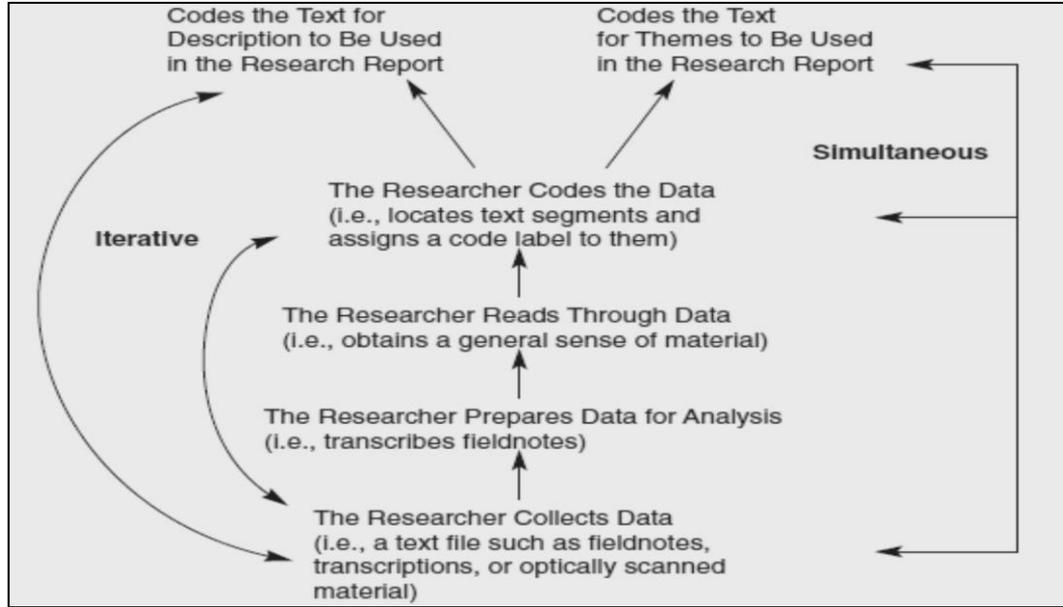
Figure 1. *Qualitative data analysis scheme (Creswell, 2012, p.237)*

To increase the validity of qualitative studies, there are some steps that should be taken into consideration in the literature. Triangulation, which is basically defined as "the use of multiple, independent methods of obtaining data in a single investigation in order to arrive at the same research findings" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 181) is one of the most important elements in qualitative research. Agreeing with the definition of triangulation above, Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016) also defined triangulation as including many participants in a study who have various features and background for gathering richer data. During the qualitative data collection and analysis process, two steps were followed by the researcher to ensure triangulation. First, for data collection, the researcher chose different participants from different contexts, that is from state and private universities, and participants from testing unit members and non members. Additionally, a colleague holding a PhD in ELT assisted the data analysis process while coding and identifying the emerging themes in order to increase the interrater reliability of the data analysis. Both raters analysed the answers of the participants to open-ended questions independently, and they came up with some codes, and eventually certain themes. Then, they compared and contrasted their analysis with each other, and they had 80% agreement on labelling these codes and themes. The labelling of the remaining 20% were agreed through negotiation. All those steps contributed to the triangulation of qualitative data collection and analysis process.

The Findings

The Opinions of EFL Teachers Regarding EFL Teachers' LAK Level

The following table presents the participants' opinions regarding EFL teachers' LAK level in higher education in Turkey. The findings were listed as emerging themes and codes. The numbers given in parenthesis in the codes express the number of the opinions stated by different participants.

Table 2.

Opinions of Teachers Regarding EFL Teachers' LAK Level

Question	Themes	Codes
Evaluation of LAK scores in general	Insufficiency of pre-service education	Limited exposure (x3) Teacher educators' insufficiency (x2) Not graduating from an ELT program (x2)
	Insufficiency of in-service education	Insufficient professional development activities (x4) Lack of teacher motivation (x4) Lack of sources in LTA (x2)
Evaluation of LAK in different skills	Teachers' being most knowledgeable in assessing reading	Priority of reading in the curriculum (x4) Having more concrete outcomes (x2) More experience in reading (x2) More resources in reading (x2)
	Teachers' being least knowledgeable in assessing listening	Practicality concerns (x3) Not giving priority to listening (x2) Insufficient experience in listening (x2)
Evaluation of LAK and variables	No impact of demographics on LAK	Lack of knowledge regardless of any variables (x2)
Effect of being a testing office member	Involvement	Feeling the need to improve (x4) Training and research (x4) Practice opportunities (x3) Non-members being far from testing (x1)
Perceived self-competency and actual knowledge level	Mismatch between self-perception and reality	Being unaware of knowledge level (x6) Resistance to accept incompetency (x3) Being unaware of the importance of LTA (x2)

