

An Investigation into Novice English Teachers' Views and Beliefs about Method and Post-method Pedagogy in Turkish EFL Context

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Abstract

This study which has a qualitative research design, reports on the views and beliefs of eleven novice English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers about the English language teaching (ELT) methods for the purpose of examining their knowledge about and attitudes towards popular methods and post-method as well as towards current discussions in ELT and the effects of them on their reported classroom practices. In this respect, the novice teachers were interviewed by means of the video conferencing feature of the Windows Live Messenger (currently SKYPE) about their views and beliefs related to method vs. post-method discussions as well as their current teaching practices. The results revealed a discrepancy between the participants' views and their classroom practices. In fact, the majority of the participants reported a negative change in their attitudes towards teaching after they started teaching. The majority of the eleven participants were totally unaware of the post-method discussions. In the final section of the paper, the reasons for these findings are discussed in detail, and further suggestions are made in an attempt to find solutions to some of the problems reported by the participant novice teachers.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching (ELT); teachers' views and beliefs; method and post-method; novice teachers; classroom practices.*

Introduction

There has lately been a growing interest in foreign language teachers mental images, thoughts and processes that they employ while teaching (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006); and this interest brought the necessity for listening to teachers' voices to understand classroom practices better (Richards, 1994). As Clemente (2001) points out, a holistic approach to teaching cannot be achieved without including the personal side of teaching. Therefore, a central assumption in this study is that beliefs are an important part of our mode of interaction in our daily lives, so they cannot be separated from our identities and actions (Van Lier, 1997) as teachers.

Investigation of teachers' beliefs is a relatively new area in language teaching. Lortie's (1975) study can be considered as one of the first studies on teachers' views and beliefs. Prior to Lortie's study, however, the studies on teaching practices were mostly under the influence of the behavioristic theories which used to be so popular back then; thus the studies conducted on teaching had mainly focused on

teachers' observable behaviors as well as the observable outcomes of their teaching activities (Freeman, 1996). In this respect, as Freeman suggests, Lortie's (1975) study played a revolutionary role in the recognition of teachers' views and beliefs as significant elements in education.

With the emergence of this new area of interest, the focus of educational studies shifted from teachers' observable behaviors to their views and beliefs for the purpose of understanding what they thought about certain aspects of their teaching and learning practices. Thus, more and more researchers began to understand the fact that it was necessary to study teachers' views and beliefs in order to get a full grasp of the complicated nature of teaching and learning processes.

There is now a general consensus on that teachers' views and beliefs have a critical impact on their classroom practices. It is generally accepted that teachers' adoption of certain teaching methods and rejecting some other are to a large extent hidden in their views related to teaching (Clemente, 2001).

Teachers' views are relatively easier to determine. Defining teachers' beliefs, however, is by no means an easy task on the part of a researcher, largely due to the fact that there is no consensus on what the constructs of teachers' beliefs refer to; thus the term has acquired a rather indistinct and unspecific quality of usage (Yook, 2010).

Teachers' beliefs can be grouped into different categories. According to Nespor (1987:317), teachers hold beliefs about "their roles, their students, the subject matter areas they teach, and the schools they work in." Calderhead (1996), on the other hand, mentions five categories of beliefs. In Calderhead's classification, first of all, we see teachers' beliefs about their students and how they learn. The beliefs in this first category are strong and more likely to affect how they teach. In the second category, we see teachers' beliefs concerning the nature and goals of teaching. The beliefs in this second category are quite resistant to change. In the third category, we see their beliefs concerning a particular subject matter. Finally, teachers have beliefs about themselves; and these beliefs are indeed quite consistent with their role as a teacher. In addition to these categories,

Woods (1996: 32) describes teachers' beliefs as "dynamic, always changing, both in terms of their specific details, and in terms of the relationships among them". According to Woods, the apparent inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and their practices are important to understand the true nature of their beliefs. Woods further argues that teachers' own language learning experiences, their early teaching experiences and the education courses they take at the undergraduate level can all influence their views and beliefs.

The number of studies, which indicate that language teachers' beliefs inform their classroom practices, has recently increased (Hazratzad & Gheitanchian, 2009). Leaving aside the theoretical discussions on teachers' beliefs, a number of studies about the reflections of language teachers' views and beliefs on their classroom practice will be discussed in the following section.

