Full Length Research Paper

Evaluation of teacher candidates writing skills[1]

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In this study, 200 volunteer students who were in Faculty of Education printed free essay compositions and the compositions were evaluated by descriptive statistics and content analysis. Content analysis is to interpret similar data within specific contexts and themes. The students were free to choose their own writing topic. The reason for this is the possibility that the person writing in freelance writing is feeling freer and thus able to collect more data. Thus, written expression errors will be examined in more detail. The data have been examined and themed. In this process, collected data were evaluated according to written expression evaluation scale. The results of this study indicated that 200 data points collected from education faculty students regarding written expression skills were found between acceptable "DC" in terms of arithmetic mean. Research is important in terms of revealing the mistakes that are often found in written expressions of teacher candidates. This research is also important for lecturers in terms of assessing the participant teacher candidates' attitudes towards writing. According to the findings of this research, it is expected that the mistakes of teacher candidates' in their written expressions are made clear, and that contributions of the recommendations and the studies related to the field are expected to be provided. It is expected that the comparison of the study with the previous studies reveal the changes and developments in the historical process related to the subject.

Key words: Language skills, Turkish education, teacher candidates, writing skills.

INTRODUCTION

The human mind has the ability to interpret which combines previous knowledge with new knowledge and adapts to new events. This interpretation later becomes essential for self-explaining needs. In this sense, understanding and explaining skills comprised reading and listening under understanding skills and speaking and writing under explaining skills. These four fundamental language skills have an integral relationship. As reading and listening skills develop, speaking and writing skills will develop as well. Similarly, as writing and speaking skills develop, skills related with understanding will develop. Among these skills, writing is an essential skill for both the private and corporate life of an individual. Explaining oneself in an appropriate and accurate written format in corporate and private life would provide various gains. Additionally, written expression is the fundamental source for information sharing between generations.

"Written expression" is expressing ideas and emotions

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within language rules, using a suitable plan and in an impressive manner (Calp, 2005: 195). It is possible to evaluate written expression processes as stated subsequently.

First, the motivation for writing should be achieved and the subject should be selected. The subject should be narrowed down and an objective should be determined. The subject should be supported with their ideas and an expression order should be determined. Readings should be done for the objective evaluation of the writing (Beyreli et al., 2011: 38).

There are many forms of written expression. However, it is possible to summarise written expression types as: explanation, proving, descriptive, and narration (Dölek, 2016: 24-26).

(1) Expression with explanation is related with giving information about one subject or teaching one subject. This way of expression often uses classification, review, and comparison.
(2) Expression with proving/discussion is used for support or confute any idea, thought, or judgement.
(3) In descriptive expression, the author will add personal views in description processes and promotes readers to imagine.
(4) Narrative expression contains a main event and auxiliary events. In narrative expression, there are important elements such as time, location, and meaning.

Written expression has certain principles. Gündüz and Şimşek (2012: 31-35) described the basic principles of writing as follows: motivation for writing, necessary Turkish skills, individuality/style or making language personal, being a careful and sensitive observer, making reading a necessary and enjoyable habit, thinking about what is learned, and understanding the knowledge.

Writing works are investigated under controlled, directed, and free (Demirel, 2003: 102-108). Controlled writing requires students to preserve words and sentence structures or to make requested changes. In guided writing, students should use words and sentence structures in a controlled way and construct meaningful paragraphs. Lastly, in free writing, student should write with their own ideas and emotions by considering the writing rules. In this study, a free writing activity was applied to teacher candidates.

Coşkun (2007: 55-56) listed writing education based on the following focus points.

In product-based writing education, students should form a text. The preparation stage is skipped. The teacher has a role in determining the topic and evaluating the writings. Writing anxiety is considered unimportant. Stylistic attributes are more important than content. The relationship between writing skills and cognitive skills is disregarded. Teacher gives the topic. The student does not select the text type. Students should express the truth in the text. Writing activities of students are bounded with in-class exercises and examination and these are made for evaluation.

In process-based writing education, writing skills is considered as a process that occurs by consecutively using related activities. The preparation stage is important for process-based writing education. At this stage, students are psychologically and mentally preparade for writing. Teacher acts as a guide at every stage. Individual differences of students are considered. Content is more important than style. Students have the right to choose topic. Selecting the text type is a right for the student. Student could work with imagination without thinking of right wrong. Writing is considered as a chance for cognitive development. The objective of the evaluation is to overcome deficiencies of children. Writing is not only considered as in-class activity.

From this point of view, it could be commented that in the evaluation stage, certain expectations occur in written expression. The expectations from written expression are as follows:

(1) It should follow language rules;
(2) It should be used under a planned period;
(3) Semantic gaps of emphasis, gestures should be filled with written expression;
(4) It should follow punctuation and grammar rules;
(5) Writer should have sufficient vocabulary (İlanbey, 2016: 14-15).

