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## Integrating Articles into Teaching English to Young Learners II Course in ELT Department

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### Abstract

While relevant literature presents us different studies examining teaching English to young learners from an application and practice perspective, its theoretical side, i.e., how to instruct pre-service teachers in foreign language departments to teach the language to young learner profiles is still an area needing investigation. Conducted in English Language Teaching department at a state university in Turkey, this case study was purposed to evaluate the effectiveness of integrating articles into TEYL II course. The participants were 36 students taking TEYL II course in the third grade. The data of this case study were collected through open-ended questions and classroom observations. The data were analyzed through conventional content analysis. The results revealed that integrating articles into TEYL II course had educational, linguistic, affective and individual/group-work-related contributions to participants. Setting out from the results, it can be suggested that articles can be rich sources of theoretical content and offer a scientific base for discussion. Besides, article integration in courses with applicable content is also suggested.

### Keywords

Teaching English to Young Learners, Article Integration, Foreign Language Education, ELT Department, Case Study

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## Integrating Articles into Teaching English to Young Learners II Course in ELT Department

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### Introduction

Language education, especially learning English as the lingua franca of the modern world, has become a high priority for people among whom are the parents who want their children to be competent in speaking English from an early age. Accompanied with the notion that “starting language learning earlier can yield better results” which was also supported with the fundamental introduction called Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967), this demand has increased the need for the betterment of the quality of foreign language education as a unique effort to contribute to the globalization of the world.

In this laborious effort, language educators are the main agents who are expected to shoulder the responsibility of meeting this growing and challenging demand. Since they need to equip themselves with the theoretical and practical aspects of how to teach a language to different learner profiles including young learners, they should be offered comprehensive training throughout their tertiary education. For this purpose, to keep pace with the growing demands of the globalizing world by providing professional training for language teaching to prospective teachers, English Language Teaching (hereafter ELT) departments have gone through fundamental changes and improvements to involve courses particularly designed to show the way to efficiently teach the target language to different age groups including young learners. Setting out from this growing attention and awareness to improve the quality of teaching-learning cycle, Teaching English to Young Learners (hereafter TEYL) course has been gradually introduced in ELT departments the world over. In Turkey, TEYL was introduced in the ELT curriculum in 1998 as a separate course. Since this introduction, a

majority of ELT departments in Turkey have offered TEYL course for two terms as TEYL I and TEYL II.

Teaching English to young learners; therefore, with its introduction to ELT curriculum as a separate course, has gained momentum as an area of investigation in the field of language education. Many studies focused on the practice of teaching English to young learners and experiences of pre-service and in-service teachers in this process. However, despite the increase in the number of studies on teaching English to young learners, research on how to train pre-service teachers in undergraduate education regarding teaching English to young learners is still inadequate.

### **Literature Review**

As a concept attracting growing attention, TEYL has been an issue of common discussion and investigation especially in the last few decades. A number of researchers have examined different aspects of TEYL mostly focusing on its practical side, i.e. real classroom applications and practices. Literature basically presents three groups of studies as regards TEYL: studies offering alternative ways to teach the language to young learners (Becker & Roos, 2016; Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011; Chou, 2014; Galligane & Han, 2015), those dealing with the experiences of pre-service teachers with young learners (Bekleyen, 2011; Bratož, 2015) and those carried out with in-service teachers of young learners (Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014; Hedge, Hewett, & Terrell, 2018; Stelma & Onat-Stelma, 2010; Wyatt, 2013).

The first group of studies aimed to provide suggestions to integrate different tools or approaches in young learner classes. In Taiwanese context, Chou (2014) investigated the efficiency of games, songs and stories in improving primary-level learners' vocabulary repertoire in English and to evaluate the effects of different test techniques on vocabulary assessment. The results pointed at the contributions of games, songs and stories in vocabulary development. Besides, participants from higher grades were observed to utilize different techniques during the assessment. Emphasizing the significance of providing chances of language production for appropriate development of oral skills in young learners, Becker and Roos (2016) proposed an approach of creative speaking activities particularly involving communicative tasks and improvisation activities. Through their proposals, the researchers aimed to support young learners in the process of developing their independent oral competencies.

The experiences of pre-service teachers with young learners also attracted attention as an area of investigation. However, there are not many studies on this topic. An example study belongs to Bekleyen (2011). In Turkish context, the researcher worked with a group of pre-service teachers to observe the difference in their attitudes before and after a short-term teaching practice in real young learner classes. The results showed that there were mostly positive changes in the attitudes of teacher candidates towards teaching very young learners through their experiences in genuine environments. In Slovenia, Bratož (2015) examined the attitudes of 53 pre-service teachers towards teaching English to young learner classes. The results of the study revealed the varying attitudes of the participants towards language teaching to this specific learner profile.

