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## **A comparative study on language learning beliefs of pre-service and in-service EFL teachers**

**Şeyda Selen Çimen<sup>1</sup>**

Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Muğla-Turkey

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is finding out what beliefs about language learning do pre-service and in-service English language teachers have, and whether there are any differences between their beliefs. This study adopts both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigating beliefs about language learning. In the study, a self-report questionnaire (BALLI) and a semi-structured interview are utilized. It is concluded that changes in certain beliefs take place between the first year to the fourth year pre-service EFL teachers and these changes can be attributed to the four year teacher education program they are engaged in. It is also concluded that language teaching experience also creates a difference in beliefs about language learning of pre-service and in-service EFL teachers.

**Keywords:** Beliefs, pre-service EFL teachers, in-service EFL teachers

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<sup>1</sup> Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Department of Foreign Language Education. **Email:** seydaselen@mu.edu.tr

## **Introduction**

Research into beliefs about language learning started in 1980s with Horwitz's (1985) initiation by developing the "Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory" (BALLI) and distributing it to foreign language students and their teachers at tertiary level. Starting from that time, interest in the research into language learning beliefs has increased and many researchers have contributed to the body of research literature on language learning beliefs, with different definitions of beliefs, different views and different research approaches.

Richardson's (1996) definition of beliefs has been the one adopted by many studies so far. He defines beliefs as "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (cited in Tercanlioğlu, 2005, p. 147). Puchta (1999), narrowing down the term to education, states that "beliefs are guiding principles for our students' behavior and strong perceptual filters (...) they act as if they were true" (cited in Peacock, 2001, p. 181). And Ellis (2008) points out the differences in beliefs and states that "beliefs constitute an individual difference variable notably different from the other individual difference factors (...) but like these variables, beliefs influence both the process and product of learning" (p. 7).

Furthermore, Barcelos (2003) makes two observations on how the term beliefs has been considered in the existing literature. First, she points out that "all the definitions of beliefs about SLA refer to the nature of language and language learning." Second, she notes that "some definitions emphasized the social and cultural nature of beliefs (...) because [beliefs] are born out of our interactions with others and with our environment" (p. 8).

There are also two different views of language learning beliefs in the literature. Some of the researchers view beliefs as dynamic and changing over time because of some changing factors in the learning environment (Ellis, 2008; Tanaka and Ellis, 2003; and Amuzie and Winke, 2009). On the other hand, some view them as static and difficult to change despite the ELT methodology courses learners are engaged in (Peacock, 1999; 2001; İnözü, 2011).

In this study, the term beliefs is operationalized as described in the three definitions by Richardson, Puchta, and Ellis above, with reference to the nature of language and language learning. Additionally, it is important to note here that learner beliefs are not regarded as preconceived ideas or misconceptions as in Horwitz (1988, cited in Barcelos, 2003), but as assumptions learners build up from their prior language learning experiences.

The purpose of this study is finding out what beliefs about language learning do pre-service and in-service English language teachers have, and whether there are any differences between their beliefs. Therefore, this study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. Does a four year language teacher education program in Turkey make a difference in pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning?
  - (a) Do first year pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about language learning differ from those of fourth year pre-service EFL teachers over a four year study at the language teacher education program?

- (b) If yes, what are the areas of difference between first year pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about language learning and those of fourth year pre-service EFL teachers?
2. Does teaching experience make a difference in the beliefs about language learning of pre-service EFL teachers and in-service EFL teachers?
    - (a) Do fourth year pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about language learning differ from those of experienced EFL teachers?
    - (b) If yes, what are the areas of difference between pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about language learning and those of in-service EFL teachers?

The following sections include information on the BALLI, review of prior studies on beliefs about language learning, and information on the present study.

### ***The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)***

The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was developed by Horwitz (1985) to investigate different learner beliefs about second language learning with the concern of finding out “if learners have preconceived ideas and negative or unrealistic expectations about how foreign languages are learned” (Peacock, 1999; 247). It was first administered to the students and teachers of the commonly taught languages (English, French, German, and Spanish) at the University of Texas-Austin (Kuntz, 1996). Later, many researchers have based their studies on the BALLI and investigated language learning beliefs of students and teachers from different countries and contexts. Barcelos (2003; 11) states that the BALLI is the most widely used questionnaire to investigate beliefs. What is more, “prior to the Horwitz research model, student beliefs about foreign language learning had not been analyzed systematically” (Kuntz, 1996; 22).

