

## Opinions of Turkish Language Teacher Candidates on a Primary-level Reading and Writing Teaching Course: A Qualitative Study

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to reveal prospective Turkish Language teachers' views on the *primary level Reading and Writing* course they take at university. Employing the qualitative research method, data were collected from participants by administering a semi-structured interview form with six open-ended questions that was prepared and administered to the participants by the researcher. Findings obtained were then interpreted under six individual themes. Based on the results of this research, it can be argued that the prospective teachers selected the course mostly to benefit their personal and professional development. They believed in the need to make the lesson compulsory, deemed the course effective, and they regarded using audio-visual and technology-supported materials as important. However, they faced certain problems on the course due to a number of factors stemming from the insufficiency of the physical setting and equipment, inadequacy of total course hours, special features of consonants, change of format in writing activities, characteristics of students to whom they showed their presentations, and challenges experienced in material design.

**Keywords:** Primary Level Reading and Writing Course, Department of Turkish Education, Prospective Turkish Language Teachers, Qualitative Research

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## Introduction

Language is the medium allowing the transmission of one's feelings, thoughts, desires and dreams to others in letters or in words. In oral transmission, listening and speaking skills take the stage; while in written transmission, reading and writing skills are featured. Yavuz (2010) claims that the mother-tongue is acquired sequentially in the order of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Based on this order, it is safe to argue that one skill prepares the scene for the emergence of an upcoming skill.

Among these skills, listening is an inborn feature for everyone except those with hearing impairments and "it is a domain in which children acquire certain basic skills before starting school" (Güneş, 2014, p. 92). Speaking is the second language skill acquired after listening; "Initially, children imitate the sounds of those nearby. Later, they improve their speaking skills with the accumulation of both personal and social experience" (Güneş, 2007, p. 74). It is suggested that children who acquire a certain range of listening and speaking skills before starting school can develop those skills after formal education begins, in which they are also required to acquire reading and writing skills.

The Basic Reading and Writing course is the first and fundamental course that children, having acquired a certain level of listening and speaking skills, would instantly experience once starting primary school. Reading and writing constitutes the foundation of educational life. "The knowledge, skills and habits that students acquire in the very first period when the most basic and essential steps of education are taken will have a direct effect on students' success in both primary education and the ensuing years" (Göçer, 2014, p. 12). Thus, it would be unwise to expect any academic achievement from children without their having a sound reading-writing education.

Considering the varying educational systems around the world, it should be mentioned here that the Turkish 4+4+4 system introduced in 2012 consists of 4 years at Primary school (ages 5/6-10/11), 4 years at Elementary (also termed "Secondary" or "Middle") school (ages 11-14), and 4 years at high school (ages 15-18).

Reading and writing are two complementary skills inseparable from one another. A person not knowing how to read cannot be able to write. That is why the pupil is first taught to read then taught to write. The order of primacy-recency does not include a time gap but one follows the other successively. First the child learns how to read, then is taught how to write letters, words or sentences" (Coşkun, 2007, p. 50). "Reading-writing on the one hand allows us to transfer the collective experience of past generations to later generations; on the other hand it functions as a significant and effective means of communication between existing generations" (Öz, 1999, p. 3). "Because writing occupies such a critical place in human life, gaining literacy skills by spreading reading-writing among the young generation is of great significance for mankind" (Aydın & Kartal, 2017, p. 36).

"The scope of the reading-writing concept refers to a range of skills from reading and writing a simple sentence to computer literacy" (Sağırılı, 2015, p. 6). There are five different levels of literacy; namely, illiteracy, semi-literacy, basic literacy, functional literacy and multifunctional literacy (Güneş, 2000). If a child having recently started primary school has not been taught reading or writing at home or by teachers and self-attempts at kindergarten, the child is assumed to be at the illiteracy level. Children in the first year of primary school could "via an effective program guided by a qualified teacher reach a basic level of literacy by means of primary Reading and Writing lessons. In senior classes and at higher levels, the child would reach functional and multifunctional levels; hence, it is expected that they would develop themselves and also the society in which they live" (Sağırılı, 2015, p. 7).