The third group of studies was about the experiences of in-service teachers with young learners. In a Turkish private primary school setting, Stelma and Onat-Stelma (2010) worked with four English teachers who experienced a transition from being teachers of older learners to younger learners as a result of an educational reform put into effect in 1997. The examination of the first year experiences of these participants in terms of organizing learning in language classrooms revealed that these teachers moved from a concern about classroom management

to a more developed conceptualization of organizing learning in young learner classes. Copland et al. (2014), based on a mixed research methodology, focused on the challenges experienced by teachers of young learners. The results indicated that teaching productive skills, dealing with affective issues and classroom management were the main factors challenging the participants. Hedge et al. (2018) explored kindergarten teachers' preparedness and their training to teach the language to English language learner profile. The results obtained from phone interviews and teacher surveys pointed that most of the participants experienced the feeling of being prepared and committed to work with young learners and were open for further development to meet the emotional and educational demands of learners.

In conclusion, there are two major factors driving this study. The first aspect is while TEYL has attracted mounting attention as an area of investigation, the literature on TEYL has mostly been related to the classroom practices and experiences of pre-service and in-service teachers working with young learner profiles. In other words, while the practical aspects of TEYL are under investigation, its theoretical side seems to remain neglected. The second reason is though there are TEYL courses (TEYL I and TEYL II) in ELT curriculum, there is not a pre-determined common way of conducting these courses. Therefore, with an aim to offer a different perspective towards conducting TEYL II course, this case study was carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of integrating articles into TEYL II course in terms of its contribution to learners' educational, linguistic, affective and interactional development.

### **Research Context**

This study was carried out in an ELT Department at a state university in Turkey where Teaching English to Young Learners I & II courses were introduced into the ELT curriculum as separate courses in 1998 by the Higher Education Council (Bekleyen, 2011). Within this context, TEYL courses are offered in the third year of the undergraduate education in order to give the particulars of teaching English to the unique young learner profile. However, despite increasing awareness regarding the peculiarity of this matter, a common content to be followed nation-wide has not yet been suggested. Therefore, setting out from the applications and processes followed in a TEYL II course, this study aimed to focus on how this course can be conducted more efficiently.

The research context was the real classroom environment in which TEYL II course was conducted in the second term of the third year in the ELT program. Within this course, the researcher was the faculty member who designed and offered the course. Before the term started, a comprehensive literature review was conducted covering articles related to the specific field of teaching English to young learners. The articles consisted of review articles mainly focusing effective methods for TEYL classes through suggestions for helpful ways to adopt and research articles presenting the experiences of pre-service and in-service teachers in real young learner classrooms in different national and international contexts. These articles were particularly selected in order to revise the theoretical content presented in TEYL I, which was given in the first term of the third grade, arm and alarm the pre-service teachers to the realities of real young learner classes and help them form ideas and think of possible ways they could use when they become teachers of young learners during practicum and in their future professional lives.

Following article selection, the researcher planned a course program in which the participants were required to go through a "read the week's article-prepare for discussions-participate in-class discussions-write the article report" process. This cyclical process aimed to further develop the participants' language skills as they were to rely on different language skills in order to follow the course program. With this course design, therefore, the researcher aimed

to help learners develop their content knowledge and language knowledge simultaneously through TEYL II course.

### **Method**

For the purposes of this study, case study design was adopted as the researcher aimed to understand how the particular case of article integration affected pre-service teachers during TEYL II course. Since an in-depth understanding of the real experiences of the participants was targeted, this design enabled the researcher to reach the details of the specific case (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, Merriam, 1998). This design was also advantageous as it gave the participants the chance to voice their lived experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this purpose, the researcher used in-class observations and open-ended questions as data collection tools. The combination of these two instruments provided the researcher with the chance to study the issue with rich data while cross-checking the relevance of the data, increasing validity. The data obtained from these two tools were analyzed through content analysis based on an individual data and cross data analysis in order to reach detailed understanding of the case.

### **Participants**

The sample group of this study were 36 third-grade students in an ELT department at a state university. Twenty-three (63.8%) participants were female and thirteen (36.2%) were male. These participants, at an advanced level of English, were taking TEYL II course. There were two criteria for participant selection. The first criterion was that the participants had taken TEYL I course in the Fall semester of the academic year 2016-2017 and were taking TEYL II course in the Spring semester 2017-2018. The second criterion was that they were representative of three learner profiles based on their level of participation in the lessons during the whole term: “the least participating,” “moderately participating,” and “frequently participating.”

The participants, before they agreed to participate, were explained that their participation would be on a voluntary-basis and were asked to sign a consent form. They were also stated that they would be informed about the process of the study.