Mangano and Allan (1986) investigated the beliefs of eight language teachers and their students for the purpose of determining the relationship between the participants' views about writing and their instructional practices in the writing courses they offer. The results revealed a strong correspondence between teachers' views and their actual classroom practices.

Smith (1996), in a qualitative study, investigated the effects of teachers' beliefs on their decision-making process, and concluded that the teachers under investigation had adopted an eclectic use of theoretical aspects, and that there was internal consistency between their views about teaching and classroom practices.

Although the studies mentioned above justifies the assumption which claims that teachers' views and beliefs have a strong influence on their practices, there are also some other studies which clearly indicate that there may not always be a direct positive correlation between the two variables, largely due to the fact that teachers' practices may be full of contradictions and ambiguities, and thus cannot directly be attributable to their views and beliefs (Fang, 1996). According to Fang, the main source of these conflicts and dilemmas is the discrepancy between what teachers think they should do in the classroom (their views) and what the latest trends in education expect them to do. Richards (1994:387) points out that "the need to follow a prescribed curriculum, lack of suitable resources, and the students' ability levels" are among the most important factors that prevent teachers from acting upon their views and teaching any subject matter according to their beliefs.

We can conclude from all of the aforementioned studies that the question of to what extent teachers' practices are informed by their views and beliefs is an issue yet to be answered.

Research on teachers' views and beliefs is particularly important from the perspective of ongoing method vs. post-method discussion. In this respect, Prabhu (1992) asserts that ELT research has not been following after the best method for a while, and in fact it has moved beyond them. As Kumaravadivelu (2006) suggests, there is a clear shift towards a post-method era that defines a new sort of relationship between theorizers and teachers. For some researchers like Brown (2002), methods have been already dead for a while. For some others (see Bell, 2007), however, the whole discussion over the concept of post-methodology is highly questionable; thus it is too early to claim that methods are indeed dead. Bell (2003:332) suggests that "Postmethodology... rather than going beyond method, may be understood as a synthesis of various methods under the umbrella of CLT". Bell (2007:143) further claims that: "teachers seem to be aware of both the usefulness of methods and the need to go beyond them. Post-method need not imply the end of methods but rather an understanding of the limitations of the notion of 'method' as it is narrowly defined and a desire to transcend those limitations". Similarly, Block (2001) argues that whereas applied linguists do not pay much attention to the notion of method anymore, teachers still do.

As Ellis (2008) suggests, the post-method pedagogy, which is undoubtedly a result of the aforementioned shift, strives for a discovery of instructional means for real life communication in the second language classroom. The result is an emphasis not only on developing language learners' linguistic competence (grammatical accuracy) but also on developing their communicative competence, which is now seen as a vital element of communication. Ellis suggests that in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) activities, learners are involved in real communication, during which language accuracy becomes less important than fluency and successful achievement of the communicative task.

Continuous dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the traditional language teaching methods has always been a stimulus for change in the EFL educational system, and Turkey is not an exception in this sense. With the changing needs of the students, and unsuccessful outcomes of the previous methods, Communicative Language Teaching proponents started to voice a need for formal instruction to be subsumed under different functional categories (Brown, 2001).

Finally, novice teachers' problems have great importance, very few studies have been conducted on their beliefs about teaching and learning (Erkmen, 2010). It is a fact that within the context of the strictly top-down Turkish educational system, teachers' roles in the processes of syllabus design and their attitudes towards what they are supposed to teach have traditionally been ignored. As Erkmen further suggests, teachers usually adopt different approaches, methods and techniques in accordance with the general philosophy they follow. In this respect, teachers can be placed into two distinct

categories as those who adopt a functional-based approach, and those who adopt a grammar-based approach (Richards, Tung & Ng, 1992).

Therefore, the present study is particularly promising because it may provide insights regarding novice teachers' invaluable views and beliefs as valid sources of improvements in the syllabus or any other sort of curriculum renewal that may be planned in Turkey in the near future. In this respect, the present study was conducted to explore a number of (eleven) novice Turkish EFL teachers' views/beliefs about and attitudes towards popular ELT methods and post-method pedagogy for the purpose of investigating the relationship between their views/beliefs and their reported classroom practices. A secondary concern for this study was to attract teacher educators' attention to the fact that views and beliefs play an important role in understanding the way teachers approach their work. The findings of this study can hopefully inform teacher educators, policy makers and other stakeholders in teacher training courses about the kinds of beliefs teachers hold as well as the experiences they develop during the first years of their teaching.