The BALLI is a 34 item self-report questionnaire. Horwitz based the inventory on a free-recall activity by 25 language teachers and developed the statements from this “teacher-generated list of beliefs” (Kuntz, 1996; 2). Having eliminated idiosyncratic beliefs, the inventory was pilot-tested with 150 university students at the University of Texas-Austin (Barcelos, 2003). She, then, categorized the statements in the inventory into 5 major themes: foreign language aptitude, difficulty of language learning, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation and expectations (Kuntz, 1996; Peacock, 1999). Horwitz (1985) analyzed the data obtained through the BALLI through descriptive statistics (Barcelos, 2003), which was regarded as a limitation by Kuntz (1996; 7) in that “she was not able to test hypothesis by inferential statistics concerning the significance of selected variables on the beliefs of students.” However, more recent studies employed inferential statistics to analyze the obtained data (Peacock, 1999-2001; among others) and comprised significant differences between certain student/teacher beliefs and some other variables. The next section will provide more detailed information on the existing research on beliefs about language learning.

### **Background to the study**

Peacock (1999) conducted a study on 202 EFL learners and 45 EFL teachers both at the tertiary level, aiming to determine if there were differences between student and teacher beliefs about language learning, and if these differences affect proficiency. He employed the BALLI, a proficiency test, a self-rated proficiency sheet, and semi-structured interviews to collect the data. What he concluded was that four of the mismatched beliefs negatively affected proficiency of the learners and resulted in negative learning outcomes.

Peacock (2001), in his longitudinal study, examined 146 trainee ESL teachers' beliefs about language learning (using the BALLI) focusing on changes in their beliefs throughout a 3-year teacher education program they are enrolled in, with a comparison to beliefs of experienced ESL teachers. The study revealed three key beliefs of trainee teachers that differed from experienced teachers and that changed very little over the 3-year program. Most of the trainees believed that learning a second language means learning a lot of (a) vocabulary and (b) grammar rules, and (c) people who speak more than one language well are very intelligent. Peacock regarded these beliefs as "worrying" since they may have negative effects on the trainees' future teaching practices in terms of over-emphasizing vocabulary and grammar rules and undervaluing their future students' intelligence for any kind of failure and slow progress in learning ESL. Over the conclusions drawn from the study, Peacock (2001; 189) had some suggestions that (a) trainees' detrimental beliefs, if there are any, should be considered to change by the program instructors, and (b) work on beliefs should be an integral part of TESL core courses.

Barcelos (2010), with a different approach to investigating beliefs about language learning, carried out an ethnographic study with the purpose of "characterizing the culture of learning languages of a group of senior English-major students at a university in Brazil" (p. 75). She attempted to find out about what students believed about language learning and examined 14 students through questionnaires, interviews, class recordings, teacher diaries, and field notes. Her findings indicated that (a) students believed that the teacher was responsible for the students' learning, (b) the teacher should motivate, make the student interested in the subject, and the students' role was to respond to that, (c) the teacher should have a controlling role, and (d) the students' role was to obey. She concluded that "the students' culture of learning, shaped over many, many years, influenced their perceptions of the teachers' role (...). In this sense, their previous and present learning experiences significantly influenced how they decided to react to a language lesson" (p. 81). She also draw the implication that there is a great need to "tune into the students' voices" to benefit any opportunity to learn about their beliefs.

İnözü (2011) investigated 326 trainee teachers that were enrolled in a 4-year ESL teacher education program in Turkey. Data for the study were collected through a survey that represented key beliefs about language learning defined by Lightbown and Spada (1999). Findings of the study revealed that trainees had some common beliefs that didn't change across all years. However, the researcher observed changes in two belief statements related to (a) language learning as a habit formation process and (b) the role of intelligence in language learning, which the trainees showed a developmental change starting from their second year

of education. In another study, Tercanlioğlu (2005) examined pre-service ESL teachers' language learning beliefs and how they relate to gender. Her findings indicated that (a) the most important aspect for language learning was 'motivation and expectations to learn' for the pre-service teachers, (b) the belief factors were all interrelated, and (c) there was no gender related difference found.