### **Tools**

The data were collected through two instruments. The first instrument was classroom observations conducted by the instructor-researcher. In a fourteen-week academic period, the instructor-researcher prepared 9 classroom observation reports (the first week, the mid-term week and the three weeks in which learners conducted micro-teachings were not included). During these observations, the instructor-researcher aimed to focus on the changes in the participants resulting from integrating articles into TEYL II content.

The second instrument was open-ended questions. In the final week, the instructor-researcher prepared seven open-ended questions. The reports taken during the classroom observations guided the researcher in the process of forming questions. These seven questions were related to the general conceptions of the participants towards integrating articles into TEYL II course, the contributions of integrating articles in terms of the development of four skills as well as students' development of self-efficacy and motivation and their interactional skills in group works. One field expert was consulted to provide feedback on the clarity and understandability of the questions.

## **Procedure**

This research followed a three-step process: article integration-practice, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Step 1: Article Integration-Practice**

In TEYL II provided in the Spring semester, 2017-2018, as the instructor-researcher covered the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching English to young learners, she designed the content of TEYL II class in such a way to integrate articles in TEYL lessons every week besides having micro-teachings. The instructor-researcher prepared a file of 14 articles (one for each week) grouped according to their scope and content ranging from the experiences of pre-service and in-service teachers with young learners to new tools or designs that can be integrated in young learner classes. The students were supposed to attend the classes having read the week's article, participate in classroom discussions and then prepare a weekly report including the general outline of the article besides a part in which they were asked to reflect their own comments on the basis of classroom discussions under the title "my comments." Each week, an article was examined through discussions referring to theoretical aspects covered in TEYL I and practical suggestions with some real experiences of a few students attending Practice Teaching in the same term. And, the weekly-article reports of the students were analyzed by the instructor-researcher each week and students were provided feedback on their papers.

In sum, TEYL II course was based on the process of reading the articles, having discussions in the class and writing article report. In this circle, students were exposed to academic language through the articles, which aimed to further develop their reading skills particularly academic reading. In-class discussions were purposed to enable learners to improve both their speaking skills by sharing their ideas and their listening skills by listening to and responding to others' ideas. The article reports were planned to provide a chance for guided and free writing as the participants were supposed to write a summary of the article about each section (guided writing) and a "my comments" part (free writing) in which they could share their comments blended with class discussions.

In addition, through article content and classroom discussions, the instructor-researcher aimed to provide the participants with an opportunity to express themselves in an atmosphere of academic content discussion. This process was planned to increase participants' self-efficacy, self-confidence and motivation since it offered a free-discussion setting and equipped the students with some practical suggestions they could utilize in their professional and personal experiences. In this cycle, the participants also had the chance to conduct individual work through the reading and writing process and group work through in-class discussions.

### **Step 2: Data Collection**

Before the data collection process, ethical permission was obtained from the head of the department. In addition, the participants were told about the study and they were informed about their rights and responsibilities based on their voluntary participation. Two instruments, classroom observations and open-ended questions, were used in this study to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the data. As regards the observations, the instructor-researcher, in the first week of the application, conducted a general observation of the students in terms of the way they were analyzing the articles, relating theoretical content to practical aspects, making inferences from the articles, participating in classroom discussions and preparing articles reports. The first informal observation which was not kept in records offered her a

chance to form an overall conception of how to conduct the following observations. In line with the initial observation, the instructor-researcher took unstructured field notes of her observations centering on the possible and observable aspects regarding the benefits of article integration. After each course, she worked on the notes in order to identify repeated aspects and new aspects, which aimed to increase attention towards details.

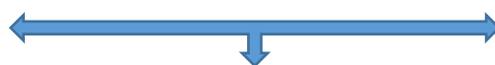
The second tool was open-ended questions. The questions were prepared by the instructor-researcher in line with the classroom observations and informal conversations with the participants during the breaks. The questions were designed to elicit the perceived contributions of article integration to the participants. In order to ensure validity of the questions, two field experts and one native speaker were consulted for the clarity and appropriateness of the questions. The questions were in English and the participants were asked to provide written answers in English as they were third-grade ELT undergraduates. However, they were also given the flexibility of switching to their native language, Turkish, when they felt challenged to explain their ideas in English. Most of the answers were in English. The Turkish-written parts were translated into English by the researcher and proofread by a native speaker.

### Step 3: Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) as the aim was to describe the case with its details. In addition, conventional content analysis was considered appropriate since the identified categories emerged from the data not from pre-conceived categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002).

