ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON TED TALKS AS AN EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT

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Abstract: The study examines the potential educational value of TED (technology, entertainment, and design) Talks as supplementary resources in the form of an assignment for teaching English as a foreign language in a teacher education context. Three questions guided our research: (1) What are English language pre-service teachers’ perspectives on the use of TED Talks in a course for teacher education? (2) What are the problems uttered by English language pre-service teachers on the use of TED Talks in a course for teacher education? (3) What are English language pre-service teachers’ suggestions for improving the use of TED Talks as educational support? The data for this case study were collected by means of an open-ended survey questionnaire prepared by the researchers. Sixty-one first-grade university students majoring in teaching English as a foreign language participated in this study as a part of their regular listening and pronunciation course for a semester. The data were analyzed using a simple thematic analysis. The results revealed a number of factors affecting the pre-service teachers’ perspectives on the use of TED Talks in a course for teacher education. Varying, interesting, and informative content, exposure to various accents, listening and pronunciation practice outside the class, embracing a positive mindset, and being granted the autonomy to choose the video to watch each week were among the most frequently mentioned positive factors, while workload, time constraints, and difficulty finding a suitable video to watch were among the most frequently mentioned negative ones. Implications for integrating TED Talks into language teacher education and foreign language teaching were discussed.

Keywords: TED Talks, teacher education, pre-service language teachers, educational support

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Introduction
In the current era of extensive globalization, education is no exception to the trend of benefiting from technological advances as technology allows any time, everywhere access to an abundance of instructional resources. The use of electronic tools makes both learning and teaching more engaging and relevant, and if students and teachers utilize it effectively, they may achieve beneficial learning results.

The emergence of resources such as Technology, Entertainment, and Design Talks, known as TED Talks, whose mission is to disseminate “ideas worth sharing” to possibly educate and enlighten millions of individuals, has provided educators with new opportunities to use technology for student learning. To provide some background information, the TED community, providing 10- to 18-minute lectures with concise and focused information, serves as a platform for the dissemination and discussion of ideas that may be applied to several fields including education. Furthermore, what distinguishes TED Talks from other video streaming websites is adhered to its “interactive transcript” function included in the script (Park & Cha, 2013). Viewers may read the transcript while watching a TED video and can go back and forth by selecting the relevant section of the script if they wish to repeat or skip a particular segment of the recording. In addition, viewers can easily share TED videos with others by downloading them to their computer or using a social networking application that can be accessed at any time, regardless of location, thanks to the most advanced communications technology.

Literature Review
The use of TED Talks as a teaching tool has grown in popularity across a range of academic fields, such as sports (López-Carril, Añó & González-Serrano, 2020), philosophy (Danilina & Shabunina, 2018), medicine (Filip, 2021), engineering (García-Pinar, 2019), education (Banker & Gourmelos, 2013), and most importantly language teaching (Harb, 2018). Particularly, such resources may assist the process of learning a language, which is one of the fundamental means of human communication and one of the most important components of our life. According to Watkins and Wilkins (2011), for example, TED Talks have proved to be a good source of speeches covering a wide range of subjects, so in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes, they may be used to strengthen students’ academic skills such as note-taking. Moreover, students may continue to discuss, debate, and reflect on a speaker’s ideas even after the talk is over. According to Taibi, Chawla, Dietze, Marenzi, and Fetahu (2015), TED talks are valuable in the classroom because (a) they are knowledge resources with rich and accessible information and insights for students, and (b) they are instructional materials dedicated to language learning, especially with the wide range of multilingual
transcripts. Similarly, Li, Gao, and Zhang (2016) stress that students’ imaginations and creativity might benefit from the great variety of subjects covered in TED Talks. Moreover, as a result of their exposure to World Englishes, students may acquire authentic vocabulary knowledge and a variety of English accents, which contributes to the development of their listening and speaking skills (Park & Cha, 2013). The authenticity of TED Talks allows students to not only be exposed to authentic contexts in which English is used (Aleles & Hall, 2016) but also to get additional listening practice (Stognieva, 2019).