The results of the study revealed the main reason of lack of language assessment knowledge among the teachers in Turkish higher education setting as the insufficiency of training in both pre-service and in-service levels. As for the pre-service level, the teachers stated that limited exposure in the curriculum, teacher educators' insufficient knowledge and not graduating from an ELT department were stated as the major reasons of the insufficiency of teachers' knowledge. In Turkey, ELT programs have to follow a curriculum determined by the Council of Higher Education and it includes just one course focusing on testing and evaluation. A 3-hour course can cover the fundamentals of testing which causes pre-service teachers to graduate without receiving enough theoretical and mostly practical opportunities in this field. The following expression can be given as an example of the participants' thoughts related to this insufficiency:

-We had just one course on testing and assessment in our pre-service program and in that course, we covered general topics such as validity, reliability, washback, etc. We received very limited knowledge on assessing language and that is why we have a relatively low level.

Another important point related with the insufficiency of pre-service programme was linked to the competency of teacher educators giving language testing and assessment courses. The teachers believed that this was not at the desired level to prepare them to the demands of real life, as seen in the extract below:

-At those times, she (teacher educator) was teaching testing and assessment superficially. When I started working and I met with real testing and assessment practices, I was sure that she would even not be able to prepare appropriate tasks and exams for the level of students…………What she taught was quite different from the reality.

Two respondents also expressed that not graduating from an ELT department and thus not being equipped with the necessary competencies is the reason of insufficiency of the teachers. They thought, as seen in the following teacher's excerpt, even having a certain amount of knowledge in their previous education is not enough for ELT graduates:

-Even ELT graduates have difficulty in language testing and assessment though they have one course on this subject in pre-service education. It is nearly impossible for non-ELT graduates to have enough knowledge related to language testing and assessment.

Insufficient professional development activities and lack of motivation among the teachers for learning more about language testing and assessment were uttered as the main reasons of their insufficient knowledge during in-service level. The following two quotations can be given as examples to insufficient sources and to lack of teacher motivation:

-After we graduated and started to work, we had very few or no opportunities to improve ourselves in testing and assessment. Some private universities provide such opportunities but in state universities, we do not have this chance. Thus, it is hard to improve and keep yourself updated if you do not have these opportunities.

-To be honest, it is a difficult topic for most of us and we do not feel enthusiastic to improve ourselves. Maybe we think that it is the duty of testing office and not ours.

Besides, lack of sources to improve themselves in language testing and assessment, especially related to skill based testing, was mentioned by two participants. The following utterance is an example for their opinion:

-Although there are many books focusing on language assessment, there are very few based on specific skills. Additionally, these books are not available in libraries; thus, it is difficult for us to get them.

The second question focused on the participants' opinions related with skill-based knowledge. It was put forward that the teachers were the most knowledgeable in assessing reading and the least in assessing listening. The participants said that the teachers were more knowledgeable in assessing reading because it was considered as an easy skill to teach and test due to its priority in the curriculum and its outcomes being concreate for the teachers. Teachers' having more experience in teaching and testing reading as well as having more resources were also explained as the other reasons. One of the participants wrote the following sentences to express her ideas on this issue:

-Reading is a dominant skill. You teach vocabulary and grammar through reading activities and it is an indispensable part of our classroom teaching……. Also what you want to teach is quite clear in reading and I can say, it is easier to teach compared to other skills. That might be a reason.

The following expression can summarize the experience factor that made the teachers perceive reading as a skill easier to teach and assess:

-As a learner, I was used to reading classes. We were given reading texts, and I have some experiences rooted in my high school years. As a teacher, course books are also full of examples intended for teaching and assessing reading; so, I feel myself more experienced in teaching and assessing reading.

