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What you think is not what you do in the classroom: Investigating teacher's beliefs for classroom management in an EFL classroom

Kadriye Aksoy ^{a*}

^aHacettepe University, Beytepe Campus, Department of English Language Teaching, 06800, Ankara

Abstract

This study explores a non-native English teacher's pedagogical beliefs about the students' behaviors as a part of a classroom management through a qualitative research methodology. The study also aimed to understand the teachers' pedagogical beliefs about teaching and learning by comparing what they say about students' behaviors to their classroom practices. The study employed three data collection instruments: semi-structured interviews, classroom observation data, and stimulated recall interview. The results show both consistencies and inconsistencies between teacher's practices and beliefs. This may be because different practices can be dependent on local teaching context (Li and Walsh, 2011). The study offers some implications for the complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in the classrooms.

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1. Introduction

There has been a growing body of research on teacher cognition in recent years. One element of teacher cognition is teachers' beliefs, and there has been a great importance given to the research of teachers' beliefs. There are studies showing that teachers' beliefs affect their pedagogical practices in the classrooms (Borg, 2003; Ng and Farrell, 2003; Farrell and Kun, 2008 cited in Li, 2012). In other words, teachers' classroom actions are mostly affected by their beliefs. As stated in Li (2012), the beliefs are often described in two ways, stated or enacted in the body research of

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +9 0312 297 8587; fax: +9 0312 297 6119.

E-mail address: kadriyeaksoy@yahoo.com, kadriyeaksoy@hacettepe.edu.tr

teachers' beliefs. The relationship between these two beliefs is not clear since there is a highly a complex relationship and they are affected by other factors, such as local context (Li and Walsh, 2011).

Li and Walsh (2011) state that there are not many studies that compared teachers' beliefs with their classroom practices in ELF contexts. Among these, there are few studies which focus on the non-native teachers' beliefs and actions. It is also required to do research in the contexts in which English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) since English is the lingua franca of today's world and the number of speakers who speak English as a second or foreign language outnumber the number of speakers who speak English as a first language. Therefore, there is a need to teach or learn English almost in every country, so to train language teachers.

In light of these, this study focuses on a non-native teacher's classroom practices. The aim is to explore a NNS EFL teacher's pedagogical beliefs by investigating the beliefs about teaching and learning English (her stated beliefs in the interview), and compare these with her classroom practices (classroom observation and stimulated recall interview). In this regard, this paper will firstly review the definition of belief, and then move on to the related literature on the link between beliefs and practices (e.g. classroom management).

2. Teachers' beliefs and classroom practices

It is difficult to make a clear definition of the concept of belief because of its psychological nature. Although it is a very old definition made by Rokeach (1968), a 'belief' refers to any simple proposition, conscious or unconscious, inferred from what a person says or does, capable of being preceded by the phrase "I believe that..." (p.113). Since that time, there has not been a consensus among researchers about the definition of a belief. Pajares (1992) has labelled beliefs a "messy construct" for two reasons. Firstly, it is difficult to make a distinction between knowledge and beliefs. Secondly, the method of investigation of the beliefs has an effect on the understanding of the beliefs. Research methods and instruments employed define the findings (Li and Walsh, 2011).

Teachers' beliefs directly affect both their perceptions and judgments of teaching and learning interactions in the classroom, resulting in a range of classroom practices (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Clark and Yinger, 1987 cited in Li and Walsh, 2011). In order to understand teacher behaviors, it is important to understand their beliefs firstly. Investigation of teachers' beliefs consist of five dimensions: subject matter, beliefs about teaching, learning and learners, the teacher and professional development (Calderhead, 1996). Teachers hold various beliefs (e.g. teaching techniques, classroom management, dealing with problem behaviors) about how teaching should occur. Some teachers may regard teaching as knowledge transmission, others as facilitating learning (Calderhead, 1996). Teachers adopt different approaches depending on how they view teaching.

