Teachers’ Beliefs about Teaching English to Elementary School Children

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Abstract

Recent research has focused much attention on teacher beliefs because beliefs are considered to greatly influence teaching practice. Teachers’ belief systems need critical inquiry so that teachers can reflect on their practices more closely and teacher training institutions can take necessary steps to improve teacher practice. This study compared beliefs held by 192 non-native in-service and pre-service teachers in Istanbul, Turkey. Data about the teachers’ beliefs were collected by means of a questionnaire and observations. The results indicated that both groups strongly supported communicative language teaching methodology, emphasizing the need for addressing children’s educational and emotional needs. The agreement rates, however, differed significantly in some respects.

Keywords: teacher beliefs, self-efficacy, pre-service teachers, in-service teachers.

1. Main text

The Turkish educational reform in 1997 required that foreign languages (English, German or French), begin at grade 4 instead of 6 and compulsory primary education become eight years. Because the number of learners nearly doubled as a result of the reform, the Turkish Ministry of National Education had to deal with an acute shortage of foreign language teachers, a deficit met by appointing teachers from other subject areas after a brief in-service education. The newly appointed teachers lacked even minimum linguistic skills and knowledge of language teaching methods and techniques, causing major debates as to the efficiency of their teaching (Çetintaş, 2010). The problem of teacher shortages was compounded by a lack of materials and overcrowded classrooms (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998).

The educational reform introduced the communicative approach to language instruction into the ELT curriculum, but its success depended heavily on the teacher enacting it (Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu, 2003). The basic goal of the reform was to develop students’ communicative capacity in the target language (L2); therefore, teachers had to become practitioners who could carry out communicative classroom activities. Today many teachers know that they should display a wider range of responsibilities, including helping students develop communicative performance and promoting positive values and attitudes towards English language learning (Kırkgöz, 2007). They should be able to play many roles in the course of teaching; and in the process...
of playing their roles, they must be well aware of the importance of interactions with their students. They should know interactive principles such as automaticity, intrinsic motivation, strategic investment, risk-taking, language and culture connection, interlanguage and communicative competence (Brown, 2001). They should also know how to correct their students’ mistakes for the sake of accuracy. Harmer (p.105, 2001) suggests that “…during communicative activities, … it is generally felt teachers should not interrupt students in mid-flow to point out a grammatical, lexical or pronunciation error, since to do so interrupts the communication and drags an activity back to the study of language form or precise meaning.” Besides, teachers are expected to be well aware of their students’ ability to grasp meaning, level of creativity in using the course materials, capacity for indirect learning, instinct for play and fun, delight for imagination and fantasy, and instinct for interaction and talk (Halliwell, 1992). In brief, the Turkish education reform demands teachers who strip off their old ways and embrace a new approach to language teaching.

Much of the literature on teacher education suggests that teachers’ beliefs affect their teaching practices and instructional decisions in the classroom (Richards, 1998; Richards & Lockhart, 1996). These beliefs are usually guided by a number of factors: their own experience as learners in classrooms, prior teaching experience, classroom observations they were exposed to, and their previous training courses at school (Richards, 1998). Teachers’ actions reflect their knowledge and beliefs, which "provide the underlying framework or schema which guides the teachers' classroom actions" (Richards & Lockhart, p. 29, 1996).

Williams and Burden (1997) underlines the fact that teaching must be concerned with teachers making sense of meaning from the conditions they encounter. Teachers’ awareness of their own beliefs and how they view the world around them is an important component of the constructivist approach and the fountainhead of becoming a reflective practitioner. Even in the case of experienced teachers, a constructivist view suggests that their perceptions and beliefs are continually strengthened by teaching experience, becoming increasingly central to their view of themselves as they develop confidence in meeting role demands (Roberts, 1998).

However, little is still known about how pre-service and in-service teacher beliefs might vary and whether teachers acquire their beliefs during teacher training or in actual practice. Thus, the main purpose of this study was to compare the teaching beliefs held by elementary school in-service and pre-service English teachers. The research questions were:

What core beliefs do in-service and pre-service English teachers hold about the process of teaching and learning English in elementary schools?