Horwitz (1999), with an attempt to identify cultural differences in language learning beliefs between American foreign language learners, Asian and Turkish heritage EFL learners, reviewed studies that used the BALLI. She noted that the Asian and Turkish heritage learners viewed learning vocabulary as the key to foreign language learning while the American group did not. Besides, the Asian and Turkish heritage students were instrumentally motivated while the American students had more integrative motivations. However, Horwitz (1999) concluded that it would be "premature" to attribute all those differences purely to cultural differences and did not underestimate the possible differences in learning circumstances and contexts.

Kuntz (1996) reviewed ten years of study investigating student and teacher beliefs about language learning and pointed out some pedagogical implications as a consensus of those studies. The researchers who used the BALLI demonstrated common beliefs that should influence language instruction, curriculum development, textbook writing, and program planning.

Ellis (2008), with the aim of exploring learner beliefs and how they can change over time, reviewed three studies by Ellis (2002), Tanaka (2004), and (Zhong, 2008). He reported some significant points from those studies. They include: (a) the superiority of qualitative methods in investigating learner beliefs rather than questionnaires, (b) the situated and dynamic nature of learner beliefs, and (c) the relationship between beliefs and proficiency which did not emerge as very strong.

Tanaka & Ellis (2003) and Amuzie and Winke (2009) associated learner beliefs with a different aspect and examined learners engaged in study abroad programs. The studies reported changes in learners' beliefs in contrast to studies regarded beliefs as stable and static. Amuzie and Winke (2009) study revealed changes in beliefs on learner autonomy and the role of the teacher and Tanaka and Ellis (2003) study indicated changes in beliefs related to analytic language learning, experiential language learning and self-efficacy during the study-abroad program.

Barcelos (2003, pp. 7-25), in her critical review of research on beliefs about SLA, grouped current studies into three approaches according to their research methodologies. The three approaches include the normative approach, the metacognitive approach, and the contextual approach. The BALLI studies and other studies that use questionnaires belong to the normative approach. In the metacognitive approach data are collected through semi-structured interviews and self-reports. Studies in the third type -the contextual approach- use ethnography, case study, phenomenology, metaphor analysis, and diaries in order to collect data.

In this section, studies existing in the relevant literature were presented. The next section will give information on the present study: the method, participants, data collection procedures, and lastly the findings will be presented.

## Methodology

### *Research design*

This study adopts both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigating beliefs about language learning. In the study, a self-report questionnaire (BALLI) and a semi-structured interview are utilized with the purpose of finding out (a) what the language learning beliefs of pre-service and in-service EFL teachers are and (b) if there are any differences between them stemming from the language teacher education program the pre-service group is enrolled in and experience the in-service group has. More detailed information on the participants, instruments, procedures, and analysis of the data are presented below.

### *Participants*

The participants of the study include 43 first year pre-service EFL teachers, 44 fourth year pre-service EFL teachers, and 32 experienced in-service EFL teachers. The first year pre-service teachers haven't taken any ELT methodology courses, yet. Since they are at the first year and first semester of the program, the courses they are taking are mostly English language grammar and four skills-based courses. The fourth year pre-service teachers have been taking many ELT methodology courses including Approaches to ELT, Instructional Technology & Materials Development, Instructional Principles & Methods, ELT Methodology I and II, Teaching English to Young Learners, Teaching Language Skills, Materials Adaptation & Development, etc. They are also taking the School Experience course which requires going to actual schools, joining the English language classes with their mentors and carrying out practice teaching during the semester. Some information on the pre-service teachers is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

*Pre-service Teachers' Summary Table*

	Gender (%)		Plans after graduation (%)				Been to an English speaking country (%)		
	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Academician</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Academic Purposes</i>	<i>Visiting</i>	<i>None</i>
1 <sup>st</sup> years	77	23	21	26	24	29	0	3	97
4 <sup>th</sup> years	86	14	10	32	48	10	5	16	79

The in-service group includes EFL instructors who work at different universities in Turkey. They teach English as a foreign language (EFL) to university students from different departments. The years of teaching experience they have range between 2 and 23. Some information on the in-service teachers is summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2

*In-service Teachers' Summary Table*

Gender (%)		Holding degrees (%)			Been to an English speaking country (%)		
<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>BA</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>PhD</i>	<i>Academic Purposes</i>	<i>Visiting</i>	<i>None</i>
72	28	56	10	34	35	12	53

### ***Instrumentation and procedures***

The main data for this study were collected through the 'Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)' (Horwitz, 1985). The BALLI was adapted to make it suitable for the participants in this study. Two versions were prepared for the pre-service group and the in-service group. However, the items in the two versions were mostly similar; there were slight differences only in the section designed for eliciting background information from the participants. The adapted version of the BALLI included 36 items to be responded in five point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Four items in total (11, 19, 20, and 33) were adapted according to the participants in the study. Additionally, there were two open-ended questions added to elicit examples from the participants' own language learning experiences. The open-ended questions are as follows:

1. What are the two most important things that affect the present state of your attitude towards English learning?
2. How did your previous language learning experiences with your previous teachers affect the present state of your language learning beliefs?