In the literature, there are studies showing both consistencies (Ng and Farrell, 2003; Lamb, 1995), and inconsistencies (Farrell and Kun, 2008; Phipps and Borg, 2009) between what teachers believe and what they do in the classroom. In every class, different practices can be seen because beliefs are dependent on **local context** (Li and Walsh, 2011). When we consider the situation in terms of classroom management and dealing with problematic behaviors, every teacher has different beliefs for classroom management. Martin, Yin and Baldwin (1998) highlight the bidirectional relation between teacher beliefs about classroom management and their experiences in the classroom (cited in Kızıldağ, 2007). Understanding teachers' beliefs about classroom management and dealing with problems cannot be achieved by what they say about they do. There should be a deeper investigation of what they do in the classrooms.

3. Classroom Management

Classroom management is defined as "the orchestration of classroom life: planning curriculum, organizing procedures and resources, arranging the environment to maximize efficiency, monitoring student progress, anticipating potential problems." (Lemlech, 1999, p. 4). It constitutes the provisions and procedures necessary to establish and maintain an environment in which instruction and learning can occur (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Brophy (1988; cited in Kızıldağ, 2007) define classroom management as "planning and conducting activities in an orderly fashion: keeping students actively engaged in lessons and seatwork activities; and minimizing disruptions and discipline problems" (p.51). According to Brophy (1988), classroom management includes teacher engagement with student groups and their personal harmony and settlement problems, considering students' individual differences. Also, DeLong (2002,

cited in Kızıldağ, 2007) defines as “...establishing and maintaining an environment in which students can learn, and that this task consists of monitoring, directing and responding to a wide range of different forms of information and activity including student learning, behavior and interactions”. Material, time, instruction and student actions and behaviors can be taken as the elements of classroom management.

As for the focus of this study, student behaviors will be taken as a component of classroom management. The situations in which the teacher orients to the students and their actions will be considered as problem behaviors.

4. The study

4.1. Context and the participant

The study was conducted in a preparatory school at a state university in Turkey. The teacher volunteered to participate in the study, and data used in this study were collected through the classroom observations during actual teaching. Since the research focused on the participant teacher's pedagogical beliefs about students' problematic behaviors for effective classroom management, I looked at the instances of the teacher's orientation to the students and stops the classroom instruction as a way of classroom management.

Firstly, the teacher was assigned a pseudonym as Pelin for the confidentiality. Pelin teaches preparatory school students of a major state university in Turkey. She had been teaching English for two years at the same university at the time of data collection. She had two different classes consisting of nearly 40 students. At the time of classroom observation data, she taught preparatory school students, aged 18-19 and of elementary level of language ability. In the lesson presented for analysis, she followed the course-book, and also she used some additional materials for the grammar teaching. There were a great range of activities during the lessons, for instance she used pair-work or whole class discussions for speaking activity. The topic was “*Save the Children*” for that day, and it was about charity, voluntary work, and so on. Except from writing, she covered all other language skills in the lessons. The focus of grammar teaching was on ‘quantifiers’.

4.2. Research Questions

The focus of this study is NNS teacher's pedagogical beliefs about students' problematic behaviors for classroom management. I will particularly look at the consistencies and inconsistencies between her stated beliefs and her practices during actual instruction. Therefore, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are this NNS (Turkish) EFL teacher's pedagogical beliefs about students' behaviors that affect the flow of classroom instruction?
2. In what ways are the teacher's stated beliefs related, if at all, to their classroom practices?

4.3. Data Collection

This study adopted a qualitative case-study approach to investigate teachers' beliefs and the interrelationships between pedagogical beliefs and professional practices, which allows different methods to seek in-depth understanding of some social phenomenon (Li & Walsh, 2011). Case study also gives the advantage of exploration of a phenomenon within its real context (Yin, 2009). It also lends itself as the best method as it benefits from ‘providing a rich and vivid description of events with the analysis of them’ (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.317 cited in Li, 2012).