"Any society developed in the social, economic and cultural domains and aspiring to improve even more is mandated to rectify any gaps in the area of reading and writing (literacy) as the pillar of education itself and is required to take all measures in parallel with global advancements and any further steps necessary" (Bulut, 2015, p. 105). In the Congress on Education held under the auspices of

President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk between 16 and 21 July 1921, Atatürk announced his firm belief that the Turkish Republic to be established in 1923 could only maintain its existence through education. As part of the Public Schools Project, a number of tangible measures were taken to teach reading and writing to the public (Önal, 2010). In November 1922, the Department of Education circulated a decree to governors requiring them to initiate public education activities. One month later, a second decree was issued and Public Schools and evening courses commenced in 105 different regions whereby about 7,000-8,000 persons were enrolled on an adult reading-writing course (Sevinç, 2016).

In the ensuing attempts to increase literacy, a number of literacy campaigns were enacted in Turkey and these continue today. The most-recent action has been decree no. E.3323631 on 16.02.2018 “Assigning Instructors to Reading-Writing Courses within the Scope of the Literacy Campaign”, issued by the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning under the Ministry of Education. Based on this decree, in schools having no classroom teacher present, full-time instructors that normally teach Turkish Language or Turkish Language and Literature lessons will be appointed initially (<https://www.memurlar.net/haber/733795/okuma-ve-yazma-kurslarinda-kimler-gorevlendirilecek.html>). Therefore, teaching of the primary-level Reading and Writing course is crucial not only for students in the Department of Classroom Teaching but also for students studying in the Turkish Language Department.

The Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK) has completed updating Undergraduate Teacher Training programs and announced the amendments on its official webpage on 16.05.2018 (<http://www.yok.gov.tr/web/guest/ogretmen-yetistirme-lisans-programlari>). The most noteworthy development in the curriculum is that in the Undergraduate Program of Turkish Language Teacher Training, the *Primary level Reading and Writing course*, has been integrated into the elective courses. Based on the course content issued by YÖK, the scope of the *Primary level Reading and Writing* course includes the following: “History of Primary Reading and Writing education in Turkey, primary reading and writing teaching methods (alphabet, spelling, story-sentence formation, etc.), the phoneme-based sentence approach, implementation stages, alternative practices, reading and writing problems at secondary school level, and the teaching of reading and writing in senior classes” (YÖK, 2018, p. 502).

The *Primary level Reading and Writing* course was offered as an elective course in Gazi and Hacettepe universities even before the recent updating by the Council of Higher Education. Starting with the fall term of 2017-2018 academic year, the same lesson was included in the elective course list of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (ÇOMÜ), Department of Turkish Language Teacher Training. This study aims to identify the attitudes of prospective Turkish Language teachers in the Faculty of Education at ÇOMÜ on the *Primary Reading and Writing* course in the curriculum. One of the main reasons for carrying out this study is that no research has so far been identified in the relevant literature on the views of Turkish Language teacher candidates about this specific course. It is thus suggested that the findings of our research are likely to make a significant contribution to the literature.

## Method

### Research Model

The qualitative research method was employed in this study to provide an insight into the attitudes of prospective Turkish Language teachers on the *Primary level Reading and Writing Teaching* course. Qualitative research is “a study in which data collection methods such as observation, interview and document-analysis are utilized; it is a qualitative process based on evaluating perceptions and actions in a realistic and holistic manner in a natural setting” (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 39). Among these methods, interviewing is a technique employed to measure individuals’ experiences, attitudes, views, beliefs, comments, perceptions and reactions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Based on the “accessibility of resources and qualities of the target data to be collected

in the research” (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2008, p. 233), the interview technique is grouped into five formats: the structured interview, unstructured interview, semi-structured interview (Karasar, 2005; Punch, 2005), ethnographic interview, and focus-group interview (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008). In a semi-structured interview, survey questions are predetermined with the aim of gathering data by directing these questions at the participants (Karasar, 2005, p. 167-168). Such interviews “unify both fixed responses and in-depth reasoning in the relevant domain” (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008, p. 234). Accordingly, in this study the semi-structured interview technique was employed in the data collection process.