In data analysis, a three-step process was followed; the first step based on individual analysis, the second based on in-group analysis and the third step based on cross-group analysis. In the first step, the researcher read each field note separately in detail in order to identify the aspects contributing to the participants' development through article integration. In this step, several codes were identified for each field note. In the second step, an in-group analysis was conducted in which all the field notes were compared to each other to find recurring items. The same process of two-phase individual and in-group analysis was also followed in analyzing the data from the open-ended questions. In the third step, the data obtained from the two sources were subjected to a cross-group analysis in which the researcher compared the codes identified in both data sets. After the analyses of both data sets were done, the identified codes were combined into relevant broader categories. The three-step analysis process was followed in order to increase the validity of data analysis. The researcher also asked a faculty member to follow the same process in analyzing the same data sets, which revealed mostly similar codings. The analysis steps can be shown in the below figure.

#### Data Analysis Steps



#### Step 1: Individual analysis analysis

- Going over the data sets
  - Identifying initial codes
- (ex: confidence, language skills)

#### Step 2: In-group analysis

- Analyzing of the data in each set
  - Expanding codes
- (ex: group work, motivation, etc.)

#### Step 3: Cross-group

- Comparing two data sets
- Identifying all codes
- Identifying the relation

between the codes

- Uniting them into

broader categories

(ex: basic skills+grammar+vocabulary=linguistic contributions

self-confidence+motivation+self-efficacy=affective cont.)

**Example coding:** "...we realized that this process would be really beneficial for us to develop ourselves in terms of both field-specific knowledge = (*reference to content knowledge*) and language skills = (*reference to language development*). Unfortunately, I was not participating in class-discussions very often; so I could not develop my speaking = (*development in specific language skill*) very much. But I realized that I really improved my reading and writing *skills* = (*development in specific language skills*) through these articles."

#### Codes identified in the except:

text content knowledge (combined into educational-contributions category)

speaking & reading & writing (combined into linguistic contributions)

### Results

This section presents the results obtained through classroom observation reports and open-ended questions. The results revealed the positive contributions of integrating articles into TEYL II classes. Findings pointed at four areas of contribution as a result of article integration which are presented in detail with some excerpts below.

Table 1 displays the categories and related codes identified as a result of content analysis. As shown in the table below, there were educational, linguistic, affective and individual/group-work-related contributions of integrating articles into TEYL II course content.

**Table 1.**

Positive contributions of integrating articles into TEYL II course

Category 1: Educational contributions	Field-specific knowledge
Category 2: Linguistic contributions	Basic skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) Grammar Vocabulary
Category 3: Affective contributions	Self-confidence Motivation Self-efficacy
Category 4: Individual/group-work-related contributions	Individual work Group work

## Educational Contributions

The first category, as can be seen in Table 1, pertains to the educational benefits of integrating articles into TEYL II course. Almost all the participants maintained that the content of the selected articles helped them revise previous content and expand their knowledge of teaching English to young learner profiles. A comment appreciating the contributory nature of article integration was proposed by a participant who referred to the chance of revising and learning more about the course through including articles into the course content. Explaining that she learned a number of academic terms and revised those that had already been covered in previous courses, a participant provided the below comment about the field-specific contributions of articles to foreign language education:

**Excerpt 1:** In the articles, there were a lot of academic terms about teaching English to young learners. We had already covered most of them in TEYL I; so, integrating articles was a chance to revise previous concepts. Besides, we were exposed to some new terminology about language teaching. Therefore, in my opinion integrating articles into TEYL II course was beneficial for us to develop our field-specific knowledge.

Holding a similar point of view, another participant expressed that articles enabled them to better internalize previous theoretical content with the help of real cases experienced by some pre- and in-service teachers. In this way, articles created a chance to turn theoretical content into practical understanding through vivid examples. The below comment can be enlightening in that it exemplifies how theory turns into practice:

**Excerpt 2:** I think these articles really helped us understand some concepts better. For example, I had difficulty in understanding the terms *assimilation* and *accommodation* covered in TEYL I. I knew their definitions, but I could not totally comprehend what they were about. Then, in one of the articles we discussed in TEYL II, an in-service teacher gave an authentic example about these two terms. While we were having a discussion about this case, our instructor asked us to tell the corresponding terms for this case. At that moment, I realized that it was an assimilation-accommodation case. The practical experience of the teacher in the article helped me internalize these terms.

The observation notes also referred to similar points. I observed that the articles served as a source of revision and expansion of knowledge. Familiar and unfamiliar topics in the articles helped the participants revise what we had covered in the previous term in addition to enlarging their knowledge source about how to teach English to different profiles, young learners in particular. I realized that the participants could internalize TEYL content better when they benefited from the information presented through related articles in the field.

## Linguistic Contributions

As displayed in Table 1, the second category about the contributions of integrating articles into TEYL II course is related to the linguistic benefits intended to realize improvement in four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) as well as grammar and vocabulary. As already referred to in Methodology section, TEYL II course was grounded on the cycle in which the participants were reading the week's article, participating in-class discussions and writing a weekly-article report including "my comments" part. This process

fundamentally aimed to improve learners' language skills while they were engaging themselves in meeting course requirements. Besides the four skills, learners could also revise grammatical rules and learn new vocabulary items. As there were separate questions to assess the contributions of integrating articles into "reading-writing," "listening-speaking," "grammar," and "vocabulary" development, different participant comments can be provided for each.