What are the similarities and differences between in-service and pre-service elementary school teachers’ beliefs about English teaching?

2. Method

This section gives detail about the participants, research instruments, and data analysis methods.

2.1 Participants

192 participants (157 female and 35 male) agreed to complete the questionnaire. 68 were in-service teachers teaching in 17 state and private elementary schools, and 124 were pre-service teachers studying at four different state and private universities. The questionnaire was only administered to Turkish teachers of English.

2.2 Research Instruments

2.2.1 Scale: Liao’s (2007) The Questionnaire of Elementary School English Teachers’ Teaching Beliefs was translated into Turkish by the researcher and two other proficient speakers of English and Turkish. The original questionnaire was composed of 40 discrete items organized into three major categories, namely, the
nature of children’s English development (CED), teaching methods and techniques (TMT), self-efficacy as an English teacher (SE). The participants were asked to assess their beliefs about teaching English to elementary school students on a five-point Likert scale, by indicating the extent to which they agreed with each statement using (1) SD = strongly disagree, (2) D = disagree, (3) N = neither agree nor disagree, (4) A = agree, or (5) SA = strongly agree. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the original questionnaire was stated to be 0.72.

The reliability of the adopted scale was examined in terms of its consistency. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.96 was obtained for the whole scale. The first factor, the nature of children’s English development, had a reliability value of 0.93; the second factor, teaching methods and techniques, 0.84; and the third, self-efficacy as an English teacher, 0.86. The fact that all the internal consistency values were over 0.80 indicates that the scale has high reliability (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

2.2.2 Open-ended question: Liao’s original question “What qualifications does a person need to acquire in order to be a successful English teacher in an elementary school?” was translated into Turkish by two proficient bilingual speakers of English and given to the participants.

2.2.3 Observations: The observations were conducted in a private elementary school over two school days. Five items from each of the three factors were selected by the researcher and two experienced teachers. Because observing all 40 items on the scale was not feasible, the observers chose a total of fifteen areas of inquiry. Four in-service teachers were observed for the whole class duration by the researcher and an experienced instructor.

3. Results

3.1 Statistical Analysis of the Survey

Of the 40 items, 27 had means greater than 3.5, and none below 2.5. Most participants were found to agree on most factors.

Table 1. Correlations of survey sub-factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CED</th>
<th>TMT</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CED</strong> Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.885(**)</td>
<td>.830(**)</td>
<td>.976(**)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>191</td>
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<td>191</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>191</td>
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** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows that as pre-service and in-service teachers develop greater self-efficacy and use methods and techniques more effectively, they contribute more to children’s English development.
Table 2 shows that there are significant differences in both teaching beliefs, which include the scale as a whole and represents the one-factor structure and all the sub-factors. It was found that the two groups differed significantly in children’s English development ($t=\ -1.76$), methods and techniques ($t=\ -2.11$), and self-efficacy ($t=\ -3.51$) ($p<.05$). The following discussion will highlight the quantitative results by grouping relevant items in three groups: the nature of children’s English development, teaching methods and techniques, and self-efficacy as an English teacher.

3.1.1 The Nature of Children’s English development

Eighteen items in the questionnaire addressed different aspects of children’s English development ranging from classroom activities to different patterns of learning and optimal age for language education. The in-service teachers and pre-service teachers agreed or strongly agreed on most of the items although the agreement rate was almost always higher for the former group.

Several items were concerned with doing activities, having interesting classes, fully understanding the lesson, interacting with others, using English during activities, and getting support from parents and teachers. The greatest discrepancy within these items was about interacting with others, for which there was about 84% (strong) agreement among pre-service teachers and about 99% among in-service teachers. A considerable ambiguity arose for both groups about whether children should be given opportunities to move around in class. Only half of both groups stated that children should be given opportunities to move around in the English classroom. More than 45% of in-service teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea. Almost 20% of pre-service teachers remained neutral, and more than 30% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This attitude toward limiting students’ moving around in class can be attributed to reasons related to classroom management.