The following ideas by two of the participants explain the existence of more resources for reading:

-Teachers feel more comfortable because there are a lot of sources both to teach and to test reading, and even with the guidance on how to use them.

On the other hand, listening was found to be the skill in which the teachers were the least knowledgeable, and the major reason for this was the perception of listening as a challenging skill to teach and to test due to several practicality issues. What the following teacher says can be presented to explain the reasons of these difficulties:

-We cannot modify the materials used in assessing listening. Adding extra sentences, or cutting some parts of a listening material are really demanding. We even do not know how to do this, because doing this requires extra competencies apart from ELT knowledge. Because of this, we tend to make use of ready-made materials which in turn makes us not question the appropriateness of the materials.

Teachers also stated that listening did not have a priority in the programmes; thus, teachers did not have sufficient experience in assessing it. According to them, listening was the least favoured skill among all, and it was even a problematic skill for the teachers themselves. The sentences below expressed by one of the teachers are quite striking:

-I do not feel myself competent enough in teaching listening. Naturally, I cannot assess a skill efficiently in which I have difficulty in teaching.

Another participant shared similar opinions as follows:

-There are not enough activities in the class to teach listening to our learners. We cannot find materials suitable for our learners in terms of content or vocabulary. Most of the language teachers have weaknesses in listening; so, it becomes a challenge for them to assess this skill.

Another finding was that six of the seven demographic features, that is, experience, educational background, the BA programme being graduated, working at a private or state university, having previous education on testing, and attending trainings on the field had no effect on the LAK level of EFL teachers. The participants explained this with language assessment knowledge not being a phenomenon related with demographic features of teachers and they uttered the insufficiency of education as the main source of the problem, with the similar reasons they stated in the first question. Some of the participants found this finding as an expected outcome, and summarized that neither pre-service nor in-service education prepared them with sufficient assessment knowledge. In other words, rather than the demographic features, the education received was important. On the other hand, there were some teachers who found this finding surprising, stating that:

-Really!!! I am shocked. I would expect years of experience and being an ELT graduate to make a difference.

Furthermore, the only demographic feature which made a significant difference on teachers' LAK level was working as a testing office member. When the participants were asked about the underlying reasons of it, they explained this with "the more you are involved, the more you learn", as expressed by one of them. They thought that testing members feel the need to improve themselves and attend to

![ENAD ONLINE logo]
EĞİTİMDE NİTEL ARAŞTIRMALAR DERGİSİ
Journal of Qualitative Research in Education

Volume 7 / Issue 1, 2019

Eğitimde Nitel Araştırmalar Dergisi - ENAD

Journal of Qualitative Research in Education - JOQRE

trainings or sometimes conduct research. Having lots of practice opportunities in preparing tests as a requirement of the office was the main factor increasing their knowledge level. They also stated that if teachers are not a part of the testing office, they were far from any knowledge related to assessment. On this involvement issue, two of the participants stated the following sentences:

-When you are in a testing office, you feel the pressure and need that you should be better and you should improve yourself in language testing and assessment. Now, as a part of this office, you are responsible for designing tests, writing item, etc.

-As testing office members, these teachers should know everything related to the question types, instructions, how to score the items in the tests they designed. They should have all this information because when a colleague or learner asks the logic behind them, they are expected to give an answer to the questions.

The last open-ended question was about the difference between the teachers' perceived self-competency and their actual LAK level. It was derived from the quantitative data that though the teachers perceived themselves very competent or competent in assessing all skills, their actual LAK was not a reflection of their perception. The participants of this study were asked to comment on the reason of this mismatch. Their answers put forward that teachers were not only unaware of their assessment knowledge level, they were also resistant to accept their incompetency mostly because they were not aware of the importance of LTA, as stated in the example below:

-Teachers may think that what they experienced or learnt years ago was correct; so, they even do not feel the need to question their language assessment knowledge.

The following is another example reflecting the teachers' opinions:

-Going through the exam questions in the class with the students, and giving them the true answers and making them explanations on how to answer the questions do not mean that teachers are knowledgeable in assessment-related activities.

