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Perspectives and Practices of Academics and Students of English Language Teaching Post-Graduate Programs within the Mediation Theory

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Perspectives and Practices of Academics and Students of English Language Teaching Post-Graduate Programs within the Mediation Theory

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Abstract

Due to unsatisfactory number of researches investigating ELT post-graduate programs, and perceptions of academics and students in these programs regarding mediation theory of Feuerstein, this study attempted to investigate the aspects of this theory in doctorate and master programs in ELT department of a state university. Methodologically, this study employed a qualitative case study approach and the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 4 academics and 2 focus-group interviews with students. The results showed idiosyncrasy of academics' use of mediation theory aspects. 'Significance' and 'purpose beyond the here and now' were important aspects for students in being a guide for them to find research topics. Academics paid special attention to relate the topics and tasks with learners' daily practices. However, in order to maximize student-supervisor relationship and increase students' success, there is a need for a change in the system. Most of the criticisms of the students stemmed from the limited time of the academics. Institutional implications include necessary changes in this post-graduate program. The results of this study allowed academics to know the views of the students in post-graduate programs regarding how, when, and where exactly they could use mediation theory aspects.

Keywords: mediation theory, post-graduate program, English Language Teaching

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Perspectivas y Prácticas de Académicos y Estudiantes de Postgrados de Enseñanza del Inglés Dentro de la Teoría de la Mediación

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Resumen

Debido al alto número de investigaciones sobre programas de postgrado ELT y las percepciones de los académicos o estudiantes en estos programas con respecto a la teoría de la mediación de Feuerstein, este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar los aspectos de esta teoría en los programas de doctorado y maestría en el departamento de ELT de una universidad estatal. Se emplea un enfoque de estudio de caso cualitativo. Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas con 4 académicos y 2 grupos focales con estudiantes. Los resultados mostraron semejanzas con la teoría de mediación de los académicos. "Importancia" y "propósito más allá del aquí y ahora" eran aspectos importantes para los estudiantes como guía para encontrar temas de investigación. Los académicos prestaron especial atención a relacionar los temas y las tareas con las prácticas cotidianas de los alumnos. Sin embargo, con el fin de maximizar la relación estudiante-supervisor y aumentar el éxito de los estudiantes, hay una necesidad de un cambio en el sistema. La mayoría de las críticas de los estudiantes nacen del tiempo limitado de los académicos. Las implicaciones institucionales incluyen cambios necesarios en este programa de postgrado. Los resultados de este estudio permitieron a los académicos conocer los puntos de vista de los estudiantes en los programas de postgrado con respecto a cómo, cuándo y dónde exactamente se podrían utilizar aspectos de la teoría de mediación de manera más eficaz.

Palabras clave: teoría de la mediación, programa de posgrado, enseñanza del inglés

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In today's rapidly developing and globalizing world, learning a foreign language is a must for each individual. English takes the role of the most widely spoken language with more than 350 million native speakers and more than 400 million speakers of it as a second or foreign language (Kenji, 1996). The popularity of English increases the need and demand for learning and teaching it. Moreover, more and more universities launch new departments of study about English to attract students. However, the most important one among these departments is English Language Teaching (ELT), which trains future teachers of English, especially in countries where it is spoken as a foreign language as in the case of Turkey.

Teaching foreign languages has always been an important part of education system in Turkey (Küçükoğlu, 2013). With the westernization movement after Turkish republic in 1923, speakers of English outnumbered those of French (Kırkgöz, 2005). The significance of English teaching is embodied in higher education institutions in Turkey as well. Many departments of study have one-year preparatory English classes and English is a compulsory course for all departments. Although the critical period for foreign language learning is primary school period, the effort concerning teaching English in higher education institutions is also remarkable due to their place in development of a country in different areas. When it is considered in the context of ELT in higher institutions, the quality of ELT department determines the quality of teachers of English and eventually quality of English training in Turkey. From a broader perspective, the increasing number of students, programs, and universities in Turkey accelerates the demand for language teacher education programs. In parallel with this fact, the demand for language academics training future academics in this discipline increases as well. Hence, master and doctorate programs in ELT departments play a fundamental role for the candidates to become future academics. However, these post-graduate programs' audience is not limited with the candidates of future ELT academics. Students in this specific discipline study with the purposes of personal development, getting better positions in their jobs, and personal fulfilment as well.