Considering the contributions of articles to their development in reading-writing skills, a participant maintained that being engaged in reading the articles in pre-discussion stage and writing weekly-reports in the post-discussion stage enabled them to improve these two skills. Though, in the first few weeks, he and most of his classmates experienced some difficulties in meeting the demands of the course because of the "read-discuss-write a report process," the participant expressed that they, in time, enjoyed this process and realized the benefits of this practice in TEYL II course:

**Excerpt 3:** When our instructor told us about the requirements of the course, we were a bit disappointed because there were many things to do. But, in a few weeks, we realized that this process would be really beneficial for us to develop ourselves in terms of both field-specific knowledge and language skills. Unfortunately, I was not participating in class-discussions very often; so I could not develop my speaking very much. But I realized that I really improved my reading and writing skills through these articles.

Another area of linguistic development was related to listening and speaking skills. Except those participants who held a somewhat shy attitude and avoided participating in class-discussions, all participants appreciated the process of having discussions about the week's article in the class. They expressed that they liked this practice because, besides assisting them with their speaking skills, it provided them a chance to be exposed to different perspectives. Articulating the general view, a participant stated that with the help of in-class discussions, they could share their ideas with others and hear others' ideas and added that this way of studying TEYL II course was a great opportunity to widen their perspectives:

**Excerpt 4:** Foreign language learners are generally afraid of speaking and I was almost this type of a learner. But, this course changed my attitude. In an academic atmosphere, we were able to freely express our ideas and had the chance to hear what our friends thought about different issues. I believe this process not only developed our language skills but also expanded our thinking and understanding.

Grammar and vocabulary can also be included as the last area of linguistic development. The participants expressed that, through article content, they reinforced their grammar and sometimes came across with unfamiliar forms and tried to integrate them into their writings. They were also exposed to academic language and field-specific terminology which helped them expand their vocabulary repertoire. Touching upon this point and those mentioned above, a participant uttered that articles served as a combination of language-related and field-related sources, which contributed to learners' development in different language skills:

**Excerpt 5:** ... In a few weeks, I realized the undeniable contributions of articles to our language development. The academic content developed our field-specific knowledge; the practical content offered us some solutions or strategies that can be utilized in some cases; and the "read-discuss-write" process helped

us advance our reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar and vocabulary. So, integrating articles into TEYL II course created a multidimensional process.

Observation notes revealed parallel results with the data obtained from the participants. Since the participants were supposed to follow the “read-discuss-write a report” cycle, the researcher observed a notable improvement in students’ main four language skills, grammar and vocabulary. First of all, as they were engaging themselves in academic texts, their academic reading showed significant progress. With the help of in-class discussions, their listening and speaking skills also advanced. As also stated by most of the participants, in the first few weeks, the students were not willing to participate in class discussions. But, in time, they got over the fear of public speaking and started to contribute to classes sharing their comments. The weekly article reports enabled the participants to develop their writings in the target language. As I was collecting and evaluating the papers weekly, I could realize the positive change also in the learners’ writing performance. They showed significant improvement in the way they formed sentences and the way they used grammatical rules and different vocabulary items.

### **Affective Contributions**

The contributions of article integration into TEYL II course was not restricted to the educational and linguistic items. As shown in Table 1, articles also had affective contributions among which increasing students’ “self-confidence, motivation and self-efficacy” can be counted as issues of great significance. Almost all the participants expressed that the way the articles were covered in the course created a chance for them to realize their potential in reading and understanding even complicated article contents, having some things to say about the issues under discussion and turning the discussions and the content under consideration into writings which also reflected their own comments. This cycle, though regarded a bit tiring and challenging at first, was appreciated as it introduced learners a comprehensive schedule in which they could enhance their knowledge, skills and perspectives. Besides, the participants maintained that, thanks to the articles, they experienced a positive change in their self-confidence and motivation since they saw they could manage different course requirements and thus improve themselves in the target language. The following remark can be an example of how articles helped learners increase their self-confidence and motivation:

**Excerpt 6:** To be honest, before this course, I was a bit shy and unwilling to talk in the class. However, the more I experienced the encouraging atmosphere in this course (and this was because of the efforts of our instructor), the more I could, fortunately, overcome the feeling that I cannot take part in class discussions. Now I can speak the way I always wanted. I naturally and gradually realized the increase in my motivation and self-confidence.