One participant touched upon the resistance of the teachers to accept their incompetency by saying that:

-I know that I have many weaknesses in assessment, but, most of the teachers do not want to accept this, and they say that it is not my favourite research area, or I am not a testing office member. However, each and every language teacher should have certain language assessment knowledge. Moreover, most teachers do not have the willingness for self-reflection, and here is the result.

 The last reason expressed by the participants was the teachers' being unaware of the importance of LTA, as stated below:

-These assessment-related activities are thought to be the duties of testing office members. Thus, they may not find it necessary to learn the things related to language testing and assessment.

To sum up, the teachers' evaluations reveal several reasons as the sources of their insufficient language assessment knowledge; and the problems in their education, the difficulties they experience in real life, the responsibilities they have, and more importantly the perceptions they hold towards the requirements of their jobs are the factors affecting how much they know about language testing and assessment.

EFL Teachers' Needs in Language Assessment

The second research question of the study aimed to explore the participants' opinions regarding their needs in language assessment. The codes and emerging themes derived from the participants' answers were presented in the table below.

Table 3.
EFL Teachers' Needs in Language Assessment

Question	Codes
Needs in assessment training	Trainings for all skills (x4)
	Overcoming subjectivity in productive skills (x4)
	Constructing tests/tasks for assessing each skill (x3)
	Analysing the validity and reliability of tests (x2)

EFL teachers stated that they need training for assessing each skill separately. How to overcome subjectivity in scoring productive skills, constructing tests and tasks for assessing language skills and analysing the validity and reliability of the tests were the most important needs expressed by the teachers in the study. The following expressions of two teachers can be given as examples of these needs:

-We should be taught how to construct tests and tasks. Knowing something and doing it correctly are different things; thus, I want to make practice with the professionals based on the specific examples. Now, the numbers mean nothing to me, unfortunately. I want to analyse the reliability and validity of the tests we designed in our institution.

-Especially, in assessing reading and writing, I want to learn how to develop clear and to the point rubrics that decrease the subjectivity of scoring in those skills.

It is possible to state that practicing teachers are aware of why they need to assess their learners and to interpret the results of this assessment in guiding them for their future progress.

EFL Teachers' Preferences for the Training

The last research question focused on identifying the teachers' preferences regarding the features of a training module to increase their assessment knowledge. The participants' opinions were presented in the table below.

Table 4.
EFL Teachers' Preferences for Training

Question	Codes
Preferred training module	Given by professional LTA practitioners (x6)
	Hands-on practices in trainings (x3)
	Both theory and practice (x3)
	Long-lasting and sustainable (x2)
	Institutional factors considered (x2)

As seen in the table, the participants

highly emphasized that they need professionals who are also practitioners on language testing and assessment. Not only knowledge of theory but also applying that knowledge in the field with hands-on experiences was the most important factor for them. The following provides a good explanation for this need:

-These trainings should be given by professionals who are involved in assessment practices regarding each skill. The problematic parts in which we cannot come to an agreement with our colleagues could be asked to the professionals and they should have the necessary knowledge and confidence to answer our questions.

The teachers preferred these trainings to be long-lasting and sustainable, designed considering the institutional factors as expressed below:

-The trainings are more beneficial when they are long-lasting and sustainable. Because, it is not very easy to learn new things or to adapt to new information. So, with the help of the recurrent trainings, teachers firstly become more aware of their practices, and start to apply what they have learned in those trainings.

-Not all the information in the trainings is applicable. Thus, the trainings should be context-specific, and train us by taking our institutional factors into consideration. Thanks to this, we could convert all this theory into practice.

As a result, the teachers stated that one-shot trainings given theoretically by experts who are not familiar with the needs of the contexts were not desirable by the teachers in the study.