These properties are considered as different evaluation scales in different studies as subsequently shown. For example, Göçer (2005:241) considered the following as an evaluation scale of written expression:

(1) Plan, title, introduction, body, conclusion, beauty of the text, page order.
(2) Perspective; emotion, idea, observing, impression, and benefiting from design.
(3) Simplicity and naturality in expression; word and sentence knowledge.
(4) Understanding the subject, explaining with original examples; content integrity between paragraphs.
(5) Spelling and punctuation.

As teachers in the Turkey have no common writing approach, this problem is one of the most important obstacles for planned and consistent evaluation of written expression applications. This causes the most important problem for developing written expression skills in an educational environment (Karatay, 2011: 1045).

Under the scope of this study, fundamental mistakes in written expression were evaluated using 200 participants from a sampling group. In this sense, this study is important for reflecting the fundamental mistakes in written expression. The data was evaluated for the

Table 1. Table for gender distribution of participants.

Participant gender	Number
Male	52
Female	148

gender of participants. As the participants were free to choose writing style, these options reflected the text type selection of this large sample group. This study based on determining written expression mistakes was conducted on education faculty students. This sample was selected because teacher candidates will affect the next generation as role models. The aim of this research is to point out writing mistakes of teacher candidates, which is thought to be significant considering the fact that the next generation will take their teachers as their role models.

METHODOLOGY

Voluntary students in Bozok University, Education Faculty wrote free style compositions and these compositions were evaluated with descriptive statistical and content analysis. Content analysis interprets similar data under the scope of certain concepts and themes (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006). The reason for not providing writing topics for the students is that as the literature suggested, students who write without pre-determined topic were feeling free and generate more data. Thus, written expression mistakes could be evaluated in detail. Data were analysed and themed.

Study group

In this study, a 200-person sample student group from Bozok University Education Faculty Class Teaching, Pre-School Teaching, and Mathematics Teaching and Science Teaching departments was selected on a voluntary basis. This study was conducted with volunteer students from different years who were attending Bozok University, Education Faculty during the 2017/2018 academic year (Table 1).

Data collection tools

Data collected in this study were evaluated using the "Written Expression Evaluation Form" developed by Cemal Yıldız (2008) in Turkish Education from Theory to Application Based on New Education Program book.

Data collection and analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistic and content analysis. Raw data were evaluated and coded in the data analysis process. Collected data were evaluated based on style, language-expression, spelling and punctuation titles of the Written Expression Evaluation Form. The form is presented in the Appendix. Two experts investigated the data and the arithmetic mean was calculated using Excel. The reliability was ensured by consulting three different experts. The arithmetic averages of the data

assessed by the three experts were presented in tables. The written expression assessment scores of the three researchers were found to be similar. The average of the scores from both the researcher and two experts was measured by a student in the study. Maltepe (2007: 197) argued that students should be free to determining the writing topic. Öztürk (2007: 145) showed that students had a higher success rate when they set the topic on their own. For data richness and for promoting easy self-expression methods for students, the students freely chose text type and topic.

FINDINGS

The participant teacher candidates' written expressions were assessed by two experts on the basis of the written expressions assessment form. The arithmetic means of the scores given by the experts to 200 participant teacher candidates are presented in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, the highest scores in Written Expression Evaluation Form was received for "main idea was given in text", "main idea and emotion was supported with auxiliary idea and emotion", and "references, citations, and examples are adequate" items. The lowest scores were observed in "using related references", "selecting title", and "word repetition" items. General score was Acceptable-DC, which could be considered as unsuccessful.

Students' scores were assessed considering the grade units used in Turkish undergraduate education: AA 4.00 90-100 High Achievement; BA 3.50 85-89 Very Good; BB 3.00 80-84 Good; CB 2.50 75-79 Above Average; CC 2.00 70-74 Average; DC 1.50 65-69 Passing Grade-Average; DD 1.00 60-64 Passing Grade; FD 0.50 50-59 Weak; FF 0.00 00-49 Very Weak.

Table 3 shows the text type selection of teacher candidates for their written expression. It was observed that students in the education faculty often preferred essays in written expression. When male participants were considered (Table 4), most of the participants were at a very poor level. When female participants were considered (Table 5), most of the participants were in a poor or very poor level. However, there were excellent level participants with few differences.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicated that 200 data points collected from education faculty students regarding written expression skills were found between Acceptable "DC" in terms of arithmetic mean. Similarly, Çamurcu (2011: 515-516) determined that when compositions of first grade Turkish Education Department students were investigated, Turkish teacher candidates had low written expression skills. When second compositions were evaluated, it was determined that written expression skills of students could be developed from the beginning of the

Table 2. The arithmetic means of teacher candidates' written expression achievement scores