### **Population of the research**

In qualitative research, the random sampling and selective sampling methods are utilized. Of these two methods, the most obvious advantage of random sampling is that a maximum population is represented. In this study, simple random sampling was used since it is a method in which “each sample is given an equal chance of being selected and the overall sampling is formed of selected units” (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008, p. 74). In this context, the research population consisted of 25 students (15 female, 10 male) who selected the *Primary level Reading and Writing* course from the Elective course list in their second year at, the Faculty of Education (Turkish Language Teacher Training Department) of ÇOMÜ during the fall term of 2017-2018 academic year. In order for the students’ identity to be anonymous, female students were encoded as F1, F2, F3...etc. and male students as M1 to M10.

### **Data Collection**

In order to identify the views of prospective teachers about the *Primary level Reading and Writing Teaching* course, a semi-structured interview form containing six open-ended questions was prepared by the researcher. (In this study, “primary”, “primary level” and “primary school” are considered to be synonymous, i.e. the child’s “first” educational years. For brevity, the Reading and Writing course is often referred to as “R/W course”.) The interview form was checked by three specialists in the field to establish the internal consistency of the study. The specialists were requested to check the comprehensibility of questions in the interview form and ensure that the questions related to the scope of the research topic. Based on feedback, the questions were reviewed and corrected where necessary then a pilot interview was conducted with three prospective teachers excluded from the total sampling. In this pilot study, comprehensibility of the questions by students was tested and, based on this feedback, it was concluded that the questions would provide the required data for this research. Following this, the 25 prospective teachers were supplied with the interview form.

### **Data Solution and Analysis**

Data gathered from the interviews applied to prospective teachers were examined via content analysis. The findings were grouped under six themes in relation to the *Primary R/W Teaching course*. These themes focused on (1) reason(s) why the prospective teachers selected the course; (2) their opinions on whether the course should remain an elective course or be compulsory; (3) views on personal gains acquired from the course; (4) views on materials utilized in the course; (5) problems encountered on the course; and (6) suggestions to correct problems witnessed in the course and solutions to make the course more effective. Then, the prospective teachers’ views obtained were contrasted with the findings of similar studies, which are presented in the discussion section.

## Findings

### 1. Reasons for prospective teachers selecting the primary level R/W course

When the views of the Turkish Language teacher candidates regarding their reasons for selection of the R/W course are analyzed, it is seen that students hold a variety of views. 44% of the prospective teachers chose the course based on the belief that they would benefit in their personal and professional development. This response was followed successively by being of help to students and adults not knowing how to read and write (24%), on recommendation or out of curiosity (16%), and the fact that primary level reading and writing is fundamental to Teaching Turkish (12%). One (4%) of the prospective teachers stated they selected the course without any specific reason in mind.

Among the students who selected the *Primary R/W* course with the conviction of gaining benefits for their personal and professional development, student F5 responded: *“I selected the course because, compared to the other elective courses, I found it more relevant to my department. Also, I believe that this course can make us more experienced in teaching and provide us with great benefits in the teaching profession.”* M3 shared his views on the same question like this: *“I chose this course because it was related to my department and when I start work, I intend to make use of the knowledge and experience I have gained on this course.”* M9 stated that: *“As a prospective Turkish Language teacher, I believe I have made an informed choice. When I start teaching, I want to have developed myself by taking varied courses; not only ones directly relevant to the topics I would teach. So I chose this course because I am sure it will contribute a lot to my field.”*

Student F2 declared that she selected this course to be of help to students and adults not knowing how to read or write, and continued: *“I selected this course because, when I am assigned in the future, I want to possess the required knowledge to teach any potential students who are not able to read or write in the schools I would teach in.”* Student F7 stated that: *“The R/W course is not only a subject interesting for our friends in the Department of Classroom Teaching but also a subject of great significance for us. When I am a teacher, I will teach the Turkish Language course, but I am positive I will definitely see students who are less than fully literate to some degree. I chose this course with the purpose of helping these students or adults.”*