Discussion

The focus of this study was to get in-depth data on teachers' opinions regarding general and skill-based LAK level of EFL teachers, as well as finding out their training needs and preferences. The participants were first asked to comment on the language assessment knowledge level of language teachers in Turkish higher education setting which was identified as 25 out of 60 in the previous study (Ölmezer-Öztürk, 2018). The main reason for the low level of teachers' knowledge was associated with the insufficiency of education on assessment in pre-service and in-service levels. As for the pre-service education, the participants mainly focused on the limited number of courses and the limited exposure to knowledge in the field in pre-service programs. This finding is in line with the findings of the studies conducted by Hatipoğlu (2015) and Herrera and Macias (2015) who believe that literacy in language assessment can not be restricted to a single course in pre-service education. As there is mostly one course in pre-service education which is directly related to language assessment, the participants expressed that it is not enough for pre-service teachers to be equipped with necessary knowledge and skills in language assessment. Besides, the teachers' opinion that the competency of teacher educators giving language testing and assessment courses is crucial is also supported by Stiggins (1999), Hatipoğlu (2015) and Jeong (2013) who argued that professional background of teacher educators is important in the preparation of future educators. There is not a must or prerequisite conditions for teacher educators to teach language assessment to learners in pre-service education. If teacher educators master on language assessment, then it is more possible to have more fruitful and efficient courses given by more knowledgeable and professional teacher educators in language assessment.

The other important point in the eyes of the participants was the insufficiency in the in-service education level. They believed that teachers in higher education setting did not receive sufficient amount of training on assessment, and for this reason, their knowledge is limited. The most critical point for them was the lack of professional development activities which was also supported by the

studies conducted by Köksal (2004) and Lam (2015) in which the lack of sufficient training was stressed.

In addition to the lack of opportunities, the participants also revealed that they did not find language testing and assessment as attractive fields and thus, they did not have enough motivation to have more knowledge on it. Not having enough sources to improve themselves in LTA was also mentioned as another reason. It is probable that since the importance of language assessment is not emphasized well enough in pre-service education, teachers may not be paying enough attention to language assessment and not be feeling themselves enthusiastic to be better in this field. Besides, they might have the opinion that assessment is a field full of terminologies and only the experts in this field can handle the practical elements, and such a perception among teachers might discourage them towards testing and assessment.

The second question asked the teachers to comment on their knowledge level in assessing reading and listening in which they were identified as having the most and the least knowledge on. Reading was found to be an easy skill to teach and test in general. Having priority in most of the language programs, having concrete outcomes, teachers' having more experience and the existence of more resources were the major factors that made the participants find assessing reading easy. As Hubley (2012) states, much of the input around us comes from reading sources, thus reading is an important skill. Since there is the density of input surrounding the learners, they have to read a lot. As reading skill is given importance, teaching it is highly valued, and as a natural consequence, it is assessed a lot. As there are various ready-made materials for assessing reading; it does not become a challenge for teachers to assess reading skills of their learners (Backlund, Brown, Gurry & Jandt, 1980).

On the contrary, teachers' knowledge in assessing listening got the lowest mean score. The respondents stated that both teaching and assessing listening were challenging for most of the language teachers and it was not a priority in the programmes. As for listening, Flowerdew and Miller (2012) discussed that assessing listening is perceived by both learners and teachers as an issue which somehow improves by itself. The participants' utterances in relation to not giving priority to assessing listening was also mentioned by Buck (2001) who stated that listening is neglected in terms of teaching and assessing. With respect to the ignorance in assessing listening, Nunan and Miller (1995) and Flowerdew and Miller (2005) stated that listening skill is a 'Cinderella' skill that most teachers take for granted. For Buck (2001), the reason why listening is neglected is because of the complicated nature of listening as a skill and practicality issues related to assessing listening. Thus, the findings of the current study are in line with the studies mentioned above, and they have posed similar problems related to assessing listening.

The third question was related to the effects of demographic features on the LAK level of the teachers. In the larger study of Ölmezer-Öztürk (2018), it was revealed that years of experience, educational background, the BA programme graduated, workplace, having a testing course and attending to trainings on testing and assessment did not have an effect on the LAK level of the teachers. The participants thought that the reason for insufficient language assessment knowledge is lack of knowledge; thus, no variable is crucial in this situation for them. The possible explanation might be the stated problems or insufficiencies in pre-service education by the participants. As they stated that the teachers graduate from pre-service education with lack of knowledge in language assessment, thus, it may not be important how experienced a teacher is. As teachers lack necessary skills, years in teaching may not be enough for them to be better. Hence, having training with a limited number of courses may not create a huge gap between ELT and non-ELT graduates, and also among teachers with BA, MA or PhD degrees. Finally, attending trainings was not found as a factor leading to more knowledge in

language assessment. The reason could be the format of the trainings, because they are usually not long-lasting and not focusing on practical issues. Because of all these possible reasons, the participants could think that knowledge is the essence of language assessment, not the variables mentioned above.