Research Questions

The questions given below, help to frame the aspects or domains about teachers' views and beliefs that the researcher has been interested to explore.

The research questions of the present study are as follows:

1. What are novice Turkish EFL teachers' pedagogical views and beliefs about the use of popular language teaching methods in their classrooms; and what are their views about what works best in the classroom?
2. Are novice teachers aware of the post-method pedagogy? If so, what do they think about it?
3. Do novice Turkish EFL teachers see any difference between the views and beliefs that they held before they started teaching and their current views and beliefs?
4. To what extent do novice Turkish EFL teachers think that their views and beliefs affect their teaching practices; and what are the contextual factors that constrain or promote the enactment of their views and beliefs?

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research design, by using in-depth interviews with eleven novice EFL teachers to investigate their beliefs about language teaching methods, and about the use of these methods in their classes within the perspective of method and post-method discussions. The extent to which the novice teachers' classroom practices reflect their views and beliefs will be investigated as a central aim of this study. In other words, the present study mainly focuses on a group of novice teachers' understanding of method, views related to what works in the classroom, and also what they know about post-methodology and its significance in terms of English Language Teaching.

Setting

For the present study, an online platform, namely the video conferencing feature of the Windows Live Messenger Software (currently SKYPE) was used to administer online interviews with teachers who were working in different parts of Turkey at the time of data collection. This technique served the aims of this study in terms of providing the opportunity of carrying out online face-to-face interviews where real-life face-to-face interviews were not possible due to the problem of physical distance between the researchers and the participants.

Participants

Eleven novice EFL teachers were selected through the technique of opportunity sampling. All of the participants were selected from among the 2008-2010 graduates of the English Language Teaching Department of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. Nine of the participants were females and two were males. All of them were working as primary school teachers at different state schools in different regions of Turkey, but the great majority of them – eight participants- were working in Eastern Turkey at the time of data collection. It was the first year of teaching for six of the participants; four of them were working their second year; and only one of the participants was working her third year. Therefore, it would not be wrong to claim that, the participants were all novice English teachers, since they had an average of less than two-year teaching experience. In the following parts, a pseudonym will be assigned to each participant in order to avoid using their real names for privacy purposes.

Procedures and instruments for data collection and analysis

The author of the present study has been in touch with the participants through the Internet on various social networking platforms since they graduated. However, considering the physical distance between the current city of the researcher and the cities where the participants inhabited at the time of the study, the online video conferencing technique mentioned earlier, rather than a technique of real-life face-to-face interviews was seen more practical, and also appropriate. Furthermore, by means of the technology used in this study, it became possible to fully record and analyze the interviews audio-visually.

The interview questions were prepared to address the most important aspects of the method vs. post-method discussions in relation to the participants' current classroom practices. The questions were checked by a peer researcher for internal validity. Certain changes were made accordingly before the administration.

Prior to the administration of the interviews, the participants were communicated through email and cell phones. They were sent an online version of a consent form informing them that they would be willingly participating in a research project on novice English teachers' views and beliefs about English Language Teaching and Learning practices. They were also informed about the number of questions, and approximate duration of the interview. They were told that they would answer 10 questions within 30 minutes, and that the interview would be fully recorded. They were also told that maximum care would be given and all possible precautions would be taken to secure their privacy. After giving information about the nature and requirements of the study via the consent form, an interview schedule was arranged and each participant was asked to be online and ready at the hour stated on this schedule.

Procedures for data analysis

Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes as planned previously, and was fully recorded. The interviews were not fully transcribed due to the irrelevance of some conversations, but the most relevant points in each interview was derived, transcribed and noted down in detail by attending carefully to the records. For the purpose of maintaining inter-rater reliability, a peer researcher also helped to check the recorded interviews and transcriptions in order to verify the appropriateness of the inferences made according to what the participants had said during the conversations.

The interviews were administered in English as the English proficiency levels of the participants were seen high enough for this task. The participants could also use Turkish as they wished. In the

transcriptions given in the findings and discussions part, necessary language revisions and grammatical corrections were made by the author and checked by a peer researcher. Some respondents' answers were translated from Turkish to English as they preferred to use Turkish in some of their replies to the interview questions. The translated parts were checked by a peer researcher for possible inconsistencies. Then, the answers of the interviewees were analyzed and commented upon in the light of the research questions.