Four of the items addressed the issues of variations in gender, individual cognitive development, learning styles, and overall capacity to learn foreign languages. 67% of pre-service teachers agreed or strongly agreed on gender differences in the rate of developing proficiency and response to instruction, whereas exactly half of in-service teachers took this stance. About 20% of pre-service teachers believed that female and male students develop English proficiency at different rates and respond to instruction differently, a rate that doubled for in-service teachers. A majority of both groups agreed that every child has a different learning style and that children have obvious individual variations in their cognitive development process, though in-service teacher agreement was quite higher (98% versus 83). The groups had quite different beliefs about whether every child can learn English well. 41% of in-service teachers believed that not every can learn it well, whereas only 21% of pre-service teachers held the same belief. Less than half of both groups somewhat believed that every child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Comparison</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
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<th>df</th>
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<td>-2,11</td>
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<td>59,01</td>
<td>7,10</td>
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<td>SE</td>
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<td>190</td>
<td>-3,51</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>3,77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>151,25</td>
<td>31,15</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>-2,34</td>
<td>.007</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-service</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>160,83</td>
<td>17,36</td>
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</table>
can learn English well. This result was interesting in that practicing teachers were less optimistic about every child’s ability to learn a foreign language.

Three items were concerned with the optimal age for language learning. Almost 65% of in-service teachers strongly believed that children can learn English faster, while about only 40% of pre-service teachers strongly supported this belief. The total percentage reached almost 93% for in-service teachers when the choice ‘agreed’ was included. For pre-service teachers, the total number reached 75%, the rest either somehow disagreeing or remaining neutral; whereas only about 6% of in-service teachers believed adults can learn English faster. A similar result held true for teachers’ beliefs about teaching English at early ages. A great majority of in-service teachers (97%) believed that learning English as early as possible produces better results. About 81% of pre-service teachers supported this view, while almost 14% somehow disagreed. The groups held completely different beliefs about whether the first grade is the best age for learning English. Only about 34% of in-service teachers thought it was a good idea, 50% somehow disagreed and 16% remained neutral, while 37% of pre-school teachers somehow disagreed and 25% remained neutral.

The relationships between the ways L1 and L2 are acquired were dealt with two items. More than 80% of both groups believed that the way children use their mother tongue affects their learning English. More participants opposed the item that children should learn English the same way as they learn Turkish than those who agreed to it. 44% of in-service teachers somehow believed it to be a bad idea, 10% remaining neutral. It was 40% and 22%, respectively, for pre-service teachers.

3.1.2 Teaching Methods and Techniques

The fifteen items in the questionnaire addressed different aspects of teaching methods and techniques ranging from activities and tools to the perceivably most important skill for language education. The in-service teachers and pre-service teachers agreed or strongly agreed on most of the items although the agreement rate was again almost always higher for the former group.

Concerning the most important skills to teach, five items revealed that both groups agreed most strongly on listening and speaking skills. An overwhelming majority of in-service teachers (99%) considered it important to teach elementary school children English listening and speaking skills. About 12% of pre-school teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed on the statement. Likewise, the two groups had similar beliefs about the importance of oral conversation when teaching children. 73% of both groups considered oral conversation to be the most important element in teaching children. Both groups perceived the role of pronunciation, an important part of listening and speaking skills, as considerably less important. Only 38% of in-service teachers believed pronunciation to be the most important element in teaching children, while 33% disagreed. pre-service teachers had a higher regard for pronunciation (50%), 34% disagreeing and 16% remaining neutral. 69% of in-service teachers considered vocabulary learning the most important element in teaching English, and 30% disagreed with the idea. About 56% of pre-service teachers held the same belief, while 36% disagreed. The two groups held wildly different views about teaching children English spelling and grammar in the early stages of instruction. About 63% of in-service teachers believed that it was unnecessary to teach the two skills, while only 36% of pre-service teachers considered likewise.

Items related to assessment revealed that both pre-service teachers and in-service teachers believed that multiple assessment types should replace paper and pen tests, rating the average of former 90% and latter 45 %. Almost 96% of both groups believed that children’s English performance in the classroom should be evaluated by using multiple assessments. The groups had different ideas about the use of paper-and-pencil tests. 55% of in-service teachers somehow agreed to the idea, 4% remaining neutral. Only about 35% of pre-service teachers supported it, and more than 50% somehow disagreed.