The findings of the fourth question indicated that the only demographic feature that had an impact on the LAK level of the teachers was being a testing office member. The respondents expressed that when teachers were more involved in assessment-related activities, they obviously learnt more about it.

The mismatch between the perceived self-competency levels of the teachers and their assessment knowledge level was another topic on which the participants' opinions were gathered. While most of the teachers found themselves very competent or competent; this perceived self-competency did not reflect what they actually knew about assessment. This result showing teachers' unawareness is important in determining the steps of in-service teacher education which should help them become aware of what they know and what they think they know. This finding is in line with Öz and Atay's (2017) and Jannati's (2015) studies in which the teachers perceived themselves very knowledgeable in language testing and assessment and thought that they had enough knowledge about the concepts and terminology in this field. These findings show that teachers are unaware of their language assessment knowledge levels and had some kind of resistance to evaluate themselves in terms of their knowledge levels.

The last research question of the study aimed to find out the needs of EFL teachers' on LTA Similar to the teachers in Popham's (2009) and Fulcher's (2012) studies, Turkish teachers needed trainings on assessment of all language skills, given by the experts in the field who are familiar with the context of the teachers. Moreover, like the participants in Popham's (2009) and Hasselgreen, Carlsen and Helness' (2004) studies they expressed the difficulties they experienced in overcoming the subjectivity scoring the productive skills. The participant teachers in the current study also wanted to learn how to analyse reliability and validity of tests, which was also mentioned by Wu (2014) and Mede and Atay (2017).

The final open-ended question focused on the elements of a potential training module on LTA in the eyes of the participant teachers. Language teachers preferred long-lasting and sustainable trainings delivered by professional practitioners and creating a significant impact on their daily lives. As Herrera and Macias (2015) argued, they believed the usefulness of ongoing training to keep up with the recent innovations in LAL. In addition, as stated by Lam (2015), they thought trainings should include practices, combining both theory and practice as well as addressing their institutional needs

Conclusion

Assessment is an undeniable part of learning and teaching process, and teachers are in the centre of all assessment-related activities such as developing tests, writing items and giving scores. All these duties require a language teacher to be knowledgeable in language assessment. As a part of a bigger study, this study focused on identifying what EFL teachers thought regarding language assessment knowledge of language teachers working in Turkish higher education setting. Teachers' needs and preferred trainings were also identified. The results of the study indicated that the teachers found both pre-service and in-service education insufficient. Limited exposure in the curriculum, teacher educators' inadequacy in teaching testing and not graduating from an ELT department were the underlying reasons of the problems in pre-service teacher education. In-service education was also

problematic due to insufficient professional development activities, lack of motivation of teachers, and lack of sources in language testing and assessment. While assessing and teaching reading were the priority of the language programmes, listening was challenging to assess not only because of practicality issues, but also because of the fact that teaching listening was not given enough importance. Being involved in assessment-related activities and practicing help teachers gain knowledge. The findings also revealed that the teachers were neither aware of their assessment knowledge level nor the importance of the issue, they also had resistance to face with their incompetency. Training on the assessment of four skills, focusing on overcoming subjectivity in productive skills, constructing tests and analysing their reliability and validity were the needs of the language teachers. Long-lasting and sustainable trainings given be professional LTA practitioners, with real practical examples, taking institutional factors into consideration were desirable.

There are some implications drawn from the findings of the current study both for pre and in-service teacher training programmes. It seems inevitable for pre-service teacher education programmes to allocate more space to assessment in their curriculum. If teachers start doing their job with more knowledge on the basics of language assessment, and if they see the applications of these theories in their lives as students, they will be more equipped when they start doing their job. Including the assessment component to teaching practice will also provide opportunities for the teachers to apply their assessment knowledge with the help of experts before jumping into the requirements of the real world. Pre-service teacher education programmes need to include assessment as an indispensable component of teaching, not as a separate course. Being more knowledgeable will also help teachers start doing their job with a feeling of efficacy which will also increase their motivation for further improvement on assessment.