A number of prospective teachers stated that their reason for selecting the R/W course was because they deemed it to be the basis of teaching Turkish language. On this issue M1 responded: *“My field is Teaching Turkish. That is to say, I will teach in secondary level state schools. Yet considering the sociological composition of Turkey in certain parts of our country, there still exist - though few - some students not knowing reading and writing even at secondary education level. As you would agree, there is no way to teach linguistic components or syntax to a person who doesn't know how to read or write. That is why I truly appreciate the integration of this course into the Turkish Teacher Training program and I strongly believe this course is a must for my field.”* M2 commented: *“I selected the primary level R/W teaching course because I consider it to be directly or indirectly connected with my professional and social life. In Turkey, a number of students who have completed primary education and are now studying at secondary level may still struggle in reading and writing tasks. The basic discipline of Turkish teachers is language and its accurate use; that is why this course is a sine-qua-non for us.”*

F10 explained that her choice of the course was based on peer recommendation and interest in the course: *“I heard about this course from my friends in Classroom Teaching. Based on my friends' recommendation and curiosity about the course content and implementation, I selected it.”* M11 stated that; *“I selected it because I wanted to learn how make a person literate and which methods and techniques to use to that end.”* His answer echoed the responses of previous participants.

M8 deviated from the previous comments and said: *“In fact, I selected it randomly with no specific purpose in mind. I had no idea about what it was exactly. But after taking the course, I was*

*thankful for my choice.*” This indicates he had no specific aim in selecting the course but felt grateful to have chosen it.

## **2. Views of prospective teachers on whether the Primary R/W course should be elective or compulsory**

Findings about the opinions of prospective teachers on whether the Primary R/W course should remain as an elective course or be integrated into the compulsory course list were analyzed. 60% of prospective teachers reported that they were in favor of including it as a mandatory course. Some of their views are as below:

M1: *“I personally believe it should be compulsory. Because it is necessary to train Turkish teachers who don’t stumble when seeing secondary school students still not knowing how to read and write but who know which techniques to implement in the face of this problem.”* M4 said, *“It should be added to compulsory course list, because as prospective Turkish teachers, we may witness in our schools some students who are not fully competent in reading and writing. We should certainly all know what to do in such a situation. That is why I believe it must be compulsory.”* F1 expressed her views as such: *“Knowing that there may be even fifth graders unable to read and write, Turkish teachers are also expected to know how to teach Primary level Reading and Writing. That is why I believe it must be compulsory.”* With these statements, prospective teachers underlined that the knowledge and skills needed to help those not fully literate could only be offered to all Turkish Language teachers provided that this course is compulsory.

F4 argued that this course must be compulsory because the Primary R/W course is the starting point of Turkish education: *“I think it must be compulsory because this course is the very basis of our field.”* Similarly, F9 stated: *“It must be an obligatory course because primary reading and writing lays the foundation of the Turkish course itself and is very influential in learning Turkish.”*

In contrast, 40% of prospective teachers reported that this course should continue to be elective. Those voting to let this course remain optional claimed that priorities varied among the students. Below are the views of a number of students:

M3 said, *“It should stay as an elective course because every person has different fields of interest.”* F13 maintained that: *“It should stay as an elective course because no matter how important it is, it would be torture for those who did not want to take it at all. This course appeals to those students who can partake in several activities and can teach even elementary level learners. So, one should have the freedom of choice.”*

M2 prospective teacher reported that primary R/W activities should be performed by classroom teachers and that this course must continue to be an elective course; *“I believe the primary R/W course should continue to be an elective course for prospective teachers. I think like this because classroom teachers are the main providers of reading and writing instruction. Still, it does not mean that this course is less important for teachers of Turkish.”*

## **3. Views of prospective teachers on benefits from taking the primary R/W course**

Analysis of the results related to the views of prospective teachers on the benefits to themselves of taking the R/W instructional course demonstrated that participants had a varied range of views. Accordingly, 60% of prospective teachers reported that it would enable them to teach reading and writing at various institutions and bodies including Education Centers for the public; 60% said the course would contribute significantly to their personal and professional development; 36% reported that it was useful because in the future they could help their own children in their first attempts at reading and writing, 28% believed that by taking this course they could act as classroom teachers if

needs be; 28% said that by remedying pupils' deficiencies they would then be able to instill in them the reading habit, and 12% argued that the literacy level in the community would increase.