As the first step toward post-graduate programs, ELT undergraduate programs were reformed in 1998 and 2006. Especially the one in 2006 suggested covering the tenets of constructivist approach (Yavuz & Topkaya, 2013). Distinguished supporters of this approach, Vygotsky and Feuerstein, claim that the role of teachers is not merely acting as disseminators of

knowledge, rather they should be 'mediators' and 'facilitators' of students' learning (Williams & Burden, 1997). Unlike teaching and learning taking place through transmission and reception, a mediational approach to teaching and learning aims at helping learners to construct their own knowledge, to solve problems on their own and to understand their own thinking processes (Fraser, 2006). Particularly, learners in the post-graduate programs of ELT departments need to have the knowledge of the role of mediator and the practices of this specific role.

If the academics do not have the knowledge of current teacher roles, it cannot be possible to observe the philosophy of that approach in the practices of student-teachers and future academics. However, there has been no effort to investigate the perceptions and practices of academics and students of post-graduate programs in ELT departments in terms of the principles of mediation. This may stem from the view that mediation was primarily considered to be used with disadvantaged adolescents and children in 1990s. However, the theory had wider applications and could be proved to underpin teaching practices across all levels of education (Seng, 2003). Given the significance of the mediator role of an EFL teacher and the understanding of them by future teachers of English in Turkey, this unique research attempts to fill this gap by investigating academics and students of post-graduate programs in an ELT department regarding the role of mediator and the aspects of the mediation theory. With respect to these aims, the current research attempts to find answer to the following research question: *How do the academics and students in post-graduate programs of ELT department consider the different aspects of mediation to promote learning?*

Theory of Mediation
Education is not simply transmission of knowledge from one source to its receivers. For this reason, psychology of education has always been a complicated issue in the complex nature of human psychology. This complex process maintains its importance and complexity in language teaching and learning as well. The trend in the psychological approaches in language teaching and learning has changed in its brief history. One of the recently embraced ones is constructivism (Williams & Burden, 1997). It claims that 'individuals are actively involved right from birth in constructing personal meaning that is their own personal understanding, from their experiences'

(Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 21). It includes 'personal' and 'social' constructivism (Woolfolk, 2004). Especially social constructivism highlights the acquisition of knowledge through interaction with the environment instead of relying on the teacher (Fraser, 2006).

Vygotsky and Feuerstein are two important figures in social constructivism. They claim that people are born into a social world and they learn language through interaction with other people. The claim of Vygotsky and Feuerstein is one of the departure points for the present study, because students' learning in master and doctorate programs is shaped by the intervention of academics. Therefore, in the context of this study, post-graduate programs take the role of social world learning occurs and academics play the role of mediators in social constructivist perspective.

The word mediation comes from a social interactionist approach to psychology (Fraser, 2006). In the context of education, mediation is conducted by teachers into the learning process of learners. Therefore, for Feuerstein, the significant people helping and guiding learners in order to enrich their learning are 'mediators'; experiences provided by these significant people are 'mediated learning experiences' (MLE). MLE is basically concerned with the quality of the interaction between learners and mediators. The main aim of MLE is to help learners change qualitatively by enabling him/her to develop cognitive prerequisites for learning on his/her own from direct stimuli (Kozulin, 1991).

According to mediation theory, 'the mediator helps learners to bridge the gap between what they cannot do on their own and what they can do with a little help' (Grosser & De Waal, 2008, p. 43). It is quite similar to Vygotsky's most widely known concept Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Mediation is located in the center of psychology of both Vygotsky and Feuerstein. Thus, it can easily be understood that the gist of both theory of mediation of Feuerstein and ZPD are the same. However, it is also claimed that Vygotsky's theoretical framework does not clearly elaborate the role of the human mediator (Seng et al., 2003). In contrast, the major role is employed by a human mediator in Feuerstein's (1990) theory of mediated learning. Therefore, mediation theory of Feuerstein seems meaningful to be adopted for the present study due to its inclusion of ZPD.

Parameters of Mediation

According to Feuerstein (1991), the mediator can mediate learners in 12 different ways to provide real educational learning experiences. The first three of these are considered to be essential for all learning tasks. 'These are also considered universal, in the sense that they can be present in all races, ethnic groups, cultural entities, and socioeconomic strata' (Seng et al., 2003, p. 36). The remaining nine are known as situational, because they are not used in every MLE. The twelve key features of mediation are presented with their explanations below:

> *Significance*: The teacher needs to make learners aware of the significance of the learning task so that they can see the value of it to them personally and in a broader cultural context.
>
> *Purpose beyond the here and now*: Learners must be aware of the way in which the learning experience will have wider relevance to them beyond the immediate time and place.
>
> *Shared intention*: In presenting a task, the teacher must have a clear intention, which is understood and reciprocated by the learners.
>
> *A sense of competence*: The feeling that they are capable of coping successfully with any particular task with which they are faced.
>
> *Control of own behavior*: The ability to control and regulate their own learning, thinking and actions.
>
> *Goal-setting:* The ability to set realistic goals and to plan ways of achieving them.
>
> *Challenge:* An internal need to respond to challenges, and to search for new challenges in life.
>
> *Awareness of change:* An understanding that human beings are constantly changing, and the ability to recognize and assess changes in themselves.
>
> *A belief in positive outcomes*: A belief that even when faced with an apparently intractable problem, there is always the possibility of finding a solution.
>
> *Sharing:* Co-operation among learners, together with the recognition that some problems are better solved co-operatively.
>
> *Individuality:* Recognition of their own individuality and uniqueness.