Items related to the ways of teaching showed that more in-service teachers then pre-service teachers agreed or strongly agreed on all of the items except Item 21. About 61% of both groups favored English immersion
programs over bilingual programs where English and Turkish are used. Over 89% of in-service teachers believed that the teaching of English pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar should be integrated. Only 68% of pre-service teachers believed so, and 24% believed teaching these skills separately. Both groups held similar beliefs about error correction. 68% of in-service teachers and 74% of pre-service teachers believed that beginning students should not be permitted to make errors in English pronunciation because it would be more difficult to correct them later. About 20% of both groups disagreed. The two groups had different beliefs about the role of memorization in learning English. 51% of in-service teachers and 62% of pre-service teachers considered it to be unnecessary. Yet almost 44% of in-service teachers believed memorization to be necessary, whereas the rate was 28% for pre-service teachers.

Items related to the activities to teach English revealed that both in-service teachers then pre-service teachers agreed or strongly agreed on all the items. Both groups favored singing and role-playing as appropriate English teaching activities. 95% of in-service teachers and 86% of pre-service teachers stated so. About 11% of pre-service teachers believed the opposite. 97% of in-service teachers believed that integrating games into English instruction can facilitate children’s learning, while the rate drops to 87% with pre-service teachers. Interestingly, 12% of pre-service teachers oppose using games for English instruction for children. Both groups believed in the importance of using multimedia equipment (Item 36). 11% of pre-service teachers disagreed to its importance, while only 4% of in-service teachers disagreed. In addition, both groups expressed the need to teach foreign cultures along with English, the difference being in the strength of the opinion. 90% of in-service teachers believed in its necessity, only 29% strongly agreeing. 77% of pre-school teachers supported the teaching of culture, more than 44% strongly agreeing.

3.1.3 Self-efficacy as an English Teacher

Seven items in the questionnaire addressed different aspects of language teacher efficacy ranging from student-teacher interaction to teachers’ qualifications. The in-service teachers and pre-service teachers agreed or strongly agreed on most of the items although the agreement rate was once again almost always higher for the former group. Items concerned with getting on with students, meaning attributed to teaching English, high confidence in language teaching produced similar results. In-service teachers felt more confident than pre-service teachers in getting along with children in English classes. 59% of the former group strongly agreed that they get along well with children in class, while 42% of the latter expressed such a strong opinion. Slightly less than 40% in both groups agreed to the statement, making the sum total about 86%. 9% of pre-service teachers strongly disagreed to the statement, while no in-service teacher had any strong disagreement. The majority in both groups found teaching English in elementary school a meaningful job, in-service teachers finding it even more so (69% strong agreement against 60% with pre-service teachers). Surprisingly, almost 10% of pre-school teachers strongly disagreed to the statement in contrast to less than 2% with in-service teachers. A great majority of in-service teachers believed that they were capable of teaching English to children, with 70% strong agreement and 26% agreement. Pre-service teachers was less confident. 54% strongly believed in themselves, while 9% seriously questioned their capabilities. No in-service teacher had strong beliefs against their capabilities to teach English to children.

Three items were related to the participants’ confidence in satisfaction with the profession. In-service teachers overwhelmingly believed (93%) that teaching English in elementary school is fun, with 51% strongly holding this belief. For pre-service teachers the prospects were less optimistic. While 43% of pre-service teachers strongly believed that the experience would be fun, 28% simply agreed to the idea, 6% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed, while 11% remained neutral. The greatest difference between the beliefs of the two groups lay in their confidence in becoming a good elementary school teacher. 60% of in-service teachers strongly believed that they would make good teachers, while only 27% of pre-service teachers believed so. A high percentage of pre-service teachers (28%) remained neutral in contrast
to 9% of in-service teachers. About 15% of pre-service teachers lacked the confidence in becoming good teachers. A similar difference emerged between the groups beliefs in their teaching abilities as opposed to native English teachers. While 29% of in-service teachers strongly believed that they were as good as native teachers, only about 10% of pre-service teachers believed so. More of the former group agreed to the statement than the latter (35% versus 31%). Although similar rates of teachers remained neutral (20% and 22%), a much higher percentage of pre-service teachers doubted their capabilities (32% versus 13%).