Among the prospective teachers believing that they could teach R/W courses in state-run schools and organizations, foremost of which are evening courses or the like, M1 stated that: *"I believe that I can teach reading-writing courses in Public Education Centers or in various institutions and organizations."* F1 echoed the same conviction, saying: *"In my workplace, I can open literacy courses for adults who do not know how to read and write so I may be a successful educator."*

A considerable number of prospective teachers stated that the Primary R/W course would significantly contribute to their personal and professional development. Some prospective teachers shared their views such: *"By taking this course I will move one step ahead in my personal development."* (M2). Another said, *"Compared to other teachers, I will be able to pronounce letters more correctly."* (F2).

F1 suggested that taking the Primary R/W course would assist her when her own children learn reading and writing: *"It will be of help in the primary reading and writing process of my own child."* M2 said that: *"The course will be beneficial for my parental role in the future."* and F8 shared similar views; *"In the future, I may assist my kids in their reading and writing endeavors."*

Prospective teacher F1 reported that after taking the Primary R/W course she could also perform as a classroom teacher if need be and she continued: *"Maybe I will not be assigned officially. In that case I may work as a contract teacher and teach in secondary schools. Because I took the Primary R/W course I may be a better teacher in elementary classrooms as well."* F14 argued that: *"When we are officially assigned as teachers, we will encounter in our schools and region a lack of teachers and teaching materials. In our professional life, particularly in certain parts of the country, it is most likely that we will substitute for classroom teachers if necessary."*

A range of prospective teachers claimed that by taking the Primary R/W course they acquired advantages in correcting students' shortcomings and instill in them the reading habit: *"I may be of help to my students challenged with reading and writing problems for several reasons and I may be able to influence them so that they develop regular reading habits."* (F9). *"I could assist senior students still trying to cope with reading and writing problems."* (F3).

F1 stated that taking the Primary R/W course would be of great help in improving the reading and writing average of society; *"I hope to become a teacher who can contribute to increasing the literate population among my people."* F12 said; *"Everyone in society would thus know how to read and write."* F14 noted: *"If we can make the literacy level 100%, there would be an increase in professional esteem."*

#### **4. Views of prospective teachers on materials used on the Primary R/W course**

All of the prospective teachers partaking in the interviews agreed that material usage mattered greatly on the Primary R/W course and added that the more human senses these materials addressed, the greater the success would be. Regarding the same issue, M7 reported that: *"Sound-based audio materials should be employed because this course is based on feeling the sound and comprehension. Learning becomes more permanent once students hear the sound from a variety of different and fun materials. Audio books could be used, for instance."* M11 said: *"To help them feel the sounds, rhymes, tongue-twisters and songs could be used"*. This implies that since reading and writing in Turkey relies on the phoneme-based sentence method, audio materials are more useful than other materials.

F1 was among the prospective teachers testifying that in teaching reading and writing, the smart board plays a vital role; *"Absolutely, smart boards should be used because they support the teaching process audio-visually"*. F11 stated; *"To demonstrate visual materials in the classroom, a*

*projector, computer and relevant technological tools must be used in schools.*” implying that in addition to smart boards, the projector and computer also play an important role.

M3 and F12 particularly emphasized that in the Primary R/W course, the smart board is the most critical tool; “Special whiteboards with handwriting guide lines make reading and writing exercises easier and should be used in classes.” (M3); “Smart boards with guide lines for writing should absolutely be used because they are useful both for the teacher and students.” (F12)

Some of the prospective teachers said that in the Primary R/W course, educational games and drama activities are quite important. F2 emphasized the importance of such games and activities, saying: “*Educational games and drama can be performed to assist in teaching letters and sounds better.*” F5 claimed; “*In the primary R/W course, educational toys can be used in teaching. Toys would be entertaining and instructive for children.*” Other prospective teachers argued that on the course, a variety of audio-visual aids created from all sorts of materials could be used to attract the students’ attention and keep their interest alive. On this issue, F4 argued that: “*I believe colorful materials should be used to take children’s attention. Also, different materials should be used to appeal to each student’s learning domain. These materials can be technological devices, colored puppets, and any number of basic games. To practice writing; colored paper, string, cotton, sand, rice, lentils and similar materials could be used. However, moderation should be observed in using games and prepared materials to try and make the course more enjoyable. If the child forgets the course objectives and simply focuses on the extra materials supporting the course content, the child may forget about the essentials of the lesson.*” As argued by this participant, it is recommended that children engage in games and use extra materials in lessons but excessive use of distracting course materials could adversely affect the flow of the lesson.