A sense of belonging: A feeling of belonging to a community and a culture. (Williams & Burden 1997, p. 69)

Studies related to Mediation Theory

There has not been a study related to Feuerstein's theory of mediation to language teaching in the context of Turkey. It has been researched in many different contexts abroad, such as China (Xiongyong, 2012; Xiongyong, Samuel & Hua, 2012); Iran (Hassaskhah, 2011); Taiwan (Chang, 2004); South Africa (Ngidi, 2012; Grosser & De Waal, 2008); France (Brown, 2002).

The educational levels of these studies also differed. While the studies of Xiongyong (2012), Xiongyong et al. (2012), and Ngidi (2012) were conducted in the secondary education institutions; Brown (2002), Grosser and De Waal (2008), and Chang (2004) investigated the concept of mediation in tertiary level. Beyond the educational setting of the studies, the methodology followed in these researches differed as well. Researchers (Ngidi, 2012; Grosser & De Waal, 2008; Brown, 2002) mostly preferred questionnaires to gather data from a large sample. Apart from questionnaires, qualitative approach implementers used just observation and interviews in their researches (Xiongyong et al., 2012; Hassaskhah, 2011). 'Mixed methodology' was also employed by integrating findings of questionnaire, interview, and observation (Xiongyong, 2012; Chang, 2004). Despite employing different methodologies, both studies conducted on the secondary education level (Xiongyong, 2012; Xiongyong et al., 2012) showed that teachers had very limited or no knowledge of the mediation concept or the role of mediator.

Among the studies conducted on tertiary education level mentioned above, there were some common points in the findings. Though conducted in very different cultures (Taiwan and France), both in Brown's (2002) and Chang's (2004) studies, teachers valued 'a sense of competence' aspect the most. This aspect was the most important aspect for the students as well in Chang's (2004) study. On the other hand, although 'purpose beyond the here and now' was among the most actively practiced mediation theory aspects in Brown's study, it was one of the least important parameters for the students in Taiwan. Researchers also conducted studies about the role of mediator and the concept of mediation in language learning and teaching in South African culture. Grosser and De Waal's (2008) results provided similar findings with those of Xiongyong (2012). Although Grosser and De Waal investigated practicing

teachers' understanding of mediation which was different from Xiongyong (2012), the results revealed deficiencies in their understanding of the meaning of mediation as Xiongyong found out in his study. Therefore, it is possible to claim that teachers are not very well aware of these concepts in different parts of the world.

Literature on the concept of mediation and the role of a mediator showed that studies on different levels of education employing different methodologies provided various results. It is also obvious that there has been a lack of studies combining Feuerstein's theory of mediation and ELT post-graduate programs. This study tries to bridge this gap.

Method

The present study had the assumptions of 'constructivist worldview' and 'case study' (Creswell, 2003) as strategy of inquiry in qualitative research tradition in order to deeply investigate theory of mediation, twelve aspects of it and students' and academics' perspectives related to them in ELT post-graduate programs. Case study approach was adopted in the present study because they provide very detailed descriptions of participants or settings within their own setting (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Research instruments
Four semi-structured personal interviews with lecturers and two focus-group interviews with post-graduate students were used for data gathering in the present study. Firstly, in both types of interview, the researcher used a set of questions including 12 mediation theory aspects and personal questions. It starts with personal questions, such as age, gender, the experience as an academic in both master and doctorate programs, and students' academic background. This interview protocol includes 14 questions involving academics' and students' views regarding 12 mediation theory aspects. Questions were prepared by taking the fact that the respondents may not know the aspects of mediation theory into account by avoiding direct questions like 'how do you use significance?'. Instead, indirectness was preferred for the preparation of the questions. Also, the questions were prepared with the awareness that the students are adults and the academics are the educators of adults. Therefore, instead of using words like 'teaching', words like 'guiding'

or 'encouraging' were preferred for suitability. Apart from the main questions which serve as a guide and a point of departure in the present study, some probes were also employed to go deeper into the interview responses. The main concern of the researcher in using focus-group interviews separately both with the master and doctorate students was to let students listen to each other's ideas which allows them to be stimulated by one other and to inspire new ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

A pilot study was carried out with the objective of testing the questions in the interviews. In this pilot study, 2 semi-structured personal interviews with two academics and two focus-group interviews with the participation of two students were conducted. The questions were found to be eliciting the views about mediation theory and its twelve aspects. The questions were also checked by two experts during this process in order to check appropriateness for the main study.