The data from the questionnaire were supported by qualitative data collected through a semi-structured interview. Six participants were interviewed in total; two first year pre-service teachers, two fourth year pre-service teachers, and two experienced in-service teachers. The participation in the interviews was on a voluntary basis.

First, the BALLI was administered to the participants. The pre-service group filled-in the questionnaire during the class hours and the in-service group filled it in at different times and via e-mails. The participants ticked the related box in the questionnaire to volunteer for the interview and then they were invited to the interview later. The interview questions were prepared after the questionnaire data were roughly analyzed. First, the items that were

significantly different were identified and 8 interview questions were prepared to explore the beliefs those showed difference among the participant groups. The interviews lasted 10 minutes and each was carried out individually at different times suitable for the participants. Five of them were carried out in English and one of them was in Turkish in the way as the participant desired.

### *Analysis of the data*

The data obtained through the BALLI were analyzed using descriptive statistics: crosstabs were run for percentages in the SPSS 20.0. The two open-ended questions in the questionnaire were analyzed through content-analysis and then grouped according to the themes emerged. Quantitative calculations were also done for presenting the frequency and percentages of the responses. For analyzing the qualitative data from the interviews, partial transcriptions were done, and then the responses were categorized according to the emerging themes. Example statements were taken from the interviewees' responses to be presented in the findings section below.

### **Results and Discussion**

Findings from the analysis of the questionnaire data according to the five major themes will be presented first. Next, the participants' responses to the open-ended questions will be presented, and finally findings from the interview data will be included.

Comparisons of the responses of the participant groups to the belief statements according to the major themes are summarized in percentage rates in the comparison tables below. The responses as 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree', and 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' are combined and reported in that way. Also, percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

The belief statements that belong to the theme foreign language aptitude are 1, 2, 9, 13, 21, 28, 31, and 34. The responses given by the participants in percentages are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

#### *Responses to Belief Statements about Language Aptitude*

Item No	Participants	Strongly Disagree or Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Strongly Agree or Agree (%)
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	(0) 0%	7	93
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	9	5	86
	IS	6	13	81
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	2	0	98
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	2	7	91
	IS	6	3	91

9 It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	7	5	88
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	2	9	89
	IS	0	3	97
13. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	2	31	<b>67</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	14	41	<b>45</b>
	IS	22	40	<b>38</b>
21. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	33	46	21
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	52	39	9
	IS	25	47	28
28. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	54	26	20
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	82	16	2
	IS	75	16	9
31. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	21	33	<b>56</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	36	34	<b>30</b>
	IS	36	37	<b>27</b>
34. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	7	12	81
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	7	16	77
	IS	6	10	84

According to the results of the descriptive analysis, responses to some belief statements show a systematic variety (increase/decrease in agreement rates) among the groups of participants. For instance, 67% of the first year pre-service teachers strongly agreed or agreed with the belief statement 13 „I have a special ability for learning foreign languages“ while the agreement rate with the fourth years and the in-service teachers decreased to 45 % and 38%. Thus, it can be said that first year pre-service teachers are more self-confident in language learning ability than fourth year and in-service teachers. Another belief statement that varied in agreement rates is number 31: people who speak more than one languages are very intelligent. First year pre-service teachers' agreement rate is 56 %, while those of the fourth years and in-service teachers are 30% and 27%. This means that first year pre-service teachers regard people who speak more than one languages very intelligent but this belief seems to fade as education and experience increase with fourth years and in-service teachers.