In-service teacher training programmes should be encouraged to design explicit trainings based on the needs of their own teachers. They can also support and encourage teachers to attend meetings and conferences designed by other institutions and learn from each other. Thus, language assessment knowledge of EFL teachers could be increased both by taking context-specific and institutional factors into consideration and exchanging opinions and learning from others. Based on the teachers' preferences in this study, designing an in-service training programme focusing on assessment in four skills in the foreign language seems necessary. Teachers could be equipped with basic, practical and to the point information related to each skill in these training programmes, and they could have the opportunity to work on real exams. Listening was identified as a skill which needs further attention in the curriculum in terms of both teaching and testing. Only by being more equipped, teachers can understand that assessment is not an area they should be afraid of, but it is an indispensable component of teaching and can be applied in an educating and enjoyable way for the learners and the teachers.

As for the limitations of this study, one is the number of the participants answering open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were sent to 20 teachers, but 11 of them replied. It would have been better if there had been more teachers answering these questions. Second one is the context in which the study was conducted. As the setting is limited to the preparatory programmes of the universities in Turkey, the results reflect the opinions and needs of EFL teachers in higher education setting regarding language assessment knowledge. Therefore, this study can be conducted to a larger group of teachers from different settings and the results can be used as a step for in-service training by raising the awareness of the teachers. Finding out language assessment knowledge of pre-service teachers and their opinions on the topic will also serve as a starting point for awareness raising even before their start doing their jobs.

References

Aydın, B., Kızıltan, N., Öztürk, G., İpek, Ö. F., Yükselir, C., & Beceren, S. (2017). Optional English preparatory programs after HEC 2016 regulation: Opinions of administrators on the current situation and problems. *Anadolu University Journal of Education Faculty*, *1* (2), 1-11.

Backlund, P., Brown, K., Gurry, J., & Jandt, F. (1980). Evaluating speaking and listening skill assessment instruments: Which one is best for you? *Language Arts, 57* (6), 621-627.

Beverly, B.A., Tsushima, R., & Wang, S. (2014). Investigating Language Assessment Literacy: Collaboration between assessment specialists and Canadian university admissions officers. *CercleS, 4* (1), 137-157.

Brown, H. D. (2003). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices.* Pearson Education.

Buck. G. (2001). *Assessing listening.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Calderhead, J. (1996). Teachers: Beliefs and knowledge. In d. C. Berliner, & R. C. Calfee (Eds.), *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (pp. 709-725). New York: Macmillan.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Boston: Pearson Education.

Falsgraf, C. (2005, April). Why a national assessment summit? New visions in action. National Assessment Summit. Meeting conducted in Alexanderia, Va. Retrieved from: http://www. nflrc.iastate.edu /nva/word documents/ assessment_2005/ pdf /nsap_introduction.pdf

Flowerdew, J., & Miller, L. (2005). *Second language listening: Theory and practice.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Flowerdew, J., & Miller, L. (2012). Assessing listening. In C. Coombe, P. Davidson, B. O'Sullivan, & S. Stoynoff. (Eds.). *The Cambridge guide to second language assessment*. (pp. 225-233). Cambridge University Press, USA.

Fulcher, G. (2012). Assessment literacy for the language classroom. *Language Assessment Quarterly, 9* (2), 113-132.

Hasselgreen, A., Carlsen, C., Helness, H. (2004). *European survey of language and assessment needs. Part one: General finding.* Retrieved April 22, 2018, from www.ealta eu.org/documents/resources/survey-report-pt1.pdf.

Hatipoğlu, Ç. (2015). English language testing and evaluation (ELTE) training in Turkey: expectations and needs of pre-service English language teachers. *ELT Research Journal, 4* (2), 111-128.

Herrera, L. & Macias, D. (2015). A call for language assessment literacy in the education and development of teachers of English as a foreign language. *Colomb. Appl. Linguist. J., 17* (2), 302-312.

Hubley, N. N. (2012). Assessing reading. In C. Coombe, P. Davidson, B. O'Sullivan, & S. Stoynoff. (Eds.). *The Cambridge guide to second language assessment.* (pp. 211-217). Cambridge University Press, USA.