Reliability and validity issues

Establishing trustworthiness was one of the major objectives of the researcher as in all qualitative researches. In order to ensure trustworthiness, five procedures were implemented in this study, which were put forward by Creswell and Miller (2000). *Triangulation* was established by using a combination of personal semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews. Additionally, the data were gathered from different participant groups. *Collaboration* was used with participants' kind acceptance to spend their time for interviews. For *member checking,* the researcher provided participants with the interview transcriptions and received the approval of using them. *Thick and rich description* of the post-graduate programs were made so that the reader can easily understand all the procedures in the research design and it can be replicated. For *peer debriefing,* researcher received feedback over time during the process of the entire study from a PhD student studying in the same department.

Research setting and participants

The setting was education faculty of a state university in Turkey. This university offers undergraduate and post-graduate programs in the department of ELT. First of all, students applying to MA or doctorate program should

have diplomas from related disciplines, have required scores from the related parts of national exams including foreign language exam, and be successful in the interview and written exam administered by the department.

Students who have the chance to join these programs need to take a minimum of seven courses/21 credits and write a thesis. The programs have the objectives of educating experts who are skilled at research studies in the particular field, educating individuals who are good at using the intercultural communication strategies. The courses are taught by eight academics.

In terms of sample selection, this study employed convenience sampling due to convenient and readily available participants (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). There were 4 academics who voluntarily participated in this study. Their personal information is provided below in Table 1.

Table 1
Personal information of the academics

Participant Codes	Gender	Age	Experience			Teaching
			ELT department	ELT Master program	ELT Doctorate Program	
T1	Female	41	11 years	9 years	6 years	Fundamental Issues In Foreign Language Teacher Education (doctorate)
T2	Female	44	12 years	12 years	6 years	Beyond The Borders Of Language Teaching Methodology (master), English for Specific Purposes (doctorate)

Table 1 (continued)
Personal information of the academics

Participant Codes	Gender	Age	Experience			Teaching
			ELT department	ELT Master program	ELT Doctorate Program	
T3	Male	35	3 years	3 years	No experience	Second Language Acquisition (master), Language Teaching and Educational Psychology (master),
T4	Male	32	1 year	1 year	No experience	Teaching English to Young Learners (master)

As shown in Table 1 above, the participants were coded by the researcher. The codes were given according to the groups they belong to. For instance, teacher participants got 'T' and the numbers were added next to their codes, such as 'T1' and 'T2'. Except for one master student working at a state secondary school (M1), all doctorate and master students participated in this study were instructors of English language at various universities in Turkey. The personal information of master and doctorate students is provided below in Table 2 and in Table 3.

Table 2
Personal information of master students

Participant codes	Age	Department of graduation (undergraduate)
M1	23	ELT
M2	24	ELT
M3	27	ELT
M4	28	ELT

Table 3

Personal information of doctorate students

Participant codes	Age	Department of graduation (Undergraduate)	Department of graduation (Master)
D1	31	ELT	ELT
D2	30	ELT	ELT
D3	39	ELT	ELT
D4	31	ELT	MBA: Master of Business Administration
D5	29	ELT	Teaching Turkish as a foreign language
D6	34	ELT	ELT

Data collection and analysis

Personal semi-structured interviews with T1, T2, T3, and T4 took 64, 52, 28, 21 minutes respectively. Focus-group interviews were conducted in 28 minutes both with master and doctorate students. The participants who took part in the pilot study did not take part in the main study. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. All interviews were in English except for the one with T4.

What was employed for the analysis of the data in the present study was 'interpretive-descriptive' approach, which involves careful selection and interpretation of the researcher together with the objective of accurate description of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher did not only clearly express lived experiences of the participants but also added their interpretation. Therefore, 'interpretive-descriptive' analysis technique served best for the purposes of this study.

The data in the present study came in words rather than numbers. In this situation, Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 21) suggest that 'data analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification'. These steps were followed in the present study as well. First of all, the data were put into initial analysis in which the repetitions and irrelevant parts were removed. The responses of the academics and students in interviews were put together in table format to ease data management. In this way, the researcher selected and eliminated the irrelevant

parts and made them simple to use for data analysis by using data reduction and display. Concerning the conclusion drawing or verification, the researcher triangulated data coming from personal semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews.