Findings and Discussion

In this section of the paper, the findings are discussed through the research questions of the study. In this respect, the related data will be presented and discussed under the heading of each research question of the study.

Research Question 1: *What are novice Turkish EFL teachers' pedagogical views and beliefs about the use of popular language teaching methods in their classrooms; and what are their views about what works best in the classroom?*

In order to address this research question, the participants were asked three separate questions. These questions were:

1. Do you think language-teaching methods that you learned at university are useful for your current teaching practice?
2. Do you follow a particular method of language teaching?
3. What do you think about what works best in your classrooms?

An analysis of the participants' responses to the first interview question reveals that the great majority of the participants (8 participants) believe in the positive effects of learning about different language teaching methods during their undergraduate university education at the ELT program. They pointed out that learning about different methods endowed them with a repertoire of activities that they could use effectively in their classes. Especially, three of the participants reported their active use of some of the popular language methods in their lessons. Two of these three participants said their classrooms were heavily communicative in the sense that they brought extra photocopied materials to the classroom for the purpose of enriching their lessons with more communicative activities in addition to the textbooks sent by the Ministry of National Education (MNE). In fact, they said they aimed to create a balance between textbook use and the use of extra materials and activities. One of these three participants Gizem, who is currently working with young learners (mainly primary level 4th and 5th grade students), says:

"I mostly use the techniques from Total Physical Response with my students. I am lucky that my classes are not very crowded, so I can easily use games and songs, which require a lot of physical activity in the classroom. I also use the activities in the textbook if I believe that my students will like them. I skip many of the activities in the textbook though, either because we don't have enough time or because they look boring."

When we further look into the eight participants who find the ELT methodology courses given at the undergraduate level useful, we see that not all of them are like Gizem, or the other two participants who use extra materials and activities to make their lessons more communicative, because these teachers state that they do not spend time to prepare extra materials and activities although they say they believe in the importance of using different methods and communicative techniques. When they were asked why they did not use extra communicative materials and activities, they provided different

explanations for their behavior. Three of them stated that the new textbooks were already communicative-oriented, so they contained a great number of useful activities reflecting the spirit of communicative language teaching. Besides, they said they did not have enough time to deal with extra activities in the classroom, because they mainly had to focus on completing their textbooks, as was expected of them by the system. On the other hand, two of these participants, in addition to finding the textbooks sufficient, gave the reason of lack of enough technological facilities in their schools as an excuse for not using extra materials and activities. Orhan, one of the participants in this category provided the following explanations:

"I like the new textbooks. They are not perfect, of course, but they are much better than the old ones. I mean the ones we used when I was a student. Sometimes, I want to use an extra video or something visual in my lessons, but unfortunately, the projector in our school has been broken for a long time. I use the CDs that come with the textbooks, though. In think, the only technological device I use in the classroom is the CD player. May be, I will be able to afford to buy a cheap projector next year. Who knows?"

On the other hand, three of the participants in this study find language teaching methods unnecessary, largely due to the wide discrepancy between the realities of popular methods and the actual realities of English Language Teaching in Turkey. They clearly state that the methods that were taught at the undergraduate level were good in terms of being informed about the history of language teaching in the world; and that these methods also contained some useful techniques that could be adapted to their classroom practices, but most of the time, it was utopia to follow a particular language teaching method due to several contextual factors such as large class sizes and lack of adequate facilities in Turkey. One of these participants, namely Banu, reports:

"I liked the methodology courses at university, because I thought they were adequately preparing me to my future profession as a teacher; but, now I see that the ELT world described in the methods is not realistic. Now, I teach 32 hours a week to mostly unwilling students in classes of 35-40. How can I use the techniques from, let's say, Suggestopedia, or Total Physical Response in such conditions? So, I mostly teach grammar. Whenever I attempt to use a game from the textbook, especially in some classes students are just out of control. Sometimes, even the principal comes to check to make sure everything is OK. How annoying! So, I don't play games with very problematic classes anymore; and I don't feel guilty about it."

Banu's answer, which is given above, is in fact a reflection of the helplessness experienced by many novice teachers during their first few years of teaching practice. Suddenly finding themselves faced with actual realities of Turkey's ELT with an overwhelming number of teaching hours, large class sizes and problematic unwilling students, it seems, many novice teachers feel disappointed to find a quite different world from the one described in ELT methodology courses and materials.