The second theme in the questionnaire was difficulty of language learning and the belief statements 3, 5, 23, 27, 35, and 36 belong to this theme. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

*Responses to Belief Statements about Difficulty Of Language Learning*

Item No	Participants	Strongly Disagree or Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Strongly Agree or Agree (%)
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	0	7	93
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	11	7	82
	IS	6	16	78
5. I believe that I will learn/have learnt to speak English very well.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	5	7	88
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	2	14	84
	IS	6	9	85
23. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	72	14	<b>14</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	81	14	<b>5</b>
	IS	66	28	<b>6</b>
27 It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	14	23	63
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	27	25	48
	IS	22	25	53
35. English is: a very difficult language/ a difficult language a language of medium difficulty/ an easy language/ a very easy language.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	5	55	40
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	2	48	50
	IS	19	47	34
36. If someone spent an hour a day learning a language, how long would it take for them to learn that language very well? Less than a year/1-2 years/3-5 years/5-10 years /You can't learn a language in one hour a day.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	59	26	<b>15</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	46	24	<b>30</b>
	IS	45	20	<b>35</b>

According to the results, in the statement „if someone spent an hour a day learning a language, how long would it take for them to learn that language very well?“ (item 36), 15 % of the first years agreed that it would take less than a year or 1-2 years while %30 and %35 of the fourth years and in-service teachers agreed with this period. This variance may mean that first year pre-service teachers find learning a language more difficult than fourth year pre-service teachers and in-service teachers.

The third theme in the questionnaire is „nature of language learning“ and the belief statements related to this theme are 7, 10, 14, 18, 24, and 25. Responses of the participant

groups to those belief statements related to the nature of language learning are summarized as percentage rates in Table 5.

Table 5

*Responses to Belief Statements about Nature of Language Learning*

Item No	Participants	Strongly Disagree or Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Strongly Agree or Agree (%)
7. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	12	11	77
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	14	22	64
	IS	31	19	50
10. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	2	2	96
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	0	4	96
	IS	6	6	88
14. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	9	18	<b>73</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	15	31	<b>54</b>
	IS	20	15	<b>55</b>
18. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	12	5	<b>83</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	57	34	<b>9</b>
	IS	72	18	<b>10</b>
24. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	11	19	70
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	0	11	89
	IS	3	9	88
25. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	26	2	<b>72</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	72	18	<b>11</b>
	IS	75	19	<b>6</b>

Results indicate that in the belief statement 14 „the most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words“, a decrease in agreement rates is observed from the first years to fourth years and in-service teachers.

For the statement „the most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar“ (item 18), 83% of the first years believe that grammar is the most important part while this rate decreases to only 9% and 10% with fourth years and in-service teachers. Similarly, in „the most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language“ (item 25), first years responded with an agreement rate of 72% while fourth years and the in-service teachers had agreement rates of 11% and 6%, which are very low

when compared. That's to say, translation has a major role for most of the first years in learning a foreign language, while it is not the case for fourth years and in-service teachers.

The other theme that plays an important role in learner beliefs is learning and communication strategies. Items 6, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20 are categorized under this theme. The results are shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6

*Responses to Belief Statements about Learning and Communication Strategies*

Item No	Participants	Strongly Disagree or Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Strongly Agree or Agree (%)
6. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	0	8	<b>92</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	13	27	<b>60</b>
	IS	50	10	<b>40</b>
8. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	81	11	8
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	86	14	0
	IS	91	3	6
11. I enjoy practicing English with the native speakers I meet.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	2	9	89
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	2	7	91
	IS	0	12	88
12 It is ok to guess if you don't know a word in English.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	2	19	79
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	2	11	87
	IS	3	3	94
15. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	0	0	100
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	0	5	95
	IS	3	0	97
16. I feel timid speaking English with other people.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	28	26	<b>46</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	48	32	<b>20</b>
	IS	57	22	<b>19</b>
17. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	55	25	30
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	62	20	18
	IS	60	12	28
	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	2	14	84

19. It is important to practice listening with CDs/DVDs.	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	4	7	89
	IS	0	6	94
20. It is important to use the internet in English as a source of input.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	0	21	79
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	2	9	89
	IS	3	13	84

As obvious from the table, in the belief statement 6 related to the excellence of pronunciation ‘it is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation’, a sharp decrease is observed in the agreement rates by first years, fourth years and in-service teachers with 92%, 60% and 40% respectively. Thus, learners’ beliefs regarding the necessity of excellence of pronunciation change as they get more education in language teaching and have more experience with the language and teaching. Another belief statement that is subject to change is “I feel timid speaking English with other people” (item 16). The agreement rate decreased from 46% to 19% and 20% with the first years to the fourth years and in-service teachers successively, which means that first years feel more uncomfortable speaking English than the fourth years and the in-service teachers. Thus, we can say that learners’ negative feelings change as they get more educated and proficient throughout the years they engage.