Findings and Discussion

Academics and students of ELT post-graduate programs were questioned in interviews about 12 aspects of mediation theory. The aspect of 'significance' was investigated by questioning efforts of academics to relate the tasks with learners' practices and how they stated the significance of subjects. To start with, all academics except for T2 pay special attention to relating the task with learners' practices. The reason why T2 does not do it specifically is the academic nature of activities taking place in her post-graduate classes. She thinks that academic nature of these activities may not be parallel with learners' daily teaching activities even though they are also teachers. However, this does not block her from relating the tasks with learners' practices. She explains it with an example:

> For example, if they are gonna do a needs analysis, I say "don't go out of your institution. If your institution allows you to do something like this, just walk around and ask questions". They should see the relevance of what we are doing here academically to their own work setting.

On the other hand, for other academics, mentioning about their own personal experiences or asking students about their practices regarding that aspect are two important strategies used for relating the tasks with learners' daily teaching practices. However, it is obvious that academics working with doctorate students have higher expectations.

From students' perspective, academics' relating the learning task with their practices depends on the course and their practices. Especially master students pay attention to academics' efforts in this regard. In terms of explicitly stating the importance of a specific topic, master students consider that they need this kind of information in order to value a topic. M3 states that: 'well, it is important because their perspective is broader. We do not possess all knowledge. So, I think their stating explicitly that something is

important will help us in future studies'. Master and doctorate students mostly think that academics' statement about the importance of a topic is guiding them in finding the topics for their researches. The overall idea among doctorate students is that ELT is a very broad term; therefore, it eventually touches upon their daily practices somehow.

> D5: I think by this way they let us know the current developments in our field of study. For example, they say "this has been the most commonly studied topic recently" or they can say "it is currently a hot issue" or "it is a unique topic".

Besides, it is interesting to find out that the academics with less experience in post-graduate programs (T3, T4) specifically tend to state the importance of one topic or the task in classes. On the other hand, more experienced academics (T1, T2) are more concerned with showing the relationships of all topics to let the learners reach the synthesis of topics. The experience of the academics may play a vital role in understanding the reactions of learners in adult education. Although it can lose its effect when frequently uttered, stating the significance of the topic may help learners skip unimportant information and focus on more specific parts of theories or concepts. As a result, 'the teacher's role is to help learners to perceive how the activity is of value to them' (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 70).

The perspectives of academics differ greatly on 'purpose beyond the here and now' depending on their evaluation of students. While T2 and T4 specifically put special emphasis on showing the relation between current and future topics, according to T3, post-graduate students already have this skill and there is no need for explicit instruction. T4 stated that: 'for example suggestions for Turkey case, I suggest them what they can study in Turkish case, how they can do it, what can be applicable in this context'. Suggestions for further researches or academics' indication of a simple relation between the constructs may be very exciting for doctorate students. This aspect together with the aspect of 'significance' may play an important role in helping learners eliminate their worries regarding dissertation topic search as well.

As a response to academics' views, both master and doctorate students consider the use of this aspect as guiding. The relationships between topics

and suggestions of the academics regarding subject search for their dissertations and papers are invaluable for the learners due to the lack of expertise in the field of ELT.

The views of academics and students concerning 'significance', and 'purpose beyond the here and now' show some similarities and differences compared to the results of other studies. For instance, Xiongyong et al. (2012) found out that teachers did not employ these two aspects. In addition, in Chang's study (2004), these aspects were among the least important aspects according to students. In contrast, in Brown's study (2002), 'purpose beyond the here and now' was one of the most actively practiced parameters. According to the results, depending on the culture the study was conducted in and the individuals' views, the use of mediation theory aspects differed.

It was interesting to receive similar responses from all academics regarding 'shared intention', which basically refers to mutual understanding between academics and students in post-graduate program context. All academics claimed to provide a course content to make it easier for learners to understand what they expected in tasks, presentations, and discussions during the classes. T1 states that: 'I do have the course content, a detailed one, and I have my expectations. But obviously I need to repeat myself later when necessary just before they give the presentations or just before they do the tasks'.

However, especially doctorate students criticized some academics for inadequate details about the tasks provided in course contents. In addition, students expect to see good examples of the tasks written by other students in previous years clearly representing academics' expectations. In this way, it may be possible to eliminate the worries of students. 'Shared intention' received considerable attention according to the results of previous studies as well. In the studies of both Xiongyong et al. (2012) and Brown (2002), it was employed and considered important by the teachers. The results showed similarity to those of the present research. It shows that regardless of culture and level of students, being understood by students and having a mutual understanding with them are the important points for the teachers.