An analysis of the data collected through the interviews also revealed that novice English Teachers' views and beliefs about what works best in the lessons show a great variety too. In this study, most of the participant teachers seemed to be quite satisfied with what the textbooks offered in terms of communicative teaching and learning practices. This finding is indeed in keeping what Kirgöz (2007) reports about the communicative-oriented nature of the new ELT curriculum in Turkey, as well as about the new English textbooks with a special focus on communicative and student-centered exercises. That probably explains why only three of the participants displayed open dissatisfaction with the current textbooks, and reported that they did their best to overcome this dissatisfaction by bringing extra activities and materials to the classroom.

Research Question 2: *Are novice teachers aware of the post-method pedagogy? If so, what do they think about it?*

When asked about the post-method pedagogy, the majority of the participant teachers ($n=7$), replied that they did not know anything about it. They said, in fact it was the first time that they had heard it mentioned. When asked related questions to these seven teachers, three of them added that it could be a new method of teaching English; but four of them claimed that they could not say anything, because they absolutely knew nothing about it.

While seven of the participants could not answer the question about the post-method pedagogy, three participants obviously confused it with eclecticism, and pointed out that post-method pedagogy could be a mixture of different methods and techniques for the purpose of addressing the changing needs of students. Viewed from this perspective, they thought that it was a good thing to bring together different methods and techniques to create the best learning environment possible for students. In this respect, Cansu replied to the question about the post-method pedagogy as follows:

"The pedagogy you ask about is the latest trend in language teaching, isn't it? Isn't it like bringing different methods together? It must be putting together a little bit of this method, a little bit of that method. Well, I am sometimes like that.."

As can be inferred from Cansu's answer, she is not really aware of the post-method pedagogy, but what she described instead was eclecticism. In that sense, although it was not what the question directly asked about, it would not be wrong to assert that this participant had a positive attitude towards eclecticism; and she occasionally used it with her students too.

The only participant who could give a somewhat relevant answer to the question about the post-method pedagogy was Gizem, who seemed to be quite knowledgeable about the characteristics of different methods and techniques, probably due to the fact that she was a graduate student at the ELT Department of a state university at the time of the study. Although she had previously claimed that she mostly preferred to use the activities reflecting the Total Physical Response, it appeared that she was also knowledgeable about the post-methodology since she gave the following answer to the question about post-method pedagogy:

"If I am not mistaken, post-method pedagogy is a new concept based on the weaknesses of methods. The whole idea, as far as I know, is that we cannot decide on the best method, or may be there is not even a best method. So, rather than following methods, this philosophy suggests that teachers can focus on what works best for their specific teaching conditions. I think, that is it. ... Personally speaking, I cannot relate this new pedagogy to my own teaching practice. I don't know how to do it, or whether I should do it anyway."

In short, this second research question about the post-method pedagogy revealed that all but one of the participant teachers were unaware of the post-method pedagogy. In fact, the vast majority of them had completely no idea about it. Even those who could somehow answer this question mostly confused it with eclecticism, and thus talked about the eclectic approach instead, unknowingly. To find out what the novice teachers thought about eclecticism was an unexpected finding of this study though. In this respect, it was a surprise to discover that the three participants who confused the post-method pedagogy with eclecticism reported positive opinions about it, more specifically that they thought eclecticism was a recent trend in ELT, because it had appeared just after language teaching methods'

loss of popularity. In their replies to the interview question, all of these three participants talked in favor of eclecticism by pointing out that it was useful for teachers to bring together different methods and techniques for the good of their students. Another interesting finding was that the only participant who could talk on the post-method pedagogy in a relevant way had no idea about how to relate it to her own teaching practice.

Research Question 3: *Do novice Turkish EFL teachers see any difference between the views and beliefs that they held before they started teaching and their current views and beliefs?*

When asked about the possible differences between the participant teachers' current views and beliefs about language teaching and the views and beliefs that they used to hold before the beginning of their teaching profession, most of the participants ($n=6$) talked about a negative attitudinal change in terms of losing their previous enthusiasm and idealism. To put it in more specific terms, these six participants reported that within the first few months of their teaching practice, they developed mixed feelings of disappointment, regret and depression mostly due to the fact that their situations as teachers of English during the time of the study were far from what they had imagined previously when they were still teacher candidates. Thus, an important finding stemming from their answers is that six of the participant novice teachers had positive thoughts about the teaching profession in general, and the teaching of English in particular before the beginning of their teaching profession. It appears that they were quite enthusiastic about the thought of being English teachers during their undergraduate teacher-training program; but they lost much of their enthusiasm during their first months in their new profession. One of them, Merve, who had been working as a teacher of English since August 2011, said:

"Well, of course, my beliefs have changed a lot since I started this profession. When I was still at university, I was very happy to learn about all the new methods and techniques of ELT. I always thought that I would be a different teacher; I mean different from any other English teacher that I knew.... Now, it seems everything has changed negatively. In fact, I had understood this reality much before I started working as a teacher. In my last year of university education, I went to a primary school for my teaching practice course. I had prepared a very good lesson plan and very good materials. I had spent a huge amount of time preparing them too. When I started using them in the classroom, oh my God, it was like a nightmare.... Now everything is much different. I can control my students more easily, but still with so many teaching hours and unwilling students, the best thing I can do is to follow the textbook."

When the other five participants were asked about the reasons for their changing views and beliefs, they more or less echoed Merve in the sense that what they actually found was not what they had quite expected previously. Two of them also added that their current working conditions were the main source of the problem. If they had not been so far away from their hometowns, and if they had the opportunity to work in a better school or town, they would not feel so disappointed. So, it would not be wrong to claim that the source of these two participants' negative feelings was not directly related to the teaching profession itself, but rather to their current living and working conditions, but the remaining four of them were more hopeless; indeed three of them said they would rather choose another profession if they had the opportunity.

As previously discussed, six of the participants drew attention to a negative change in their beliefs, perceptions and attitudes after they started working as teachers of English, the remaining five participants can be divided into three groups as those ($n=1$) who had negative feelings even before they began the teaching profession and those ($n=2$) who had had serious reservations about teaching

before they began teaching but started to like teaching after they started to work as teachers; and those (n=2) who did not experience much attitudinal change but kept their positive attitude after they started to teach.

Tolga, the participant in the first category says that he has always had negative feelings towards teaching and further expresses his opinions as:

"I think I have never wanted to be a teacher. My parents did not ask about my opinion when they sent me to an Anatolian Teacher Training High School, then I had to choose a teacher-training program for my university education to get extra points in the exam, you know. My friends think that I am so lucky, because I have been appointed in my first year after graduation, but I don't agree."

As can be inferred from Tolga's answer, some novice teachers in Turkey do this profession out of necessity, not because they really like it. It is highly doubtful that such teachers can be useful to their students with the negative attitudes they hold towards teaching.

As an example to the two students who stated that they started to like teaching after they started to teach English, Cansu's answer is given below:

"I was a reserved person at university, and whenever I had to give presentations, I used to feel very nervous. One time, in Sevgi Hoca's methodology course (the name of the lecturer has been changed), I was about to faint while doing a microteaching presentation, I just stopped in the middle of the presentation, and I could not go on. It was such a shame. I was overwhelmed with anxiety.... In fact, I did experience similar problems during my practice teaching and the first two weeks of my teaching, but it did not take long to overcome these negative feelings and anxiety. Now, I love teaching, and I do lots of different activities with my students too."

To sum up, most of the participant novice teachers complained about a negative change in their beliefs (n=6), perceptions and attitudes, mainly resulting from disappointment whereas the remaining four reportedly had positive beliefs and feelings about working as an English teacher; and one participant did not report any attitudinal change but he rather preserved his negative attitude.

Research Question 4: *To what extent do novice Turkish EFL teachers think that their views and beliefs affect their teaching practices; and what are the contextual factors that constrain or promote the enactment of their views and beliefs?*

The answer to this research question, which is highly related to teacher autonomy, has been sought by means of the following interview questions:

1. To what extent do your current beliefs and expectations affect your teaching practices?
2. What are the most important factors that influence your teaching?
3. What are the most common problems you encounter while doing your job as a teacher of English?
4. To what extent are you free to plan your lessons as you wish and apply those plans?

Depending on their answers, the participant teachers can be categorized as those (n=6), who see themselves as heavily restricted by their current teaching conditions, mainly resulting from the top-down structure of the Turkish Educational System; as those who feel relatively more autonomous to

prepare their lessons according to their views and beliefs (n=3); and as those who cannot express clear opinions about this issue (n=2), reportedly because they had not really given a thought.