Only one item revealed a contrasting result to the other items for the self-efficacy factor. 44% of in-service teachers believed that teaching English in elementary school was easy, with only 4% strongly holding this belief. A higher percentage of pre-service teachers (47%) believed that the experience would be easy, with 10% strongly holding the belief. Almost 15% of in-service teachers strongly disagreed with the statement, whereas only 5% of in-service teachers did so. Although disagreement rate was similar for both groups (38% and 39%), almost 10% of pre-service teachers remained neutral in contrast to the 1% in the other group.

3.2 Content Analysis
41 of the 68 in-service teachers and 15 of the 124 pre-service answered the open-ended question. A total of 320 words and expressions about perceived teacher qualifications (206 of which were from in-service teachers) was examined for patterns. Finally, three major categories were classified, and single instances were grouped under “others.”

Professional competence: This category included content knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, and openness to innovations and self-development. English language proficiency was a frequently mentioned part of content knowledge. Pedagogic content knowledge comprised knowing how to put across the subject matter according to the student group and employing technology for that end. Being open to innovations and self-development encompassed being engaged in a wide range of activities such as seminars, workshops, conferences, journal subscriptions, and colleague observations.

Personal traits: Of the nine personal traits of a successful teacher, being patient was mentioned most frequently, followed by being loving and fair. Ability to get along with students also ranked high on the frequency list. Other traits were understood, creative, responsible, and energetic.

Student centeredness: Providing fun and motivation through activity ranked highest (mentioned 27 times) together with teachers’ awareness of students’ needs, levels, and differences. Also included in this category were use of games, songs, and drama activities suitable for the age group.

Others: The category involved infrequently mentioned characteristics such as being smart, having a good memory, focusing on vocabulary, and being a leader. Although they could be included in the above mentioned categories, they were left out due to their isolation. For ease of comparison, Table 3 rank these categories by the frequency and percentage of responses made by the pre-service teachers and in-service teachers.

Table 3. The Ranking of both groups about a Successful Elementary School English Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank (PST)</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rank (IST)</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Professional competence</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Personal traits</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Personal traits</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Professional competence</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31.1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Student-centeredness</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student-centeredness</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Others</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As indicated in Table 3, the ranking differed for the two groups. The pre-service teachers regarded professional competence as the most important qualification a successful elementary school teacher should possess. 41% of the pre-service teachers reported it as a necessary qualification, while the percentage was 31% for the in-service teachers. Both groups mentioned personal qualities with the same frequency, which ranked second for the in-service teachers, though. Student centeredness came third for both groups, but the in-service teachers had a higher regard for placing students at the center of the profession. Almost 30% of the in-service teachers specified student centered concerns, whereas the percentage was 10% lower for the pre-service teachers.

3.3 Observations

On the first day of observation, a meeting was held with the teachers in a private school and a schedule was determined by both sides. Unwilling to accept the request for observations right away, teachers wanted to make sure of confidentiality before letting us in their classes. The participants seemed fairly capable of handling classes of very active students. The first participant was a trainee teacher teaching grade four. The observation in her class added the research a new dimension since she was also observed by the vice-principal who happened to be in that class, so she was very well organized in her presenting the lesson on animal life. The students aided their teacher during her hardest experience in her career by actively participating in the lesson. The participant did not use L1 and the topic seemed to be a correct selection considering young learners’ interest in animals. The students were mainly seated and the practitioner, who seemed fairly confident and delightful, overlooked grammar and pronunciation mistakes at all times.

The second participant was a more experienced teacher who was going to teach grade 4 students. The students were asked to form groups of five and so they did without any confusion. It was clear that the teacher often had group work in her classes. The first activity was a knowledge contest which aimed to teach word order with questions like “What is the name of capital of Turkey?” and the students’ responses had to be in written form and syntactically correct; otherwise, no score was won. The second game was “Simon says,” a famous total physical response activity that required students to respond to give directions. The last game was “twelve,” targeted practicing numbers when students were standing in a circle. The teacher was completely in control of the activities and seemed to have developed a good rapport with the students. L1 was not allowed during all these activities and feedback was given on syntactical mistakes instantly. The teacher also presented a good figure of confidence and seemed to be pleased with her profession.