According to Brown (2002, p. 5) 'people who feel competent may perform better than those who do not, irrespective of their real level of knowledge'. Therefore, 'a sense of competence' aspect of mediation theory was assumed to be actively used in post-graduate classes. T1 highlighted individual or

group tutorials in serving for the purpose of making learners become self-confident. She stated that:

> When I was a student, I wanted to hear that kind of appreciation. I did not have like "ok that was a good job, I really liked it, that was a good idea". I do it when there is a new idea. I want to appreciate time, effort, and especially creativity. I think it would boost their confidence.

T3 also encourages students to have a higher self-confidence. He states that, regardless of the program, all students need some booster, some encouragement to feel that they can do it. He states that:

> I say "you all know these things", "in practice you are all doing these things, but, the only thing you have to do is to try to understand these theoretical aspects and relate them to your own practices as teachers".

Students are mostly aware of the expectations of academics and they do not need extra support from them to be motivated and self-confident. M3 states that: 'They think that only the ones who can overcome this problem should come to this program'. However, when they were questioned about the kind of support they would like to receive, students preferred individual feedback. They also criticized academics for the lack of feedback on their tasks. D2 criticizes: 'we mostly don't get feedback about our studies. Personally speaking, there are not clear explanations in the feedbacks, so I cannot understand how it can guide me'.

This aspect was the most important mediation theory aspect for Taiwanese teachers teaching English at a college (Chang, 2004). Even though it was not the most popularly used aspect by the academics in the present study, the results were almost similar. In both studies, 'a sense of competence' aspect of mediation theory was perceived as an important parameter of being a mediator in the classes.

Except for T4, academics did not prefer to use 'control of own behavior' aspect due to some reasons. This aspect is related to academics' attempt to make students autonomous. However, academics mostly think that students in this level should already control their own learning. In addition, this attempt requires a great deal of time. Therefore, academics claimed that unless there

is a supervisor-student connection, it is not possible to transfer this into practice. T4 makes more obvious efforts compared to other academics. He claims that he helps students in reaching the library databases or some online books which allow them to study on their own. He states that: 'I try to guide them how to learn, how to self-study'.

Despite academics' ignorance of this parameter in ELT post-graduate programs, findings regarding 'control of own behavior' in the study of Xiongyong et al. (2012) showed that Chinese teachers preferred to use this aspect. There are differences between the views of doctorate and master students. While master students consider themselves lacking in having the features of an autonomous learner, doctorate students think that they cannot be successful in this program unless they are autonomous learners. It is obvious that master students' expectation of assistance regarding the use of this aspect was not met in the master program.

In terms of 'goal setting' aspect, all academics agreed that they allowed learners to participate in shaping the course content which means students had the chance to set their own goals in this respect. T1, for instance, states that she allows them to design their own researches, presentations or choose their own topics. However, she plays the role of a controller who puts the plans in the doable framework. She stated that:

> Sometimes they are so ambitious, and they feel like they can solve many problems about teacher education and teaching English, which is not realistic. So, I limit their topic, research area, research questions. Actually, I try to shape and modify their perspective.

However, students' responses showed that they were passive in this process and the goals were already set for them.

> M2: I think we follow teachers' goals. Because the classes are generally set and chosen, so we don't have the right to choose. So for the course period, I need to do what is required from those classes, but during thesis period in terms of choosing a topic, it will be more personal.

The mismatch between academics' and students' views stems from the fact that despite students' chance to contribute to the formation of the course

content, they were not knowledgeable in the beginning of the term. Therefore, they did not have any suggestions regarding the goals of the courses. In order to solve this problem, all planned course contents may be provided online for the students before the classes start. In this way, students may have a general idea about the possible topics of the course and they may add more options for the final versions of the content. It is of crucial importance because Williams and Burden (1997, p. 74) claim that 'learners need to set their own goals instead of following what teachers set for them because an absence of goals can lead to aimlessness and a lack of any sense of direction'.

Almost all academics agreed that writing a research paper is the most challenging task in both programs. The reasons differ according to academics. For instance, while the reason for T1 was students' having hard situations, such as being a teacher or travelling for long periods, it was students' not being ready for that task and also the time limitation they had for each task for T2. The important point mentioned by T2 was the collaboration among academics in providing tasks for the students. They try to balance the level of challenge of the tasks. The confounding fact between academics' and students' responses is that despite collaboration of academics concerning the tasks, students' claims show that there are some overlaps among the course contents of different classes. Therefore, stronger collaboration is needed among academics during planning phase. Otherwise, students may become disinterested because of discussing the same topics over and over in different classes.

Concerning 'awareness of change', both academics and students agree that there is an academic progress. It is interesting to find out doctorate students' realization of changes related to society and human relations.