Having such a considerable number of benefits, the TED technique of sharing worthy ideas has also received some criticism, such as simplifying subjects to fit them into a convenient and entertaining presentation (Romanelli, Cain & McNamara, 2014). As a result, students who follow TED Talks may be less eager to investigate evidence, theory, or disagreement. TED Talks may also give students a misleading perception of simplicity and promote an approach to learning that is seldom seen in the real world. Despite TED Talks’ limitations and legitimate criticisms, Romanelli et al. (2014) state that educators may use the talks as a part of a larger course sequence that helps students connect with the subject or ignites student interest in issues that are later addressed in greater detail.

The increase in the popularity of TED Talks has correlated with an increase in empirical studies conducted to understand the value of TED Talks as a pedagogical resource. In their study with Korean pre-service language teachers, Park and Cha (2013) examine pre-service teachers’ views on using TED.com to design listening exercises for teacher training to suggest changes to traditional listening courses in Korean teacher colleges. The findings reveal that pre-service language teachers regard TED.com as a valuable source to foster learners’ autonomy and motivation as lifelong language learners. The study carried out by Ishinuki (2014) has yielded rather interesting results. Namely, their results indicate that utilizing TED Talks alone does not appear to close the motivation gap between motivated and unmotivated students. In addition, personalized counselling and feedback can be crucial in fostering learner autonomy among unmotivated students who suffer from anxiety or a lack of self-efficacy. The meticulous literature review has revealed various other studies focused on examining the potential use of TED Talks in foreign language teaching (to list a few recent studies (Al-Jarf, 2021; Chang & Huang, 2015; Karunakar, 2019; Nurcholish, Handayani & Nurhidayanti, 2023; Sailun & Idayani, 2018; Salem, 2019; Shelestova, Kalizhanova, Romanyuk & Zhuman, 2021; Stognieva, 2019; Tilwani et al., 2022).
Research Aim and Questions

The researchers were intrigued by the question: How can teacher educators ensure the delivery of meaningful, up-to-date knowledge in an ever-changing educational landscape? As research suggests, with the exponential rise of technology and information, it is a necessity for teacher educators to rethink the content to make it relevant to pre-service language teachers, applicable to many disciplines, and beneficial to both individuals and society. Moreover, teacher educators are responsible for “modelling innovative teaching techniques that their students can apply in their own classrooms” (DaViva Rubenstein, 2012, p. 262). Having evaluated several possible technological tools to model up-to-date teaching techniques, the researchers have agreed on using TED Talks as educational support in a listening and pronunciation skills course at a pre-service language teacher education program. The following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are English language pre-service teachers’ perspectives on the use of TED Talks in a course for teacher education?
2. What are the problems uttered by English language pre-service teachers on the use of TED Talks in a course for teacher education?
3. What are English language pre-service teachers’ suggestions for improving the use of TED Talks as educational support?

Methodology

Research Design

Research, as defined by Dörnyei (2007, p.15), “simply means trying to find answers to questions, an activity every one of us does all the time to learn more about the world around us”. While planning the research, choosing an appropriate method to answer research questions is one of the most crucial steps in the research process; thus, researchers must be able to articulate and defend their choice (Creswell, 2003). For the research design of the current study, a qualitative case study served as the basis since it provides straightforward descriptions of experiences and perceptions, particularly in areas where little is known about the investigated topic (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). According to Yin (2003), a case study may have multiple purposes, including evaluating a specific case. As in this study, a researcher might, for instance, evaluate the educational value of an implementation or application from students’ perspectives.

Research Setting and Participants

This research was conducted in the four-year English Language Teacher Education Program at a state university in Turkey. The participants for the study
were sixty-one first-grade university students majoring in teaching English as a foreign language and participating in it as a part of their regular listening and pronunciation course for a 14-week semester. Information regarding gender distribution (Female: 31, Male: 30) is demonstrated in the pie chart below.