The last theme in the questionnaire is related to motivation and expectations of the learners and related belief statements are 22, 26, 29, 30, 32, and 33. Table 7 shows the response results by the groups of participants.

Table 7

*Responses to Belief Statements about Motivation and Expectations*

Item No	Participants	Strongly Disagree or Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)	Strongly Agree or Agree (%)
22. I want to speak English well.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	0	2	98
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	0	0	100
	IS	0	3	97
26. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities in my profession.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	0	0	100
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	0	2	98
	IS	3	9	88
29. People in Turkey feel that it is important to speak English.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	16	26	<b>58</b>
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	2	11	<b>87</b>
	IS	9	3	<b>88</b>
30. I would like to have native English speaking friends.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	0	5	95
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	2	7	91

	IS	0	12	88
32. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know American people.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	45	27	28
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	48	29	23
	IS	66	12	22
33. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know British people.	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS	37	23	40
	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS	48	27	25
	IS	66	12	22

Results show that the belief statement related to the importance of speaking English in Turkey (item 29) was more agreed more by the in-service teachers (88 %), second by the fourth years (87%), and the least by the first years (58%). This shows that in-service teachers and the fourth years are more positive regarding the importance of speaking English in Turkey than the first years. Thus, ten belief statements in total are found to show considerable changes among three groups of participants in the questionnaire data. Rest of the belief statements were responded in similar agreement/disagreement rates and didn't show any variety among the three groups of participants in this study.

As for the participants' responses to the open ended questions, they share some common beliefs, but there is variety as well. In the first question the participants were required to report two most important things that affect the present state of their attitude towards English language learning. Key beliefs that emerged from the qualitative analysis and the quantitative values of them in percentages are summarized in Table 8 below.

Table 8

*List of the Most Important Factors That Affect the Participants' Attitude towards English Language Learning*

Belief Statements	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS (%)	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS (%)	IS (%)
1.To have a better education /career and Occupational /academic needs	13	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>
2.Desire to learn English/ foreign languages	<b>37</b>	15	20
3.Desire to communicate with international people	10	15	12
4.The state of English as lingua franca	10	11	12
5.Positive experiences with previous teachers	10	8	6
6.Inadequacy in productive skills in English	8	2	-
7.Advantages it provides	6	13	-
8. Interest in watching American films*	4	-	-
9. Special ability to learn languages*	2	-	-
10.Desire to go/ study abroad *	-	6	3
11. English being an easy language*	-	3	3
12. Desire to teach English*	-	2	-
13. Parental support in learning languages*	-	1	-
14.Teaching experiences*	-	-	18
15. Early start with English *	-	-	3

(\*=Statements that show variety among the groups of participants)

Fifteen key beliefs emerged about the most important things that affect the present state of the participants' attitude towards English language learning. Five of the emergent belief statements were common to all participant groups, and the rest ten showed variety among the groups. Most of the first year pre-service teachers (37%) reported that 'desire to learn English/foreign languages' is the most important factor that affects their attitude towards English language. However, fourth year pre-service teachers (24%) and in-service teachers (23%) reported that the most important factor that affects their attitude is 'to have a better education/career' and 'occupational/academic needs'. Another point of difference is that 'teaching experience' was reported as an important factor only by in-service teachers (18%) but not the two pre-service groups. Even though it has a low percentage rate (2%), 'desire to teach English' was reported as an important factor only by fourth year pre-service teachers. Additionally, 'inadequacy in productive skills in English' is another factor that shows variety. Both the first year (10%) and the fourth year (8%) pre-service teachers reported it as an important factor, while in-service teachers did not. In the second open ended question, the respondents were required to report how their previous language learning experiences with previous teachers affect the present state of their language learning beliefs. The participants' responses and their quantitative values in percentage rates are summarized in Table 9 below.

Table 9

*List of Previous Experiences That Affect the Participants' Language Learning Beliefs*

Previous experiences	1 <sup>st</sup> year PS (%)	4 <sup>th</sup> year PS (%)	IS (%)
1. Positive experiences positive effects in general	<b>38</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>38</b>
2. Positive experiences in learning grammar but negative experiences in speaking/listening	23	3	-
3. Positive experiences in terms of encouragement/self-confidence/motivation	9	18	21
4. Positive experiences in terms of good content knowledge	9	-	-
5. Negative experiences in terms of pronunciation	17	18	-
6. Positive experiences in terms of good teaching styles	-	11	8
7. Negative experiences in terms of old fashioned/traditional teaching styles	-	5	25
8. Negative experiences in terms of the difficulty of English language	-	-	4
9. Negative experiences in general	-	5	-
10. Neutral	2	-	4

As shown in Table 9, there are nine different types of experiences emerged from the participants' responses related to their previous language learning practices and teachers.