> D5: I think your conversations with your colleagues change as well. For example, I observe an increase in the conversations I make with assistant professors or associated professors or professors in my own institution as a person who is studying at an ELT doctorate program.

Therefore, it can be deduced that doctorate program helps students to be positioned in a higher place in the eyes of the students' colleagues. Despite the importance of this aspect, 'awareness of change' was chosen as the least important mediation theory aspect according to the results of Chang's study

(2004). However, when the nature of the context of the present study is considered, it is possible to expect that students are aware of the changes taking place throughout the long process. The first reason is that students are adults and they know their current capabilities. Thus, it is possible that they do not need any academics' effort to realize it.

In terms of 'a belief in positive outcomes', academics focus on two constructs: trust between students and academics, and students' initiative to express their problems. For instance, T2 does not have a special interest in understanding the problems students unless students talk to her. She states that she can be flexible in terms of the task submission deadlines. However, the way students approach identifies the way she approaches students. She states that: 'this is adult education. It's very difficult to know what problems. But if they drop a mail about their problems, I always give that room and I can be flexible'. It is also obvious that there is limited academic-student communication regarding personal problems of students. Academics are ready to help learners if they trust students and only if students initiate the conversation. On the other hand, students think that academics are too busy to tackle with their personal problems. In addition, even if they have problems, they think it is a kind of embarrassing situation for them to share it with the academics. Adult learners, as in the case of this study, may have closer relationships with academics. On the other hand, they are more withdrawn in terms of sharing problems.

For the aspect of 'sharing', academics mostly try to encourage friendship in their classes by providing pair or group works. They have the idea that students can learn better from each other. T1 emphasizes importance of friendships during doctorate program for future collaboration by stating that:

> PhD is a friendship and it is very important. Because they are mature enough and they have similar goals and responsibilities. Therefore, I told them, when you graduate, just work with each other because PhD friendship is about future collaboration.

Students' choices about working together, on the other hand, depends on the kind of activity. They prefer working alone in writing activities, whereas they prefer sharing and discussing about topics in a group. M1 states that: 'I support working together to understand topic better, but the process of writing

is more personal. But in order to understand a topic, I prefer working with a small group and learning from them instead of reading alone'.

Although Williams and Burden (1997) claim that working in pairs or in groups brings success to young and adult learners, the parameter of 'sharing' is considered and implemented as the least important parameter of mediation by the teachers working at university in English language classrooms according to the results of Brown's study (2002). However, the use of 'sharing' in post-graduate programs is popular. The reason may be the need of cooperation among students to be successful.

Concerning 'individuality' aspect, academics mostly try to let each learner in the classroom participate by sharing their own experiences as a teacher or a researcher. Students in both programs agree with academics that they can express their own ideas independently. The busy timetables of academics do not give them the chance to monitor each student's individual development. Students are also aware of the limited time. Therefore, they do not have the expectation of receiving individual tutorials. This aspect was also the least important parameter for the students according to the findings of Chang's study (2004), which was also conducted in university context. Thus, it can be deduced that young adults already have the realization of their own uniqueness and individuality without teachers' effort and they do not expect from their teachers.

The last mediation theory aspect was 'a sense of belonging', which refers to feeling of belonging to a community and a culture. From academics' perspective, students feel belonging to master and doctorate programs naturally and implicitly despite lack of their effort in this respect due to their busy timetable. T1 explains it:

> I think the course or the program itself bounds everybody together. I mean it is kind of glue. You know they all need to survive in the program, and they need to collaborate to pass because they need to learn from each other.

Students agreed with academics in this respect. Students feel like a part of a group in their programs and they also know the importance of this feeling to be successful in these programs. D4 considers that it is important for students' success: 'when there is a harmony, we have better results. I mean we have a cooperative atmosphere'. D6 also expresses the feeling of a student in

a class in which there is a high level of belonging feeling: 'you feel yourself calm for example when you are making a presentation. You don't feel the threat that they will criticize you. You feel that they are my friends and they will consider what's best for me'.

The students' perspectives found in Chang's study (2004) are in accordance with those of the students in the present study. However, Brown (2002) also considers this feature of mediation as the most difficult parameters of Feuerstein to adapt to the area of language learning. Therefore, it can be claimed that though the implementation of this aspect is not easy due to its time-consuming nature and high number of students, students are already aware of the significance of it. Thus, it occurs naturally without any specific effort of teachers.