Increase in self-efficacy was another point which is worth dwelling on as regards the contributions of including related articles in the course content. As the learners were academically witnessing the experiences of real practitioners narrated in articles, they could broaden their minds and were equipped with different perspectives into educational research. Although the participants were undergraduates and did not have real classroom experiences, they stated that the lived-experiences and corresponding suggestions in the articles integrated into class-discussions opened new horizons for them as prospective teachers. An example quotation from a participant can be enlightening to understand the growing sense of self-efficacy built by the course content:

**Excerpt 7:** There were a number of real examples of in-service and pre-service teachers in the articles; some had similar and some had different experiences. I believe, when analyzed in detail through class-discussions, these experiences offered us great examples of what we should and should not do in real classroom settings. Before taking this course, I did not have much confidence in myself as a teacher because of the lack of experience. But, now, though I am still an undergraduate student, I believe I can be a good teacher because this course equipped me with different strategies and filled my mind with useful suggestions.

The outstanding increase in the levels of learners' motivation and self-confidence was also in line with the observation notes. During in-class observations, I noticed the increase in the learners' motivation and self-confidence. Initially, all the learners were attending the classes reading the week's article and writing the report but there were just a few regular participants in the lessons. Fortunately, after a few classes, there was an increase in the number of students who were willingly participating in the lessons. When we were having mini-talks during the break, some of them stated that they had more confidence in themselves in this new course design because they could have more voice in a motivating and encouraging atmosphere, which clearly reflected an increase in their self-efficacy. While most of them, at the beginning, had difficulty in providing comments sometimes even for some basic issues, they, in time, could come up with remarkable comments or solutions to different issues. The more we were having discussions, the more critically they could analyze the content in the articles. This explicitly illustrates a development in their self-efficacy and self-confidence as prospective teachers. By sharing their ideas and being exposed to others' comments, they could develop a sense of critical thinking and critical analysis, which also helped them develop their self-efficacy.

### **Individual/Group Work-Related Contributions**

The last category of the contributions of integrating articles into TEYL II course was the individual/group work-related contributions. As shown in Table 1, there were two codes under this category. The first code was about the individual work-related contributions. More than half of the participants indicated that the cycle followed in TEYL II course offered a great chance for them to organize their own learning processes. Since the course required them to follow the same procedure on a weekly basis, the learners could put what they were supposed to do into a systematic order. In this system, they were conscious of the steps to follow and this process helped them establish a particular order as self-directed learners. Referring to this benefit, a participant provided the below remark:

**Excerpt 8:** The process we followed in this course really helped me improve the way I study. Before this course, I had an irregular way of studying; so I was sometimes experiencing problems. But, the cycle in this course enabled me to turn my studying pattern from an irregular to a regular one. Now, I can organize what I am expected to do in a better and orderly way.

The second code in the last category was about the group work-related contributions of article integration. Though not directly referring to the concept of *group work*, almost half of the participants implied that classroom discussions created an atmosphere of mutual sharing in which learners could freely express their ideas and benefit from others' comments and suggestions. This setting offered them an academic community atmosphere in which learners

could develop themselves in diverse aspects. Appreciating the existence of such an atmosphere in undergraduate education, a participant maintained as the following:

**Excerpt 9:** I really enjoyed participating in this course because it was different from the other courses I had taken. In this course, we could have the chance to freely express what we knew and thought. What was most important, there was no fear of being judged or criticized. So, I believe the integration of academic articles combined with the instructor's attitudes was a great chance for us to improve ourselves and benefit from each other.

Based on the observation notes, regarding individual work, I realized how some of the learners started to regulate their studying patterns and processes. For example, there were five students who were inclined to attend the classes without reading the week's article or submitting their weekly reports after the due date. However, after the negotiation of the issue, they started to follow the procedure regularly. Towards the end of the term, they expressed that they were content with the way they improved their studying habits and could become more self-regulating learners.

As for group work-related contributions of article integration, I observed the mutual benefits students were gaining out of participating in classroom discussions. They were benefitting from each other's ideas and completing their missing parts with the help of their friends. So, integrating articles into TEYL II course seemed to provide the learners with a context of mutual sharing and development.

## Discussion

This study showed that integrating articles into TEYL II course brings positive contributions to learners in four areas. The first set is about the educational contributions. As the participants in this study were students in an ELT department, they need to be equipped with the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching the target language to different profiles including young learners. For this purpose, tertiary education should offer prospective teachers the chance to base and improve their field-specific knowledge on strong grounds. Setting out from the comments of the participants and observation notes presented in the Results section, it can be inferred that the educational contribution of integrating articles is of critical importance for undergraduate ELT learners for revision and expansion of field-specific knowledge. Since they are teacher candidates, the participants need to be equipped with a vast repertoire of subject matter knowledge which they can use and integrate into their future teaching events. As knowledge providers, prospective teachers will be expected to possess a notable knowledge capacity and reflect this in their professional lives. Upon this issue, Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) underline that effective teaching requires the mastery of subject-matter knowledge. So, the integration of articles into TEYL II course can be helpful for the participants to enhance their field-specific knowledge repertoire.