Most of the participants reported that they had positive experiences in general which affected their beliefs positively (38% of first years, 40% of the fourth years, and 38% of the in-service teachers). Positive experiences in terms of encouragement/self-confidence/motivation were reported by all three groups of participants. However, experiences with old fashioned/traditional teaching styles and pronunciation were reported as negative ones by the participant groups. In general, it is observed that most of the participants

have positive experiences which have positively affected their language learning beliefs, and this may be regarded as a reason of the participants' choice of being an EFL teacher.

The last set of results to be presented in this section comes from the analysis of the interview data. Six interviews in total were carried out for this study. Two participants were interviewed from each group separately. Participants Z and P are first year pre-service teachers, Participants R and H are fourth year pre-service teachers, and Participants M and F are in-service teachers. Z and P don't have any teaching experience, R and H have some teaching experience since they have been taking the School Experience course this semester, and M and F have 10 and 15 years of teaching experience. Besides, Participant F has M.A. degree and M is pursuing his M.A. The interview questions were about the place of translation and the place of grammar in language learning; the importance of excellent of pronunciation; feelings when speaking English; difficulty of learning English; and having a special ability in learning languages (Please see Appendix for interview questions).

It was observed that both of the first-year pre-service teachers told that they made use of translation when learning English. Participant Z noted that when she sees both the Turkish and English versions of a pattern she can remember it easily but sometimes she has difficulty in word by word translation of the sentences. Participant P has similar ideas about the place of translation and notes that she feels more confident and sure about what she has read when she makes use of translation. On the other hand, both of the participants from the fourth year pre-service group think that translation has a limited place in language learning. Participant H believes that one needs to think in the target language to be able speak and understand it accurately. And Participant R adds that sometimes learners tend to find the exact equivalence of a word in the native language and regards it as a negative learning habit. In parallel, the in-service teachers F and M believe that translation can be used to a limited extent in learning languages: Teacher M told that he uses it only in dealing with new words and Teacher F told that he makes use of translation sometimes to cope with cultural and cross cultural issues.

To the question related to the place of grammar, Teacher Z responded that grammar has an important place for her because she will be a teacher of English but for ordinary language learners, it shouldn't be the main focus. Teachers H and R think that grammar should be integrated in the classes and teachers M and F believe that getting yourself across despite grammatical errors should be the basic concern.

All the interviewees share the same idea about the excellence of pronunciation; they believe that understandability is enough and excellent pronunciation is not a must. Nevertheless, Participant R thinks that explicit teaching of pronunciation is needed and Participant Z thinks that excellent pronunciation is very important and can be achieved more easily with experience in an English speaking country.

As for the participants' responses to how they feel when speaking English with other people, both of the in-service teachers stated that they generally feel confident. Fourth year pre-service teachers distinguished between in-class or out-of-the-class speaking, and native or non-native listeners. Participant R stated that she feels more comfortable and can speak more freely out of the class but nervous when speaking in the class. Participant H said that she feel nervous when speaking to native speakers, especially in terms of pronunciation, but more

comfortable with non-natives. On the other hand, both of the first-year pre-service teachers, Z and P, stated that they feel excited and nervous when speaking with the fear of making mistakes and sound ridiculous.

For difficulty of learning English, all four of the pre-service teachers stated that they didn't have much difficulty emphasizing their early start with the language at the age of 9 or 10. However, in-service teachers M and F reported some difficulty in learning. Teacher F stated that sometimes it was difficult because of a teacher's way of teaching. And he added that "Having to memorize many new words, regardless of their frequency level, without a context to associate them with was difficult. Speaking tasks in problem solving tasks were easy and enjoyable." And teacher M reported a difficulty in learning phrasal verbs and conditionals.

The last interview question was related to having a special ability to learn languages and the pre-service group shared the belief that they have a special ability and learn languages more easily compared to other people around them. And they mention learning languages other than English such as Italian (Participant Z), Japanese (Participant H). However, the in-service teachers focused only on learning English and answered the question accordingly. They didn't mention learning languages other than English.