This study employed three data collection instruments: semi-structured interview, video-recorded real classroom instruction and stimulated recall interview with the participating teacher. An interview was conducted as a useful way for getting information related to the teacher's beliefs as much as possible. Interview guidelines were specifically designed for this study. A pre-interview was conducted with the participant as a pilot study. Then, it was revised and, a final version for the interview was prepared (see Appendix A). The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Three hours of real classroom instruction given by the participating teacher were video-recorded. Each lesson lasted between 40 and 45 minutes. A few days later, a stimulated recall interview was conducted with the teacher to comment

on the classroom practices. Stimulated recall technique has been used by researchers who are interested in classroom context and behavior. It was first used by Bloom in 1953 to compare his students' thought processes about two learning situations (Calderhead, 1981). It was also used to investigate teachers' thought processes and interactive decision-making while teaching. Calderhead (1981) defines the technique as a way of gathering "teachers' retrospective reports of their thought processes" (p.215). The main aim of using stimulated recall is to help the teacher recall his/her thought processes and reflect on what was happening during his/her teaching (Gass and Mackey, 2000). The data from stimulated recall interviews were also audio-recorded and used in the analysis of data.

4.4. Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis was adopted to analyze the interview transcript. Firstly, interview data were transcribed, and the transcription was shown to the participant teacher to check. Secondly, in line with research focus, data were coded; transcripts were read through several times so that relevant information to research questions was selected and coded.

Not all the concepts of belief were included in the process of coding. Since the focus is on the instances when the teacher attended to the students and stopped the instruction, only teacher's beliefs about students' problematic behaviors were taken into consideration. The qualitative data analysis was conducted by using HyperRESEARCH 3.5.2. The main reasons for using HyperRESEARCH in data analysis were: 1) it provides free limited usage up to fifty codes which were enough for this study; 2) it enabled me to interact with the data as much as possible through its easy and interactive design; 3) it did not require any pre-defined categories in data analysis and be flexible in interpreting data.

Video-recorded lessons were not transcribed, but used as a stimulation for the teacher to obtain information about the reasons why she behaved in a particular way. Later, her comments and the data from the first interview (teacher's stated beliefs) were compared as a means of gaining insights into the complex relationship between what teachers report as belief and their practices while teaching. In other words, this procedure allowed to compare what teachers purport/claim they do while teaching to what they actually do as evidenced in their classroom practices.

5. Findings

In the findings, I will firstly present the stated beliefs of the teacher as she expressed in the interview, and compare these with video-recorded classroom data and stimulated recall interview. Findings are presented according to themes emerging from the interviews and relate to teacher's beliefs about students' behaviors.

5.1. Teacher's Stated Beliefs

The excerpt 1 below shows that the teacher considers students' actions as a component of an effective lesson. She explains her beliefs about language teaching:

The students should be motivated in the class. They should listen to the class carefully. They should not disturb each other much by talking to each other during the class time. (Excerpt 1)

There is further evidence of this position in Excerpt 2:

Student-originated problems may harm the flow of the class more.

She mentions that there is a level of seriousness of student-originated problems. In excerpt 3, we see clues for that:

These are not too serious things such as talking to each other quietly or using their mobile phones. The problem should be more serious such as challenging the teacher, and it may really be a big trouble. Or two students' fighting in the class may be a serious matter that ruins the flow of the class. On the other hand, using their

mobile phones or talking in Turkish or talking to each other during the class may not harm the flow of the class, if the teacher has the control of the class.

Here, she overemphasizes the level of problems caused by students. It can be said that there are two types of problems caused by the students during the instruction. I coded them as minor and major problems. Major problems include challenging the teacher, two students' fighting in the class. Others such as talking to each other, playing with the phone, talking in Turkish are minor problems for the teacher. An important point to be made here is that she adds the control of the class by the teacher (If the teacher has the control...). It can be understood that the teacher believes that she should have the control of the class even at the times of minor problems. She also adds that if students ask a question in Turkish during a grammar instruction or speaks in Turkish during a speaking activity, or they do not understand the instructions, they are not very important for her even if these disrupt the flow of the lesson. The excerpt 4 below shows her opinions:

For instance, while teaching a grammar topic, student's asking a question in Turkish may also ruin the flow of the lesson, but it is not much important ... it will not harm the flow for me. Or for instance, during a speaking activity, if the student uses Turkish or does not understand the instructions, these are not important for the flow of the class ... I mean more serious things harm the flow of my class.