## **5. Problems encountered by prospective teachers on the Primary R/W course**

Interviews with prospective teachers manifested that 64% attending the Primary R/W course encountered certain problems. Based on their opinions, it is seen that some of the challenging factors of the Primary R/W course are: an unfavorable physical setting, insufficient course equipment, inadequate course hours, specific features of consonants, behavioral traits of students in class, constant changes in the officially-sanctioned writing style to be taught on the curriculum, and material design. Below are prospective teachers’ views on these adverse factors.

### **Unfavorable Physical Setting**

Crowded classrooms could pave the way for certain issues in the lesson hour. Facing such a challenge, M1 reported that: “*Because a lot of students selected this course, our classroom was very crowded. When we were asked to practice in class, it was too noisy at times.*” F4 declared similarly: “*During practical activities I had a hard time due to the large number of students in the class.*”

### **Inadequate Equipment**

F3 shared her problem related to malfunctioning or broken equipment: “*We had problems due to not finding or unsuitable equipment. Nowadays in almost all schools, technological devices are ubiquitous. The greater the variety of equipment we use, learning becomes not only more permanent but also more enjoyable for students. In our presentations, we didn’t want to limit ourselves to the materials we always used but also wanted to use technological apparatus, viz. smart board and projector, etc. Yet occasionally these gadgets didn’t work.*” F6 reported: “*This is not a problem directly stemming from the course, but occasionally, when the projector failed to work, there were interruptions.*” F11 said that: “*In the class there was no technological equipment so our presentations were not as we wanted them to be.*” M9 added: “*The board in our class was unsuitable for teaching reading and writing, so before any activity we had to draw the lines manually. We failed to draw*

*perfect lines. Also, we lost a lot of time because we had to draw the lines repeatedly before each exercise.*” This reveals some of the problems associated with equipment in the classroom.

### **Inadequate Course Hours**

A number of prospective teachers reported facing time-related problems. M2 expressed his views like this: *“The Primary Reading and Writing course is a three-hour course but still it wasn’t enough.”* F7 commented: *“Some of our friends worked diligently to make their presentations so their presentations lasted a bit longer. Since we did not have another lesson after this course, we could extend the lesson time for one or two hours sometimes. But if we had to attend another lesson after this course, we could not do that.”*

### **Specific Features of Consonants**

M8 attributed one of the problems to the specific features of consonants to be taught; *“I believe the biggest challenge is teaching consonants. When teaching consonants it may become hard to teach some of them because only the sounds are provided to the learners.”* F9 stated: *“The biggest challenge for me was teaching the sounds r, s, f which are exceptionally difficult to pronounce.”*

### **Constant Changes in Writing Format on Curriculum**

F5 reported having problems because of the constant changes in the writing format issued for the Primary R/W course; *“A good number of people, including me, learnt to write with straight (manuscript) letters. Later, the authorities said cursive was better. However, now straight letters are used again in schools. When the script changes, the writing style of some letters is also transformed. Indeed, this is a significant matter of confusion. On this course, I was having a lot of difficulty deciding whether or not I wrote the letters correctly.”*

### **Problems arising from the student composition of the course**

According to some of the prospective teachers, several problems originated because the students in the class did not consist of elementary school first graders. From this viewpoint, F1 stated that; *“It really troubled me to teach my classmates something they already knew quite well and something really easy for us because of our age.”* F14 said; *“After the theoretical part of the course, all students taught a sound for practice in the implementation stage. As our classmates taught the sounds, others behaved like elementary school students not knowing how to read or write. But in truth, because our friends are not elementary school students, it was difficult for us to teach them something they already knew.”* Regarding a different problem, M4 said; *“Because we are university students, admittedly we hesitated to use some materials that our friends had already used in their presentations. Also, initially we found it fun to partake in the games, but later we all had a lot of fun together.”*

### **Material Design**

M3 reported that he had difficulty in selecting the material to use while making a presentation: *“Each week, four friends tried to teach the sound they were assigned. Those starting in the first week had some difficulties but each following week the presentations were more successful compared to the previous week. That is why the bar was raised even higher. As we were presenters during the last weeks, it was very hard to decide what to do differently and more successfully.”* F12 reported that; *“In material design, it was particularly difficult to manage time.”* This implies that she failed to manage time effectively regarding preparation of materials used in the presentation.