A more detailed analysis of the first group, namely the group of participants who believed that they were not free to make their own decisions, revealed that those were the same participants as those who had negative feelings towards working as an English teacher, and as those who were not willing to try new techniques, but rather preferred to follow the textbooks sent by the MNE. It appears that these teachers did not like taking risks, and rather than perceiving it as a personal problem, blamed the system instead. However, as the three participants state (those who do not feel restricted by the system), the system does not really limit those teachers who want to bring extra activities and materials to the classroom, or those who want to try out new techniques with their students. Instead, they believe that as long as one follows the general principles of the curriculum and the content of the syllabus, one is allowed to be flexible in using different activities and materials in lessons.

To illustrate the opinions of the participant teachers who felt restricted by the system, Banu's views are reported below:

"My biggest problem is, some people who are superior than me dictate how many courses a semester and how many hours a week I have to teach. These people also dictate what I should teach and how I should teach it. I would really like to decide on the teaching hours and the number of courses I am to give... I am the only English teacher in the whole school; so, they give a lot of responsibilities to me. I have serious discipline problems with some students too... It is as if I am left all alone with a group of spoiled children in some classes. The expectations and desires of the higher authorities and inspectors are still there."

Not all participant teachers were so hopeless about the restrictions. For example, Gizem expressed her opinions on the same issue as follows:

"Well, of course we are not the kings or queens in this system, I mean we cannot do whatever we want to do, but still it is wrong to put the whole blame on the system, because it is not the system which ties our hands, but our own laziness most of the time, I think... If some people are complaining about the system, they should suggest alternative solutions. I believe that it is in our hands to change the system if we don't like it or at least we can make revisions in it even if a total change is not possible most of the time."

Gizem's response to the questions about teachers' autonomy in their teaching practices are important in the sense that they illustrate the opinions of some teachers who have not yet been passivized by the demotivating aspects of the Turkish Educational System, or by the discouraging remarks of their colleagues within this system. These teachers still have the courage and desire to be flexible to the benefit of their students.

The opinions of the remaining two participants were rather vague on this issue. It was as if they had not given much thought to this autonomy issue, and they seemed to be happy with the way things worked. They were mostly textbook followers and they saw nothing wrong with it. Since their answers were irrelevant to this research question, they will not be discussed further here.

Conclusions and Suggestions

In this section of the paper, the implications of the findings for current ELT practices will be discussed together with the significance of these findings in terms of the post-method pedagogy. Besides, some suggestions will be made in an effort to seek solutions to some of the problems uttered by the participants.

An analysis of the collected qualitative data concerning novice teachers' knowledge about popular methods and techniques in ELT revealed that they had knowledge about the historical development of language teaching methodology, and about the methods and techniques that were popular once. However, their knowledge concerning most recent issues in ELT such as the post-method pedagogy and its significance was rather limited. In fact only one of the participant teachers could explain the notion of 'post-method', and she was not sure about its significance for current ELT practices. A few of the participants confused post-methodology with eclecticism, and said highly positive things about the eclectic approach in ELT, but the majority of the participants had absolutely no idea about the post-method pedagogy, let alone its significance in ELT. In fact, the majority of them admitted that it was the first time that they had heard it mentioned as a part of ELT methodology.

Another important finding of this study is that the participant teachers were negatively influenced by the top-down restrictive nature of the current Turkish Educational System, which caused a large discrepancy between their reported beliefs and their classroom practices. Six of the participant teachers complained that they were granted little autonomy to make their own decisions about the teaching and learning process that they were involved in. Most of the rules were dictated from above and they were merely expected to follow them obediently. In this respect, their complaints can be seen as a strong desire to be involved in decision-making or policy-designing procedures.

Some participants also complained about a lack of resources as well as the negative effects of the teaching profession on their psychological states. In fact, some of them looked too overwhelmed with problems to the point of seriously considering quitting their jobs. One of the major reasons for their early burn-out related to the teaching profession appears to be the restrictions that they felt within the system. Another important reason seems to be the discipline problems that some of them experienced with young learners. Especially one of the participant teachers sounded too hopeless about these problems, and believed that no one could solve them, and that without solving the problems about discipline, no real teaching and learning would take place especially in some of the classes.