She seems to be ignoring minor problems caused by the students in the classroom. When she was told that she ignores the minor problems, she explains that she does not think much about what she can do at those times. She still does something to warn the students like using humor or needling the students, but these do not mean that they disrupt the flow of the lesson much. She admits that she uses humor as a warning to the students. She, then, continues the instruction after giving the message to the students to stop that behavior. She says this does not disrupt her instruction (*I don't think it ruins the flow of my teaching*).

Ignoring means that I do not focus on these, or I do not think what I will do when the flow of my teaching is harmed ... I ignore in this way. Of course, I do sarcasm. I mean ... I warn the student, but that I warn him does not mean that the flow of the class has been corrupted. ... I do not think it has ruined the flow of my teaching (Excerpt 5)

Her way of using humor and needling as a warning in the lessons can be taken as her approach to the students. She gives importance to the feelings of her students, which is a feature of humanistic approach. From her remarks below (Excerpt 6), it can be said that she thinks there is a need for entertainment space both for the teacher and the students. And she fills these situations at the time of break-downs. She, in a way, both creates a warm and friendly environment by using humor and takes the attention of the students. The relationship between her and the students does affect the way she behaves the students at the times of break-downs.

Because, at times, the students also need to have fun, by teasing me or doing sarcasm. (Excerpt 6)

I see further evidence of this position in *Excerpt 7* below. She says when a student comes late to the class intentionally, she uses harsher methods for the student. If the student does not mean to disrupt the lesson, or challenge the teacher by coming late to the class, she does not give any response, waits until she gets seated, and continues the lesson. She also mentions there are some classroom rules for the late comers.

It is related to the character of that student. ... If I know that student well, and think that he does not come to the class deliberately, I do continue teaching. After the student gets seated, I will continue from where I stop. But if I know that students come to the class late intentionally, I stop the instruction and ask him questions such as "why are you late?, where were you?". Generally we do this in this way. The late student says a few words in English, and then he gets seated. I try to use this routine in my classes. However, if a student comes to the class deliberately, it harms the flow of the class because he teases me in the middle of the class. (Excerpt 7)

The teacher makes further comments on the problems that she faces during instruction as irritating and annoying in relation to the ones in Excerpt 3 and 4:

Being interested in their mobile phones, of course, a big trouble but this means sending text messages or doing something else on the web. Normally, I do let them use their mobile phones. If they use it as a dictionary, they put it on their tables so that I can see. ... the ones who send text messages use their mobile phones under the table, so I can see them easily. If they use their mobile phones excessively, it irritates me. But if it is not too much, I can ignore it, especially when I am sure they use it as a dictionary. And this is the routine of our class. (Excerpt 8)

She says if the students use the phones as a complementary tool for the lesson such as using a dictionary, she lets them use and does not intervene with what they do if she is sure. She here, again, mentions a classroom routine of her class. Students' playing with their phones is very irritating and annoying for her, but she yet does not interfere in much if there are short moments. She also further comments on students' talking to each other. She states it is not a big problem for her, but if it is consistent and in a loud voice, she gets irritated. Especially in larger classrooms, it creates a big problem. In addition to this, she states when the students in more advanced levels prefer using Turkish, she gets irritated again. But, in this class, since the proficiency level of the students are not very high, she does not expect them much to use English.

Other than that, their talking to each other loudly. Whispering or speaking quietly does not disturb much, but if they keep talking in a loud noise for some time really disturbs me, especially in crowded classes. Other than this, since the proficiency level is low in these classes, I do not expect them to produce much in English. But in more proficient classes, if they use Turkish instead of English, I get irritated. This harms the flow of the class. (Excerpt 9)

From the excerpts examined below, we see the stated beliefs of the teacher about students' behaviors that harm the flow of the class. Since the aim of the study was to look for the consistencies and inconsistencies between her stated beliefs and classroom practices, we now turn into classroom data and stimulated recall interview.