A total of 64% of prospective teachers admitted facing problems on the course while 36% stated they did not face any challenges. Among these students, M7 mentioned: *“We have so much fun*

*in this lesson. I can't say I really had any problems.*" F10 said; *"I really love this course and so far I have not faced any challenges."*

## **6. Suggestions by prospective teachers to make the R/W teaching course more successful**

Respondent prospective teachers were asked, "What can be done to make the Primary level R/W course more effective?" Accordingly, prospective teachers came up with some suggestions. These are itemized under the headings below.

### **Course hours**

M2 and M6 suggested increasing the course time, which is one 3-hour session per week. They stated that; *"To enable us to conduct more practice, we need to increase the total course hours during the week."* (M2). *"I think every opportunity should be used to practice as much as one can. Total course time in a week could be increased so there would be more practice in the classroom."* (M6).

### **Practice with those who cannot read and write**

Aside from theoretical knowledge and sample in-class activities on the course, a majority of prospective teachers shared their views on practical applications for those not able to read and write. M4 stated: *"In addition to the primary level R/W course, we may be given a chance to practice among first graders in elementary schools."* F2 reported: *"If we had a chance to teach reading and writing among actual first graders in schools, I believe this course could be even better. We may be given an opportunity to practice with first graders on certain days and lesson hours in elementary schools."*, emphasizing that practicing with first graders in primary/elementary schools would offer benefits.

M3 said, *"By bringing early learners of reading and writing to the course lessons, we might be asked to practice with them."*, suggesting the advantage of bringing first graders to the classroom. F14 suggested: *"This course could be even more versatile by bringing those who are really not yet literate to the lesson hours for actual teaching. Maybe it is difficult to bring elementary school children to this course; so instead, adults who did not know how to read or write could be invited."* Instead of elementary school students, illiterate adults could be taught in a real class atmosphere.

F10 stated that: *"This course should be given not only in one semester but in two. In the first semester it would be better to focus on teaching all topics related to reading and writing education. During the second semester, as a social responsibility project or similar, we might be asked to work in centers educating those not knowing how to read and write."* This underscores the need to put the knowledge acquired on the course into practice via social responsibility projects.

### **Classroom design and equipment**

Insufficient equipment in classrooms impedes effective teaching in practice-based courses. On this issue, F3 stated that *"On the R/W course there is a special board for writing on and it is vital. Also, there should be special classrooms equipped with different kinds of materials useful for reading and writing activities."* F6 also responded: *"An effective course depends on physical conditions above all else. Currently, the conditions in our schools are not favorable because there is ongoing construction work so we are temporarily using the classrooms of a building not ours. As for this course, if we had a special writing board for teaching reading and writing and if we had a classroom equipped with all essential materials, the lesson would be even more effective."*

### **Benefitting from experience of Classroom Teachers**

M1 suggested: "To make the course more effective, a classroom teacher employed in an elementary (primary) school could be invited to our lesson to share with us his experience on teaching reading and writing." F5 argued that: "This course should be taught in place and by actual practitioners. That is to say, we could visit elementary schools or elementary school teachers could be invited to our lesson. Extra insights from their presence and the experience they share could add versatility to the course." This response indicates that by inviting primary level classroom teachers to talk about R/W instruction, the course context would be enriched.

### **Observation in Primary-Elementary schools**

Some prospective teachers taking the primary R/W course declared that by visiting elementary schools to observe the way that classroom teachers taught reading and writing, they would gain immense benefit. For example, M8 stated: *"We take this three-hour course during fall term so it coincides with the reading and writing activities of first graders. In addition to the knowledge we learn on our course, we could visit elementary schools to spend one or two hours for observation. We could personally observe the way reading and writing is taught to first graders."* F4 noted that: *"We didn't have a chance to witness R/W activities among pupils who had not yet learnt to read and write. If we had the opportunity to observe in real classrooms where R/W learning is being carried out, this course could be more effective."*