Conclusions and Implications

The results remind us that the use of mediation theory aspects in this specific post-graduate ELT program is idiosyncratic from academics' perspective despite similarities. The main point was to have a shared understanding in the classes with students. One of the strategies academics used in order to have this understanding was providing a course content form in the beginning of the term. However, students considered that some of these course contents lacked necessary details. The reason was high expectation of academics from students in post-graduate programs. However, students in both programs mentioned about the need of good examples of tasks written by previous students. Thus, academics should include every detail in their course contents regarding sources, evaluation, preparation, and format. The good examples of these tasks written by previous students can also be provided in these course contents. A better and more organized alternative of providing previous students' works may be exhibiting them in a library or in a classroom where students can reach and take from. It is also possible that academics upload these examples on their personal websites for the easy access of students. In this way, the mismatch between the expectations of academics and students regarding the tasks can be eliminated.

The results concerning 'purpose beyond here and now' along with 'significance' aspect showed that learners in post-graduate programs in ELT department needed assistance from academics for dissertation topic search.

When they do not receive this help from academics, they get lost in the vast area of ELT. Hence, understanding the importance of the use of these aspects is crucial for academics for guiding them with respect to their interests and skills.

In terms of 'a sense of competence', students preferred receiving individual feedback from academics. Receiving negative feedback among group friends demoralized them. In addition, students complained about the lack of feedback. Therefore, academics should prefer individual feedback and they should provide feedback for almost all possible tasks for students.

Regarding 'challenge' aspect, all academics should discuss about course contents of each class before the classes start. Similar topics can be eliminated or replaced with another possible one. Therefore, more cooperation in this respect is needed in ELT post-graduate program.

It was also obvious from the responses of both academics and students that students could only find the chance of discussing about their personal goals and have closer relationships with academics after they chose their thesis supervisors at the end of the first term of the course period. However, after course period, students and their thesis supervisors mostly cannot meet as often as desired due to time limitation of both sides. The close relationship students have during the thesis period with their supervisors may help learners improve themselves. However, they cannot use this chance because they do not spend time with thesis supervisors as much as they do during the course period. In order to maximize this chance of the students, institutions should allow students to choose their thesis supervisors at the very beginning of the course period. By this means, students may benefit fully from the expertise, experience, and, the knowledge of their supervisors. On the other hand, in order to put this change into practice, students should either have personal interviews with academics to get their approval or academics' curriculum vitae should be updated regularly so that students can understand whose research interests are closer to those of themselves before they start the course period.

Another mediation theory aspect which is related to students' having closer relationships with academics and among themselves is 'a sense of belonging'. Organization of congresses or conferences, a group work of article writing, or presenting a research paper at a conference may be effective ways of enhancing students' sense of belonging in these programs.

As a conclusion, despite the fact that students were post-graduate students, they needed a kind of guidance in many respects. Hence, in order to meet their needs, the use of two universal mediation theory aspects, namely 'significance' and 'purpose beyond the here and now', was important in academics' being a guide for them. Avoiding group feedback and providing strength and weaknesses for all works of students are crucial for students' sense of competence. The challenge and goals of the course should be set in cooperation with the learners in post-graduate programs. Trust between one another is another major issue both for the students and academics for the belief in positive outcomes. With all these results, this study provides a projection for academics in designing their courses and way of teaching to play the role of mediator in post-graduate programs. The post-graduate students who are candidates to be future academics in this department may also benefit from the findings in this respect.

According to the findings, the main problem of not using mediation theory aspects or partial use of them stems from the limited time of academics in master and doctorate programs in ELT department. The busy timetables of academics include classes from ELT undergraduate program, ELT master and doctorate programs, and administrative works. In order to solve the time problem, academics may have classes just in master and doctorate programs. By this way, they may have longer time for thesis supervision, task feedbacks, or personal development of students. Consequently, institutions responsible for organizing post-graduate programs may take into consideration the problems emerged due to the busy schedules of academics which was apparent as the reason for almost all aspects. Thus, the results may also be valuable to managers concerned with this topic.

Suggestions for further research draw in part from aspects related to the limitations of the current research. Due to the case study nature of this study, generalizability of the results was not the main concern. However, in case of a general mediation theory use examination in post-graduate programs in ELT departments, a quantitative nationwide investigation of post-graduate programs in this specific field is needed for generalizable findings. Another limitation of the present study was the validation of the instrument that guided the interviews just by two experts in the field, which could have been established in a more systematic way through the views of more experts.

Besides, this study mostly dealt with how mediation theory was put into action by academics in these programs together with the views of the students. The results provided no information about the role of each mediation theory aspect on students' success. A comprehensive investigation of mediation theory aspects regarding their role in students' success is also recommended. Finally, it is recommended that researchers investigate the use of mediation theory aspects cross-culturally. In this way, it may be possible to understand whether culture plays a significant role in the use of these aspects or not.

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