Classroom Data and Stimulated Recall Interview

In the first lesson, the teacher starts the lesson with a video viewing activity. While she is doing some arrangements, some of the students are talking to each other, and the teacher does not intervene. After she has just played the video, a student asks a pen from his friends and there is some noise among the students. She stops the video and asks "are you ready?", and also she says to pass the pen. In the stimulated recall, she says that at that moment, she has not started the lesson, but she is checking the voice, screen. So, she let them be on their own and did not want to interfere in since she has not started the lesson yet. But, in the video recording, it is seen that she looks at the student who is the source of the noise (who asks a pen) twice, but he does not respond to her eye-contact. She, then, stops playing the video and orients more to the student. This is in line with what she says in excerpt 9 ("*Whispering or speaking quietly does not disturb much, but if they keep talking in a loud noise for some time really disturbs me...*"). She usually sees students' talking as a problem in the class if it is in a low voice. However, when it is louder, she orients to the students. The reason why she has behaved in that way may be the nature of the activity. After watching the video, she asks some questions about the video. So the students need to understand what is going on through the video.

After just watching the video, three students come late to the class. She just looks at them, and when they get seated, she continues her lesson. This is in line with what she says in excerpt 7 ("*If I know that student well, and think that he does not come to the class deliberately, I do continue teaching. After the student gets seated, I will continue from where I stop.*"). In the stimulated recall, she supports what she has said in the interview. Her gazes in the video-recorded data do not seem to be comfortable, and she looks a bit irritated by late comers. She explains this by saying that they did not even apologize for being late to the class, so she just looked at them in that way. She, then, mentions classroom rules for late comers. It can be said that she has set some classroom routines for unwanted behaviors in the classroom before, and she wants the students to act in that way. In the interview data, since, she makes a comment on

this by saying that “*Generally we do this in this way. The late student says a few words in English, and then he gets seated. I try to use this routine in my classes*” in excerpt 7.

In the second lesson of the video-recorded data, there is a moment in which a student says something to the teacher for the pictures she has brought to the class for the activity. The activity flows as follows: the teacher will teach quantifiers such as much, many, a lot of. She writes six sentences on the board, and then she shows pictures related to the sentences on the board and asks the students to choose the correct sentence from the ones on the board. Through the end of the activity, the teacher says that “the pictures are not best quality” since some of the students find it hard to recognize what is in each picture. A student then replies as “*as far as it is*”. She then says “*well, yeah*”. When she is asked to comment on this incident, she states that she is not disturbed or does not feel challenged by the student’s behavior. She again focuses on the relationship between her and the students, which she has stated in the excerpt 7. If she has a closer relationship with the students, she does not feel challenged or irritated by such remarks. For the friendly environment of the class, there should be jokes like these in the classroom which she has stated in excerpt 6. She further comments on this by saying that it is not possible to cover everything in the lessons one by one. According to her, it is important to develop an inter-personal relation with the students. It is understood that the way she behaves is also a way of creating a warm and friendly environment, which she has also stated in excerpt 6.

In the second lesson, the students are talking to each other while the teacher is explaining a grammatical point. There is some noise in the class and the teacher’s voice is not thoroughly heard by all students. However, the teacher does not warn the students, she just continues her instruction about the grammar. In the stimulated recall interview, she says that she was explaining an example for the grammar point that she covered and explained before. She says the noise at that moment is not important for her, since she thinks it is not rational to create such silence which she resembles as ‘death silence’. Another reason may be a student tries to explain the grammatical point to another student. Here, we can say that she gives importance to peer-learning. In excerpt 9, she states similar opinions to what she has done in the classroom. She has said students’ talking to each other is not a big problem for her, but if it is consistent and in a loud voice, she gets irritated. We have a situation for this in the classroom data. At that moment, the teacher is eliciting answers for the questions about quantifiers in the worksheet. While a student is reading the answer, but another student is talking to someone in a hearable voice. The teacher intervenes and uses “*shhh*” as a warning for the student. In the stimulated recall interview, she explains that she can no more ignore the talking of that student because she says he talks much in the lessons, and she calls him as an unmotivated student for her lesson. She tells that she cannot use eye-contact any more, since the student still keeps talking. Therefore, she stops the lesson, makes the warning, tries to understand the problem and solve it, and then continues her lesson. In another time, a student is reading the answer for the question, and there is some talking among some students at the other side of the class. The teacher raises her hands and says “*shhh*” to make them silent. In the stimulated recall interview, she says she cannot hear the student who is on-duty.