### **Smaller groups in the classroom**

M5 pointed out that the number of students taking the R/W course was large so that it was necessary to divide them into smaller groups: *"Since the primary R/W course is basically practice-based, there may be a lot of noise during practice. To prevent that, students taking this course could be divided into smaller groups. The course lecturer may have to teach in different classrooms but I do believe this course would be more effective when there are fewer students in one class."*

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

Findings of the interviews concluded that 44% of prospective Turkish Language teachers selected the Primary Level Reading and Writing course to gain benefits in their personal and professional development. Following this, the successive reasons were listed alternately as being helpful to students and adults not knowing how to read and write (24%), peer recommendation and personal curiosity (16%), and the course being the basis of Turkish Education itself (12%). 4% of prospective teachers reported that they had selected the course without any idea in their mind. The fact that most of the prospective teachers selected the course to benefit in their personal and professional development might be related to circumstances encountered particularly while teaching in rural areas where the literacy ratio is lower, and they wanted to be ready and equipped for possible difficulties.

Based on the collected data, 60% of prospective teachers believed that the R/W teaching course must be compulsory. This shows that prospective teachers valued the significance of this course.

Regarding the views of prospective teachers about the potential benefits they would gain from taking a Primary Level Reading and Writing Teaching course, it surfaced that all of the teachers gave positive feedback. Most of the teachers (60%) agreed that after taking this course they would be qualified to work in reading and writing centers of various institutions and establishments; Public Education Centers in particular. Based on decree E.3323631 concerning assigning instructors to Reading-Writing courses as part of a Literacy Campaign (issued by the Ministry of Education, Directorate of Lifelong Learning, 16.02.2018), in schools with no classroom teacher present, full-time

teachers of Turkish Language and Turkish Language and Literature would be appointed. Thus it is rational for prospective teachers to select the Primary Reading and Writing course.

Audio-visual and technology-supported materials play a critical role in any course. Based on the interviews, on the Primary level R/W course it is suggested that audio books, rhymes, and tongue-twisters that support the Phoneme-Based Sentence Method of teaching be employed and use should be made of technology-supported materials such as the smart board, projector and computer. Prospective teachers also reported that using a white board, educational games and toys, play dough, puppets, string, cotton, sand and relevant teaching materials is also crucial. This finding is in parallel with the sample materials suggested in Aksin's (2015) study "Using equipment and materials in primary reading and writing education".

Interviews with prospective teachers manifested that they found a number of factors challenging on their R/W course. These factors stemmed from inadequate physical setting and equipment, too few course hours, special features of consonants, producing lesson materials and the composition and characteristics of student groups in their class especially in regard to presentations. An identical finding is echoed in the study of Adıgüzel and Karacabey (2010) entitled "Problems encountered by classroom teachers in first reading and writing." Their study emphasized that overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials and suchlike affected Primary Reading and Writing Teaching adversely. Babayiğit and Erkuş (2017) in their research "Problems and suggested solutions in the literacy training process" attest to a similar finding. According to their research, in addition to challenges originating from the teacher, the pupils and parents, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching and technological materials in classrooms also posed difficulties. In the analysis of Demir and Ersöz (2016, p. 19), "An evaluation of the difficulties classroom teachers experience while giving primary reading and writing education within the 4+4+4 education system", it was identified that classroom teachers faced difficulties due to insufficient educational materials, play areas, crowded classrooms, lack of classrooms, etc. It can thus be argued that the present study overlaps with the findings of three research studies mentioned above.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the findings of current study, the following suggestions can be made:

1. "The Primary Level Reading and Writing Teaching course could be turned into an 'applied course' and practice could be performed in actual classroom settings" (Şahin, 2010, p. 1749).
2. By inviting senior classroom teachers to the course, their experience could be benefited by all.
3. Prospective teachers should be encouraged to partake in public service, social responsibility activities and similar projects for reading-writing practice to reach different target masses.
4. To ensure that courses are more effective; projectors, smart boards, computers and similar technological tools should be used in classrooms and be periodically maintained.
5. By designing Reading and Writing classrooms, a set of materials - special writing boards in the first place - and sand, cotton, colored paper, cardboard and crayons, play dough, and primary level reading and writing sets are essential materials that need to be readily available for use.
6. To conduct teaching practice freely, the total number of students in one classroom should not exceed 25.

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