Therefore, it can be said that findings from the interview data support findings from the questionnaire data. Each interviewee provided responses similar to the responses of the groups they belong to.

## Conclusion

This study attempted to investigate the language learning beliefs of pre-service and in-service teachers and see if there are any differences in their beliefs stemming from the teacher education program they are engaged in or experience in language teaching. In total, ten belief statements (approximately 28% of the whole belief statements) are found to show considerable changes among three groups of participants in the questionnaire data. And, a majority of the beliefs in the questionnaire are shared by the two pre-service groups and the in-service group. The belief statements that show variety and the themes they belong to are shown in the Table 10:

Table 10

### *Belief Statements Hat Show Variety among the Participants Groups*

Belief statements	Major themes
13. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	<i>Foreign language aptitude</i>
31. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	
23. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	<i>Difficulty of language learning</i>
36. If someone spent an hour a day learning a language, how long would it take for them to learn that language very well?	
14. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	<i>Nature of language learning</i>
25. The most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language.	

18. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.

6. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.

*Learning and communication strategies*

16. I feel timid speaking English with other people.

29. People in Turkey feel that it is important to speak English.

*Motivation and expectations*

Those belief statements listed above show variety among the participant groups as if there is a developmental phase. From the first year to fourth year and to in-service group, there are systematic changes observed in the agreement/disagreement rates. Therefore, as an answer to the first research question, it can be concluded that from the first year to the fourth year changes in certain beliefs take place with the pre-service teachers and these changes can be attributed to the four year teacher education program they are engaged in. On the side of the second research question, again changes in certain beliefs are observed between the fourth year pre-service and the in-service teachers. Thus, it can be concluded that language teaching experience also create a difference in beliefs about language learning. Moreover, results of this study find support from the existing literature on language learning beliefs. Contrary to the view that language learning beliefs are static and difficult to change (Peacock, 1999; 2001; İnözü, 2011), the results of this study showed that they can be dynamic and changing over time (Ellis, 2008; Tanaka and Ellis, 2003; and Amuzie and Winke 2009). Besides, beliefs that were found to be changing in this study are key beliefs such as the place of translation, grammar, etc. that would play an important role in future teaching practices of the pre-service teachers. Therefore, it is good to find that those beliefs are subject to change rather than being static.

However, this study has a number of limitations in terms of sample size, and investigating the learners in only one teacher education program. additionally, Kuntz (1996; 22) favors the use of factor analysis to determine the structure of student beliefs, by which important factors unique to a sample can be revealed, and this may enable researchers to recommend specific instructional changes. Parallel to what Kuntz (1996) states, further research can be conducted with a larger sample of Turkish EFL learners from different levels of proficiency. By synthesizing those findings to cultural issues, characteristic beliefs of Turkish students related to foreign language learning can be revealed and those findings can be used as a basis for developing foreign language instruction.

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## **Appendix**

### ***Interview Questions***

#### Background Information

1. What is your grade year at the university? (For pre-service teachers)
2. For how long have you been teaching English? (For in-service teachers)
3. Have you been in an English speaking country? For what purposes? (Both)
4. What age did you start learning English? (Both)
5. What are your future plans after your graduation from this department? (For pre-service teachers)

#### Questions

1. What are some important factors that affect your beliefs about language learning? Could you please list 3 of them?
2. What do you think about the place of translation in learning a foreign language?  
(a) How important is it in learning English for you? (b) Do you make use of translation in learning English? (c) If yes, in which areas?
3. What do you think about the place of grammar in learning a foreign language?  
(a) How important is it in learning English for you?
4. When you think about pronunciation, how important is it to make it sound native-like?  
(a) Do you think learners should make extra effort in making their pronunciation excellent?  
(b) Is excellence of pronunciation a must in learning a foreign language?
5. How do you feel when speaking English with other people?  
(a) Do you think your feelings when speaking English affect your performance in a positive or negative way?
6. How easy or how difficult is learning a foreign language for you?  
(a) Could you learn English easily or did you have difficulty in learning it?  
(b) What was easy and what was difficult for you in your learning process?
7. Do you think you have a special ability to learn foreign languages?  
(a) How did this idea of yours (having a special ability or not) affect you in your learning process?
8. Is there anything that you would like to add about English language learning (in Turkey)?