The second area of contributions of integrating articles was related to the linguistic development of the participants. Under the umbrella category of "linguistic contributions," the main focus was on the development of basic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), grammar and vocabulary. In the flow of TEYL II course, learners were offered an atmosphere of developing their language skills while being exposed to the academic content. The contributory nature of this course was also appreciated by the participating students who expressed that they did not have much chance to study scientific articles and to combine theoretical content with language practice in their courses. Therefore, in this course, as also mentioned in participant remarks, learners could have the chance to practice four skills while

they were revising previous content and learning new things. This aspect can be regarded as a significant dimension in undergraduate foreign language education because teachers are expected to be language masters knowledgeable about field-specific knowledge. As stated by Park and Lee (2006) and Werbinska (2009), this language mastery involves being a good reader with a vast vocabulary repertoire, a good writer with the knowledge of appropriate grammar, a good listener and speaker with fluency and accuracy.

Another point to highlight here can be related to the opportunity for self-expression besides listening to and understanding others' ideas. As teachers-to-be, undergraduate students are supposed to develop their self-confidence in order to express their ideas freely and comfortably. Besides, as they are to communicate with different people with diverse experiences and opinions, these students should develop the sense of appreciating, or at least, respecting other perspectives. In their study on the challenges awaiting English teachers, Hang Khong and Saito (2014) referred to cultural diversity as a challenge for teachers and suggested that teachers should be educated to deal with different ideas and life styles in their classrooms. Therefore, the system carried out in TEYL II course may also be considered as a way to get learners accustomed to respecting and understanding different viewpoints.

Affective contributions were also observed and noted regarding the effects of article integration into TEYL II course. Self-confidence, motivation and self-efficacy were among the affective factors mentioned by the participants in this study. As regards motivation, the participants expressed that the new system introduced in TEYL II course became a source of motivation as it introduced novelty and provided a content of sharing, understanding and producing scientific ideas related to the course. In the context of foreign language education, it is paramount to increase learners' sense of motivation because language education requires continuous effort for success (Dörnyei, 1994; Ellis, 1994). Motivation can be said to be the force keeping learners on track in the long process which may sometimes become challenging. So, the design of TEYL II course involving articles may motivate learners to follow the course requirements and participate in lessons.

Another point to center on in the discussion of affective factors was the issue of self-efficacy. As the prominent figure to present the concept of self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) defines the term as the personal belief of the capability to learn and do things. He also emphasizes the connection between self-efficacy and motivation, which is also supported by Pajares (2002), and adds that self-efficacy impacts the way people think, act and succeed. Holding a similar point of view, in their research on self-efficacy in EFL context, Tılfarlıoğlu and Cinkara (2009) communicated the idea that self-efficacy beliefs influence how people function "through cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes" (p.130). Therefore, the development of the sense of self-efficacy is essential for undergraduate learners because they are prospective teachers who will be expected to manage different responsibilities ranging from classroom management to paperwork. As also recommended by Shi (2017), it is essential to increase the feeling of self-efficacy and motivation in students in order to follow chances for development as personal and professional beings. Based on participant remarks, the way TEYL II course was conducted seems to increase the sense of motivation and self-efficacy in learners as the course enabled them to recognize their potential and increase their willingness to keep on track.

The development of the participants' sense of self-efficacy in this study also indicates an improvement in their critical thinking. Carrying out a study to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and critical thinking, Fahim and Nasrollahi-Mouziraji (2013) found a strong connection between critical thinking ability and self-efficacy, a point also observed in this study. Facione (2011) also reports the apparent connection between self-confidence, self-efficacy and critical reasoning skills. During my in-class observations, I realized the gradual

increase in the way the participants were analyzing the issues in the articles from a more critical stance.

The last area to which article integration contributed was the work-related practices of the participants. On the basis of the results about the individual/group work-related contributions of integrating articles into TEYL II course, the discussion can mainly be associated with the concept of self-directed or self-regulated learning. As defined by Knowles (1975), self-directed learning refers to the process of identifying possible problems and needs, setting particular goals, evaluating potential sources and assessing the outcomes. Being a self-directed or self-regulated learner is significant for learners, especially foreign language learners because they are first supposed to go through a long journey of improving themselves in a foreign language and then teaching this language to others. Therefore, learning how to organize, monitor and evaluate the process and progress is of great value for their personal and professional development. As suggested by Ghoortani et al. (2016), self-directed learning brings success in language learning. Hence, as teachers of future, the participants in this study should develop the sense of self-directed learning so that they can teach a similar strategy to their learners. As an evaluation of the system followed in the present study, it can be implied that the conduct in TEYL II course was effective in helping learners develop self-directed learning. This case is in line with Zimmerman's (1989, p. 329) proposal that learners should be "metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process."