![Gender Distribution](image)

**Figure 1. Gender Distribution**

In the course, pre-service language teachers are expected to do an assignment by means of listening to or watching TED talks outside the class in their free time, recording a minute or two of their reflection on the talk, uploading it on the Padlet platform for their classmates to be able to listen to, and finally leaving written comments on at least two of their classmates’ audio-recorded reflections weekly for ten weeks. The Padlet link is shared by the course instructor, and the deadline to submit each audio recording and comments is Sunday at 23.59.

As shown in the pie chart below, the majority of English language student teachers successfully completed the ten-week assignment.

![Fulfillment of the Assignment](image)

**Figure 2. Fulfillment of the Assignment**

The study has been designed to explore the potential educational value of TED Talks as supplementary resources in the form of an assignment for teaching English in a teacher education context. Since the assignment made use of TED Talks as supplementary resources, the purpose of the study is to describe English language student teachers’ perspectives on the use of TED Talks in a course for
teacher education, the challenges they encountered, and their suggestions to improve the assignment made use of TED Talks as supplementary resources. This study would provide teacher educators with information about the possible benefits of using TED Talks as supplementary resources, student teachers’ reported difficulties in completing an assignment that lasts for ten weeks, and pedagogical procedures that need to be planned in integrating TED Talks into courses as supplementary resources in the context of language teacher education.

**Data Collection**

A structured survey questionnaire with open-ended questions was used to gather qualitative data for this study. As a qualitative research method, an open-ended survey questionnaire assisted the researchers in naturally analyzing the data by eliciting information that could be difficult to gather using other data collection approaches, such as the observation of emotions, thoughts, and intentions (Wen, 2004). The open-ended survey questions were developed in accordance with the research questions and the relevant literature. Then two experts with PhD degrees in the field were consulted for their feedback. In line with their feedback, necessary adaptations were made, and the questions were finalized. The final survey questionnaire was comprised of five questions as follows:

1. Were you able to do the assignment weekly? Why? Why not?
2. Do you think this assignment has had any positive effects on your personal/academic/professional growth? Please explain and give examples if possible.
3. What were the weaknesses of this assignment? How could this assignment be improved to help you most?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Data Analysis**

In this research, the following qualitative data were gathered from the survey responses of sixty-one participants. The survey questions collected English language student teachers’ perceptions of the potential educational value of TED Talks as supplementary resources in the form of an assignment for teaching English in a teacher education context based on their understanding and experiences. The participants were informed about the study and asked to sign a consent form. As qualitative data analysis offers the researcher an insider’s
perspective on the field by fostering a close relationship with the participants and the events occurring in their natural setting (Burns, 1997), each researcher read through the interview transcripts carefully. The data were analyzed using a simple thematic analysis, which is defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes” (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p.1278). This allowed each researcher to identify, analyze, and report the emergent themes related to English language student teachers’ perceptions of TED Talks as supplementary resources in the form of an assignment for teaching English in a teacher education context. Since categories were derived from data during analysis, recurring themes from the content were gathered to gain a richer understanding of a phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data analysis phase, the researchers went over the themes together, discussed the uncommon themes, and finalized the data analysis.

**Findings**
As mentioned in the methodology part, the qualitative data were gathered from the survey responses of sixty-one English language student teachers. The results were utilized to answer the research questions on the perspectives of pre-service English language teachers on the use of TED Talks as an educational supplement in a teacher education course, the reasons behind their failure to complete the assignment, and their suggestions for improving the use of TED Talks as educational support.