In the third lesson, there are some students who do not behave according to the instructions given by the teacher. At a moment, during the speaking activity, the students throw the ball to each other, the one who throws the ball asks a question and the other one answers the question. During the activity, one student instead of throwing a ball gives the ball to his friend who is sitting next to him. When the teacher is asked about whether she gets annoyed when the students do not act according to her instructions, she says it is not a problem for her. However, if it continues like that more than once, she interferes in the situation. Another instance supports her belief. A student does not hold the ball and gives to a girl sitting next to him. This time, the teacher directs the student who will ask the question to ask the question to the one who does not want to answer the question. She comments on this by telling that at that time, it becomes annoying and irritating for her. Therefore, she interferes in the situation, directs the situation in the way she wants. A similar situation occurs when a student does not want to ask a question to the teacher after throwing the ball. She comments on this by saying that it will take at least two minutes for the student to form a sentence, it is good not to waste time by waiting him. Also, up to that time, almost enough time is allocated for the activity, and the students have been given a considerable input.

In the same lesson, the teacher shows an obese child and asks the students to think some adjectives for the boy. A girl says he is selfish, and the teacher asks “why selfish?” The student says something in Turkish, and the teacher immediately asks the student to speak in Turkish. There is one more clue for the situation. A student responds to the question during the speaking activity in Turkish. The teacher warns him to speak him by saying “in English!”. This

does not correspond to what she has stated as a belief in the interview data (excerpt 4). In the stimulated recall interview, she comments on this by telling the aim of the activity is speaking, but the student is using Turkish.

There is a listening activity in this lesson. There is a completely unmotivated student at the back of the class and he does not listen to the activity, he does not give attention to the activity. Pelin does not do anything to include him in the activity. In the stimulated recall interview, she explains this by telling that he is completely unmotivated, he does not understand much in the lessons, but he also does not have any wish to be better. So, she says she cannot do anything for him. But, this does not mean that she is totally ignoring the student. Since the activity is listening, she says she cannot do anything for him. She believes it will waste time, and also other students get distracted. She says it is not easy to control students in reading and listening activities. In other ones, it is easy to check whether they are doing the activity or not. We can understand that the teacher is more flexible in receptive skill activities during which they are not required to produce much.

6. Conclusion

In this study, I looked at the beliefs of an EFL teacher, first by analyzing interview data, and then by looking at the video-recorded classroom data and stimulated recall interview. The findings show how many complex beliefs the teacher holds can be investigated both by analyzing what they say about their beliefs and by looking at their interactions in class.

In line with the studies conducted on teachers' beliefs, the findings show both consistencies (Ng and Farrell, 2003; Lamb, 1995) and inconsistencies (Farrell and Kun, 2008; Phipps and Borg, 2009) between what the teacher has stated as a belief and the classroom practices. The approach that the teachers have about teaching shape their practices in the classroom. From the interview data, it can be understood that the teacher has a humanistic approach towards the language teaching. She gives importance to students' feelings (excerpt 6), relationship with the students (excerpt 7). Her stated beliefs mostly correspond to what she has done in the classroom. Only at one point, she does not behave in the way she has asserted in the interview data (excerpt 4). She has stated students' talking in Turkish is not a problem for her if the proficiency level of the students is not high (which is elementary in this case), and she does not expect them to produce much in English. During the lesson, she direct the students to use English by saying "In English!".

In this study, since beliefs are specific to local-context, it is good to collect data from classes from other teachers. It is suggested that research methodology which includes both interview (stated beliefs) and classroom data (stimulated recall interview) is a beneficial way of looking into teachers' beliefs and their actions in the classroom.

Appendix A.

A.1. Interview Guidelines

- 1) What do you think about an effective classroom environment with all the components included?
 - Equipment
 - Students
 - Materials
- 2) What might be some of the factors that destroy the flow of the lesson?
 - Students' behaviors?
- 3) Can you think about what is a disruptive behavior according to you?
- 4) Can you think about what is a disruptive behavior that you faced during your lessons recently?
- 5) What are the most faced disruptive behaviors that you face during instruction?
- 6) How do you react to these disruptive behaviors?
- 7) Are there any strategies that you employ at the time of a disruptive behavior?
- 8) What do you think about the usefulness of these techniques?

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