A comparison of the participant teachers' previous views and current ones revealed that most of the participants' views and beliefs about the teaching profession went through a negative change since they started the teaching profession. According to their replies to the relevant questions, it appears that especially their living and working conditions played a significant role in their early loss of enthusiasm and disappointment. A closer analysis of their answers revealed that they were mostly optimistic about being a teacher before they graduated, but as soon as they realized that the real teaching conditions in Turkey were not in the least similar to what they had previously thought and expected, they experienced adaptation difficulties, and as a result, they lost much of their enthusiasm.

The present study also shows that the methodology courses in ELT programs attract teacher candidates' attention, and they mostly utter positive thoughts about learning about different methods and techniques in these courses. However, in practice, novice teachers do not usually follow a particular English Language teaching method. Instead, most of them quickly adapt themselves to the realities of the Turkish Educational System, and begin to follow more traditional approaches or merely follow the assigned textbook most of the time. A few of them become more eclectic in the sense that they choose

from a number of different methods and techniques in addition to the ones offered in the textbooks. In fact, although most of the novice teachers are quite knowledgeable about what communicative language teaching has brought to ELT, and they hold a strong belief that communicative activities are important in current ELT practices, in practice, they mainly focus on grammar, reading and mechanical drills, which results in an obvious discrepancy between what they believe about what needs to be done in English lessons and what they actually do.

Previous literature, as discussed in Erkmen (2010), shows that foreign language teachers generally believe in the benefits of the Communicative Approach (CA) on the grounds that their students will be able to acquire all the four skills as well as the necessary grammar and vocabulary points effectively with the techniques commonly used in the CLT. However, previous literature also shows that although teachers favor the CA and believe in its effectiveness, they are not able to fully implement the techniques of CLT and tend to deal with explicit grammar teaching instead (Erkmen, 2010). The findings of the present study support the previous studies in this respect too, because most of the participants of this study also believe in the effectiveness of communicative activities for language development, however they end up using more traditional and mechanical techniques instead as discussed earlier.

When all these findings are taken into consideration, it is clearly seen that they mainly support Block's (2001) and Bell's (2007) claims that whereas applied linguists are not primarily interested in methods anymore, teachers still are; and that teachers are well aware of the benefits of the popular methods in ELT. In this respect, as Block suggests, the notion of 'post-method' does not necessarily imply the end of methods but rather an understanding of the limitations of defining methods from a narrow perspective as well as a desire to go beyond these limitations by allowing for more flexibility.

Suggestions

Literature shows that incongruence between belief and practice appears as an important issue that needs to be addressed by teacher educators. One solution can be to introduce them to the realities of the Turkish school system in a more effective way, so that when they become teachers, they will become better equipped to reconcile their beliefs with their practices, which is certainly necessary for the implementation of a more effective language instruction. In this respect, redesigning the ELT departments of Turkish universities may help. An increase in the class hours of teaching practice and an earlier offering of this course can help teacher candidates become aware of the realities of ELT at an earlier phase of their education. Besides, as the results of this study reveal, some novice teachers experience discipline problems in class. However, the current classroom management courses are far from providing useful guidelines for such problems. In these courses, teacher candidates are mostly introduced to theory. According to the findings of this study, what they need is not theoretical discussions on classroom management and discipline problems, but real hands-on experiences with problematic situations and students.

As Hazratzad and Gheitanchian (2009) suggest, English teacher candidates should be exposed to really good teacher models by observing the classes of experienced teachers who are able to use what works best to achieve an effective English lesson full with real communication. However, it is a fact that the great majority of pre-service and in-service programs in Turkey fail to demonstrate practical and successful models and approaches to teacher candidates.

As a part of redesigning ELT programs in Turkey, the awareness level of the instructors working at these departments can be raised through various means such as seminars and in-service workshops. Besides, considering that teacher candidates are influenced by the education they take during their undergraduate years, instructors employed in teacher training institutions must be more aware of their

own views and beliefs about teaching and of the ways that they reflect those beliefs to their students, who will be appointed as language teachers of the new generation. Only then, researchers can help teacher candidates with the shaping of appropriate beliefs about methods and their significance in language learning in a realistic way.

To sum up, in order for EFL teachers to meet the challenges of the 21st century, teacher candidates currently studying at ELT department of Turkish universities must be provided with the necessary skills and techniques that will enable them to understand the contemporary educational developments. Further research can be conducted with participants from a variety of undergraduate backgrounds in order to get a better picture of novice English teachers' views and beliefs in Turkey.

Note: A simplified version of this study has been presented at the 7th International ELT Research Conference organized by Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey.

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