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data are shown in Table 1. It also displays the number of comments, which indicates the frequency with which participants discussed certain subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Theme 1: English language pre-service teachers’ evaluations of the use of TED Talks as educational support in a course for teacher education | • Personal Aspect  
- Content  
- Affective factors  
- Soft skills  
• Professional Aspect  
- Subject Matter: English  
- Pedagogical skills | 91 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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| Theme 2: Advantages of the use of TED Talks as educational support in a course for teacher education | • Personal Development  
  - Variety of topics  
  - Broadening horizons  
  - Positive mindset  
  - Talking about feelings  
  - Dealing with psychological issues  
  - Time-management  
  - Putting knowledge into practice  
  - Being autonomous | 48 |
| | • Professional Development  
  - Subject Matter: English  
  - Speaking skills  
    - Fluency  
    - Pronunciation  
    - Clarity  
    - Content  
    - Organization  
    - Listening skills  
  - Exposure to different accents  
  - Comprehension  
  - Writing skills  
  - Vocabulary knowledge  
  - Pedagogical Skills  
  - Reflection  
  - Commenting  
  - Planning and delivering a talk  
  - Peer learning  
  - Teaching technique (tip) | 43 |
| Theme 3: Problems related to the use of TED Talks as educational support in a course for teacher education | • Assignment-related  
  - Duration  
  - Deadline  
  - Not assigning a topic for each week  
  - Audio-recorded reflections  
  - Being graded  
  - Limited to TED Talks  
  - Lack of face-to-face interaction  
  - Lack of instructors’ feedback on reflections  
  - Lack of instructors’ feedback on students’ recording in terms of accuracy and fluency  
  • TED Talks-related  
    - Variety  
    • Personal  
    - Social anxiety  
  • Lack of the habit of doing such assignments | 44 |
Theme 1: Pre-service English language teachers’ evaluations of the use of TED Talks as educational support in a course for teacher education

The evaluations of English language pre-service teachers’ use of TED Talks as educational support in a teacher education course centered around two subthemes: personal and professional. As shown in the table, a total of 91 evaluations, encompassing these two subthemes, were conducted. The most key data is that pre-service teachers evaluated both subthemes almost equally. Although there were 48 evaluations for the personal sub-theme, there were 43 evaluations for the professional sub-theme. The quotes of pre-service language teachers are not edited by the researchers but are provided in their authentic versions.

Personal Aspect

More than half of the participants commented on the personal aspect of the use of TED Talks as educational support in a course for teacher education, including content, affective factors, and soft skills. The shared examples of how TED Talks contributed to their personal growth are as follows:

“…….effected me in every positive aspects, especially personally. Every time I watched a ted talk, I learnt something new and I tried to use the information I’ve gained in my life. For instance, sleeping 8 hours a day is not necessary and your body can maintain the sleep you have automatically.” (Student No.1)

“The TED Talks have influenced me how to better manage daily psychological problems such as anxiety, stress, and loss of self-confidence.” (Student No.22)

“…..there were so many useful/ vital information given from real life.” (Student No.8)

“……after some of the motivational/ inspirational ted talks, now I think I manage my time and my emotions better.” (Student No.10)
Professional Aspect

Apart from the preceding subtheme, the pre-service language teachers almost equally emphasized the benefits of using TED Talks as educational support for their professional growth in terms of proficiency in English language skills and pedagogical skills. Among the many examples are the following:

“It has improved my both listening and speaking skills. It helped me with correct pronunciation.” (Student No. 32)

“…….because I improved my pronunciation by recording them.” (Student No.42)

“First of all, I learned numerous words and phrases.” (Student No.5)

“…..helped me grow my listening, and also understand all the accents that speakers speak.” (Student No.6)

“…..growth in my writing because it got better. And my sentences got advanced, I started to use different words while I speak.” (Student No.13)

“….It gave me an idea to use when I become a teacher.” (Student No. 43)

Theme 2: Advantages of the use of TED Talks as educational support in a course for teacher education

The second theme worth-mentioning was the advantages associated with the use of TED Talks as educational support in a course for teacher education. This theme indicated that English language pre-service teachers believed that the use of TED Talks had contributed to their personal and professional development. As for personal development, they expressed overwhelmingly positive views about the use of TED Talks as educational support in teacher education programs. It focused especially on the variety of topics that TED Talks include, which enabled pre-service teachers to broaden their horizons, embrace a positive mindset, talk about their feelings, deal with psychological issues, manage their time better, put the knowledge they gain to practice, and be autonomous. Some of the examples are as follows:

“I think it had positive effects on both my English speaking skills and my mindset.” (Student No.10)

“I found new interesting and effective techniques or facts about my life, career, lifestyle etc.” (Student No.12)

“In my personal life, ………. so ted talks gave me many precious informations about several topics.” (Student No. 14)

On the other hand, pre-service teachers listed a number of positive outcomes for professional development, such as advancing in English language skills, not
limited to speaking and listening skills but also writing and vocabulary and gaining pedagogical knowledge on how to be a better teacher. To share a few:

“….it contributed to my listening, speaking and writing skills.” (Student No.59)

“Also, pronunciation is a plus in my view” (Student No.57)

“…..made me more aware about pronunciation of the words.” (Student No.49)

“…..while listening to others, I realized that I have many mispronounced words stuck with me.” (Student No.44)

“…..had positive effects on my professional growth as a future teacher because it is important for me to be able to explain the information and attract the audience.” (Student No. 18)

“…..I was able to prepare talks easier.” (Student No.4)

Theme 3: Problems related to the use of TED Talks as educational support in a course for teacher education

The third theme was about the difficulties associated with using TED Talks as educational support. This has garnered 44 comments. The pre-service language teachers noted difficulties associated with the assignment itself, TED Talks, and their own traits. They mainly underlined the fact that even though TED Talks cover a variety of topics, limiting the assignment only to watching TED Talks decreases its benefit. Also, most of them complained about their workload due to having several assignments from other courses. Another worth mentioning finding was about pre-service teachers’ attributing the problems to their own traits. Here are some examples of what they argued:

“…..might be the durability. I believe students might get tired of doing this every week.” (Student No.51)

“With no deadline like weekly deadline puts pressure.” (Student No.21)

“…..we changed subjects every week. Therefore, we couldn't dive deeper into every subject.” (Student No.22)

“I think the weaknesses are up to the students. I consider these assignments as a good chance to improve in different areas. However, if the students do not care enough, it will be no helpful to them.” (Student No.45)

“I have social anxiety, so it was a bit hard for me to record my voice at the first stages. Later on I got used to it, and gained more confidence.” (Student No.16)
“….I didn’t like watching ted talks before because I could not understand speakers properly, and this bothered me. Thanks to this assignment, I learnt that sometimes we have to confront our weaknesses….this assignment turned into an amusing task for me.” (Student No. 5)

Theme 4: Suggestions for the use of TED Talks as educational support in teacher education

The last theme was related to pre-service teachers’ suggestions for improvements while using TED Talks as educational support in teacher education. They provided some solid suggestions, such as setting the deadline for every two weeks, assigning a topic for each week, sharing a topic pool, integrating a face-to-face reflection phase, and providing feedback on pre-service teachers’ audio recordings and comments.

“…..we can do this assignment face to face in every two week.” (Student No.1)

“…making it an activity inside of classroom would benefit more since students would not be worrying about the grades.” (Student No.15)

“I loved how this assignment was made on the internet instead of face-to-face. Because I was stressed enough for the presentations that we do in speaking.” (Student No.26)

“The sources could be expanded (For instance, it would be good to be able to use not only TED Talks, but other videos, podcasts etc).” (Student No.18)

“…..finding videos was hard too. Maybe a list of videos can be given that includes videos in various topics, so that it interests everyone.” (Student No. 29)

“…would be much better if I could see my progress…..we did it unconsciously without knowing how to reflect on thoughts.” (Student No.40)

“Some feedbacks about our accuracy and vocabulary might help us better. If there was a feedback a little in detail would help me a lot.” (Student No.17)

Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the potential educational value of TED Talks as supplementary resources in the form of an assignment for teaching English as a foreign language in a teacher education context. The prominent findings to be discussed with relevant literature are as follows:

• The results supported the educational value of TED Talks, and this is consistent with previous studies on teaching the English language (Shelestova et al., 2021), speaking skills (Li et.al, 2016; Sailun & Idayani, 2018), listening
skills (Al-Jarf, 2021; Nurcholish et al., 2023; Tilwani et al., 2022), vocabulary knowledge (Salem, 2019), and writing skills (Harb, 2018).