Scale items	Arithmetic mean
Appropriate margins are left between paragraphs and sentences. - 5p	3.4
Good, readable, and functional handwriting is used. -5p	3.4
Title is related with topic. -5p	3.2
Topic was explained in logical consistency and integrity. -5p	3.6
Appropriate connections were made between paragraphs. -5p	3.5
Single idea-emotion was included in each paragraph. -5p	3.5
Main idea was given in text. -10p	6
Main idea and emotion was supported with auxiliary idea and emotion. -10p	5.8
References, citations, and examples were adequate. -10p	5.7
The conclusion sentence summed the topic and was effective. -5p	3.6
Sentence structures were compliant with grammar rules. -5p	3.4
Words were used correctly and with correct meaning. -5p	3.5
There were no word repetitions in sentences. -5p	3.2
Resources were used about the topic. -5p	2.7
Unique statements were used for explaining the topic. -5p	3.3
Spelling rules were followed. -5p	3.6
Punctuation was correct. -5p	3.5
Total	65.4

Table 3. Text type selection of teacher candidates for written expression.

Type	Participant number
Memoir	4
Essay	184
Interview	5
Story	5
Fairy tale	1
Biography	1

term until the end.

The results of this study indicated that most of the students in the education faculty preferred to express themselves using essay. The data of the study showed that writing skills of female participants were higher than writing skills of male participants (Tables 4 and 5).

Can (2012) evaluated written expressions of 524 students in 9 and 10th grade in terms of paragraph coherency, consistency, and idea development techniques. This study showed that students had significant problems regarding coherency and consistency of the paragraphs.

Arıcı (2008) evaluated written expression mistakes for individual distribution. The results of that study showed that most of the students had spelling mistakes (68.6%), planning mistakes (37.3%), approximately one third had problems finding main idea and supporting ideas (31.3%), approximately one fourth had problems with sentence structure and bad handwriting (27.7%), again approximately one fourth had punctuations problems (24.1%), one out of five students had problems with paper order (19.2%) and 7.2% had problems with selecting a title. Although different topics and methods were used, the results showed that there are significant problems at every level of writing skills.

Kellogg (2008: 22) said that like this study's result, writing involves multiple representations and processes, with limitations in working memory constraining skill development. Advanced writing skills require systematic training as well as instruction so that executive attention can successfully coordinate multiple writing processes and representations. Finally, the principles of deliberate practice and cognitive apprenticeship offer writing educators the means to train writers to use their

Table 4. Point range of male participant.

Point range of male participant	Number
90-100 Excellent-AA	3
85-89 Very Good-BA	3
80-84 Good-BB	4
75-79 Intermediate-Good-BB	3
70-74 Intermediate-CC	6
65-69 Acceptable-Intermediate-DC	6
60-64 Acceptable-DD	5
50-59 Poor-DF	5
00-49 Very Poor-FF	17

Table 5. Point range of female participant.

Point range of female participant	Number
90-100 Excellent-AA	24
85-89 Very Good-BA	8
80-84 Good-BB	14
75-79 Intermediate-Good-BB	8
70-74 Intermediate-CC	9
65-69 Acceptable-Intermediate-DC	12
60-64 Acceptable-DD	15
50-59 Poor-DF	29
00-49 Very Poor-FF	29

knowledge effectively during composition.

Rao's (2007: 100) study's data demonstrated that explicit instruction of brainstorming strategy had a measurable influence on writing performance. The attitudinal survey also indicated that the students felt positive about the brainstorming strategy. It is suggested that EFL teachers in universities or colleges should move from a product-based approach to a process-focused approach in their teaching of writing as the latter may contribute towards activating students' thinking and creating ideas for a writing task. In this study, it can be said that brainstorming can be used to improve written expression skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the written expression papers of education faculty student are examined, the mistakes should be shown to students. Writing about topics that will interest the students will increase the frequency of writing and contribute to written expression skills. As listening and reading skills of students in the education faculty are increased, deep understanding levels could be supported. Activities including developing written

expression skills in different text types should be included in the classes.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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APPENDIX

Written expression evaluation form

Name surname:

Class:

Style	Properties to be searched in written expression	Adequate point	Point given by teacher
	Appropriate margins are left between paragraphs, and sentences.	5	
	Good and readable handwriting was used.	5	
	Language and Expression is related with topic.	5	
	Topic was explained in logical consistency and integrity.	5	
	Appropriate connections were made between paragraphs.	5	
	Single idea-emotion was included in each paragraph.	5	
	Main idea was given.	10	
	Main idea and emotion was supported with auxiliary idea and emotion.	10	
	References, citations, and examples were adequate.	10	
	The conclusion sentence summed the topic and was effective.	5	
	Sentence structures were compliant with grammar rules.	5	
	Words were used correctly and with correct meaning.	5	
	There were no word repetitions in sentences.	' 5	
	Resources were used about the topic.	5	
	Unique statements were used for explaining the topic.	5	
	Spelling rules were followed.	5	
	Punctuation was correct.	5	

NOTE: Points given in the scale are provided as examples. The points could be changes by teacher.