Inbar-Lourie, O. (2008). Constructing a language assessment knowledge base: A focus on language assessment courses. *Language Testing, 25* (3), 385-402.

Jannati, S. (2015). ELT teachers' language assessment literacy: Perceptions and practices. *The International Journal of Research in Teacher Education, 6* (2), 26-37.

Jeong, H. (2013). Defining assessment literacy: Is it different for language testers and non-language testers?. *Language Testing, 30* (3), 345-362.

Köksal, D. (2004). Assessing teachers' testing skills in ELT and enhancing their professional development through distance learning on the net. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education (TOJDE), 5* (1), 1- 11.

Lam, R. (2015). Language assessment training in Hong Kong: Implications for language assessment literacy. *Language Testing, 32* (2), 169-197.

Mackey, A. & Gass, S. M. (2005). Second language research: Methodology and design. Mahwah, N. J.: Lawrance Erlbaum.

Malone, M. E. (2013). The essentials of assessment literacy: Contrasts between testers and users. *Language Testing, 30* (3), 329-344.

Marzano, R. J. (2000). Transforming classroom grading. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Mede, E., & Atay, D. (2017). English Language Teachers' assessment literacy: The Turkish context. *Dil Dergisi, 168* (1), 1-5.

Mertler, C. A., & Campbell, C. (2005). *Measuring teachers' knowledge and application of classroom assessment concepts: Development of the assessment literacy inventory*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED490355.

Nunan, D., & Miller, L. (1995). *New ways in teaching listening.* Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

O'Loughlin, K. (2013). Developing the assessment literacy of university proficiency test users. *Language Testing, 30* (3), 363-380.

Ölmezer-Öztürk, E. (2018). Developing and validating language assessment knowledge scale (LAKS) and exploring the assessment knowledge of EFL teachers. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Anadolu University, Turkey.

Öz, H. (2014). Turkish teachers' practices of assessment for learning in the English as a foreign language classroom. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 5* (4), 775-785.

Öz, S., & Atay, D. (2017). Turkish EFL teachers' in-class language assessment literacy: perceptions and practices. *ELT Reseacrh Journal, 6* (1), 25-44.

Popham, J. W. (2009). Assessment literacy for teachers: Faddish or fundamental? *Theory Into Practice, 48*, 4-11.

Shepard, L. A. (2000). The role of assessment in a learning culture. *Educational researcher, 29* (7), 4-14.

Stanford, P., & Reeves, S. (2005). Assessment that drives instruction. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 37* (4), 18-22.

Stiggins, R. J. (1995). Assessment literacy for the 21st century. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77* (3), 238-245.

Stiggins, R. J. (1999). Evaluating classroom assessment training in teacher education programs. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, *18* (1), 23-27.

Tsagari, D. & Vogt, K. (2017). Assessment literacy of foreign language teachers around Europe: Research, challenges and future prospects. *Papers in Language Testing and Assessment*, *6* (1), 41-64.

Wu, J. R. W. (2014). Investigating Taiwanese teachers' language testing and assessment needs. *English Teaching and Learning, 38* (1), 1-27.

Yıldırım, A., ve Şimşek, H. (2016). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Ankara: Seçkin.

Zhang, Z., & Burry-Stock, J. A. (2003). Classroom assessment practices and teachers' self-perceived assessment skills. *Applied Measurement in Education, 16* (4), 323-342.

Authors

Elçin ÖLMEZER-ÖZTÜRK is an instructor at the Department of Foreign Language Education at Anadolu University. She holds a PhD in English Language Teaching and she is currently teaching pre-service teachers. Her research interests are language testing and assessment, language teacher education, and affective factors in language learning.

Belgin AYDIN is a professor at the Department of Foreign Language Education and the director of School of Foreign Languages at Anadolu University. She has been teaching at the department at both graduate and post-graduate levels. Her research interests are teacher education, technology integration in language teaching, language testing and assessment and individual factors in language learning.

Contact

Dr. Elçin Ölmezer-Öztürk, Department of Foreign Language Education, Anadolu University, Turkey.
e-mail: elcinolmezerozturk@anadolu.edu.tr

Prof. Dr. Belgin Aydın, Department of Foreign Language Education, Anadolu University, Turkey.
e-mail: baydin@anadolu.edu.tr