• This research provides further empirical evidence identifying that being exposed to TED Talks also empowers personal growth in terms of having a broad knowledge of various subjects (Park & Cha, 2013; DaVia Rubenstein, 2012), broadening horizons (Chang & Huang, 2015), being self-confident (Banker & Gourmelos, 2013), being autonomous (DaVia Rubenstein, 2012; Hubbard, 2011; Jeong, 2008), and managing time efficiently (Romanelli et al., 2014), as well as professional growth as future teachers in terms of familiarizing with innovative instructional practices (DaVia Rubenstein, 2012).

• The study revealed a significant challenge in finding realistic and efficient ways of individualizing instruction cementing the significance of assisting students to self-regulate learning effectively (Butler, 2002). Furthermore, prior studies have confirmed the difficulty of dividing the attention across many students at once in whole-class instruction (e.g. Butler, 2002; Schunk, 1994). Therefore, teachers may be encouraged to adopt the Goldilocks principle, which proposes a “not too much, not too little, but just right” approach to set an assignment in terms of content, time, and deadline (Brookhart, 2008).

• The findings regarding pre-service teachers’ demand for receiving feedback on their audio recordings and even the comments they left for their classmates’ audio recordings in the online platform (Padlet) are consistent with similar studies in the literature. Tasdemir and Yalcin Arslan (2018) reported that students strongly believe in the effectiveness of teachers as sources of feedback. The results seem to be consistent with those of Schulz (2001), who stated that the majority of students prefer their teachers as a source of feedback.

The present study has several limitations. First, the sample is limited to a group of English language pre-service teachers studying at a teacher education program in a state university. Consequently, the findings might not be employed to portray the situations at other universities in different regions of Turkey. Further studies should have a larger sample size and, if feasible, cover a wider geographical range to provide a larger picture of relevant accounts. Second, the use of TED Talks as an educational source is limited to a listening and pronunciation course here. Further studies are needed in other fields of education to test the potential educational value of TED Talks. Third, the data came from only one source: an open-ended survey questionnaire. Future empirical studies are expected to involve diverse data collection tools to triangulate data and gain a deeper understanding of the educational value of TED Talks.
In conclusion, this study examined the perspectives of English language pre-service teachers towards the use of TED Talks as an educational source in the context of teacher education. According to the qualitative findings, pre-service teachers supported the use of TED Talks as an instructional resource in the context of teacher education. In addition, they evidenced that the use of TED Talks empowered having a broad knowledge of a variety of subjects, broadening horizons, embracing a positive mindset, knowing oneself better, gaining self-confidence, being proficient in the target language in listening, speaking, and writing skills with expanded vocabulary knowledge. In addition, their gain included soft skills related to autonomy, time management, and self-regulation. However, some participants argued that the use of TED Talks as an educational source had the following uttered drawbacks: deadline, limited variety, lack of in-class phase, and lack of teachers’ feedback on students’ reflections. In light of the disadvantages, the present study then made recommendations for the future use of TED Talks as an educational source in language learning and teaching programs to individualize the process as much as possible, including setting the deadline with the involvement of learners, not limiting the material only to TED Talks, providing a pool of sample Talks to guide students, adding a reflection-in-class phase as post-listening, and gathering feedback during the implementation to obtain information about the experiences of individual students and providing immediate assistance or guidance to meet the individual needs. By following the aforementioned recommendations, future studies may be designed to gain more empirical data on the use of TED Talks as educational support in varied contexts.

References