As regards the contributions of integrating articles to group work, participant remarks and observation notes revealed that discussing the articles in classes created a context of group sharing and understanding, which promoted collaboration among learners. As suggested in language education, group work can turn into an effective practice when carried out properly since it enables learners to share their ideas and comments besides sharing the responsibility of the task. As underlined by Vygotsky (1978) in his Sociocultural Theory, learning is a cognitive and communicative practice. It is, thus, essential for learners to be offered a context of sharing and communicating for development (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Knowles, 1975).

The whole discussion can be summarized by pointing at the contributory nature of integrating articles into TEYL II course in terms of the provision of the chance to enhance field-specific knowledge, to practice linguistic skills, to increase learners' self-confidence, motivation and self-efficacy and to promote a more regular way of individual and group work. In the light of these conclusions, therefore, some practical recommendations can be provided. Since TEYL courses (I and II) are included in ELT curriculum to equip prospective teachers with the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching the language to a certain profile, articles can be integrated as an alternative way of conducting TEYL II course. By analyzing the experienced cases in the articles, learners can be exposed to real examples of teaching English to young learners and can reach some practical conclusions to adopt or adapt in their own teaching. Learners taking TEYL II course can also be asked to keep reports of their teaching experiences through micro teachings and share these experiences with their classmates.

Second, as an alternative way to contribute to TEYL II content, those instructors teaching TEYL II course can conduct some common projects in which learners can attend real young learner classrooms to teach English. In such a setting, learners may be asked to keep reports of their teaching experiences. The student-reports formed by students in different universities can be combined and utilized as additional materials in TEYL II courses in addition to the academic articles selected by instructors.

The third practical suggestion is about the integration of articles into other course content. The process followed in TEYL II course is expected to equip undergraduate students with adequate and proper foreign language skills and to train them as more authentic teachers with the capability to deal with genuine and specific educational issues in their professional

lives. As the fundamental purpose of ELT departments is, in general, to educate prospective teachers in such a way to ensure professional effectiveness and success, taking the above-mentioned aims into account, it can be suggested that articles can be integrated in many courses in ELT curriculum which are based on a combination of theory and practice like TEYL II course. Though article integration may not be appropriate for a group of learners who has not yet developed certain language skills or accumulated basic knowledge, it can be effectively applied with a group who needs to practice the language, revise previous content and learn additional points. As a source of detailed content and rich discussion, articles can be integrated in ELT courses when applicable in view of the content and aim of the course.

### Conclusion

Involved in general ELT curriculum as courses offered for two terms, TEYL I and TEYL II courses are essential in equipping prospective teachers with the theoretical and practical features of teaching English to young learners. Appreciating the value of the issue of teaching English to young learner profiles, this study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of integrating articles into TEYL II course. In the light of the results revealing the positive contributions of article integration into TEYL II course in terms of educational, linguistic, affective and individual/group work-related benefits, main reasons why articles can be implemented in TEYL II course can be suggested as follows:

- Since they include specific content about subject matter knowledge, articles can be beneficial sources for revising previous knowledge and expanding existing knowledge repertoire.
- When integrated into TEYL II courses in a cycle of “reading, discussing and writing,” articles can be advantageous for learners to develop their language skills besides providing a chance for grammar and vocabulary revision and development because of learners’ constant engagement in the language.
- In an encouraging discussion and idea-sharing atmosphere, articles can increase learners’ willingness and motivation, which is important to make learners active members of the learning community. While being exposed to new knowledge, learners can also enjoy having their voices heard during classes as participative members.
- Occupying their minds with articles can enable learners to develop a sense of self-efficacy since article content and relevant classroom discussions equip them with theoretical and practical knowledge that can be utilized in teaching practice. Before starting the pleasing but, at the same time, demanding journey of teaching, pre-service teachers can be informed about what awaits them in the profession through contents of course related articles.
- When appropriately integrated into TEYL II courses within a pre-determined regular system, articles can promote self-directed or self-regulated learning since learners go through a similar process on a weekly basis.
- As materials suitable for classroom discussions, articles can also form a great basis as main or complementary course materials for group work since they stimulate a context of active participation and mutual sharing.

In the light of the results of this study, several suggestions can be made for future research. In order to reach more comprehensive understandings of the contributions of article integration, further studies can adopt pre-and post- designs to determine the level of change in the areas identified in the present study. In order to assess the effectiveness of integrating

articles, studies can also be conducted in other departmental courses in which articles can be applicable. With an aim to form a common content, research can also focus on the type of articles which are more contributory for such particular classes in terms of content.

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