The third participant was teaching grade six and was making necessary preparations for a video lesson when we arrived at her class. When she said that they were going to watch the film “The Lion King”, I was a little perplexed because I never imagined that this film was appropriate for this age. But the teacher was so experienced in simplifying the scenario that students were eager to respond to their teacher’s questions. The teacher paused the film every ten minutes to let the students comment on whatever they saw on the screen. Many of the students seemed to have already made considerable progress in language learning. She made some corrections and portrayed a skillful and highly confident practitioner in her class. At the end of the lesson, she assigned the students to write a summary of the film. The observers found that observation notes had quite a number of commonalities and the participant successfully had integrated the listening, speaking and writing skills.

When we arrived at the school next day, we were informed that one of the participants would not come to school due to personal reasons, so we were invited by another participant to a grade 4 class. The objective of the lesson was to practice Simple Past, and the participant asked each student to talk about their previous day. The students were quite good at using irregular verbs for this level. Despite her obvious
excitement due to our presence in the class, the participant, a teacher with two years of teaching experience, actively encouraged and motivated the seated students to ask further questions to and interact with the speaker. When the students acted diffidently, she herself assumed a participatory role by asking genuine questions. Occasionally she had eye contact with the researchers asking for approval of what she was doing. She used L2 all the time and in no way were the students allowed to speak Turkish.

In the afternoon we were planning to observe the sixth participant, but when we encountered her in the corridor just before the lesson, she asked us not to join her class since she felt rather tired and it might not be a very active lesson and apologized for not keeping her promise.

To sum up, the four participants who were observed during actual classes mainly followed methodologies advocated by the communicative approach and focused on speaking activities, which motivated students to participate actively. Student-centered activities dominated all the classes, relegating teachers to facilitator role. Moreover, the participants seemed to spend a lot of energy, a fact frequently mentioned by in-service teachers in their responses to the open-ended question. Furthermore, the participants all showed understanding to the students’ little misdemeanors, generally overlooked their minor errors that did not prevent comprehension, and smiled most of the time. Comfortable with class management issues and having established routines, the participants had confidence in themselves and displayed their personal characteristics effectively.

4. Discussion

The data in this study revealed that Turkish in-service teachers and pre-service teachers differed considerably in the extent of their beliefs. Even the items that were agreed upon by the majority of two groups did not produce a convergence over 90%. The in-service teachers scored 13% higher on average in the 34 items they agreed or strongly agreed, the difference sometimes running as high as 31%. The differences between the groups for the factors (Children’s English Development, Methods and Techniques, and Self-efficacy) were 11%, 12%, and 19%, respectively. The greatest difference in self-efficacy showed that in-service teachers had a stronger sense of self-efficacy. The gap can be attributed to pre-service teachers’ inexperience and thus feelings of insecurity.

Of the six items the pre-service teachers score higher than the in-service teachers, three items concerned children’s development, two self-efficacy, and only one method and techniques. For example, almost 67% of the pre-service teachers believed that male and female students develop English proficiency at different rates and respond to instruction differently, while only 50% of the in-service teachers stated so. Also, 11% more pre-service teachers believed that every child can learn English well. In addition, the pre-service teachers believed in the importance of pronunciation more and that of memorization less. It was interesting that less than 40% of both groups believed grade 1 to be the best age to start learning English, the rest either disagreeing or remaining neutral.

Responses to the open-ended question revealed discrepancies as well. While the pre-service teachers ranked professional competence highest in importance for a successful language teacher, personal traits were deemed most important for the in-service teachers. The in-service teachers also valued student-centered teaching more. A finding that corroborates a result of Liao’s study was that pre-service teachers never mentioned physical readiness required by a successful teacher, a fact that became obvious during the observations: teaching at elementary schools requires energetic teachers. Previous research found that novice teachers focused on maintaining the flow of instructional activity (Akyel 1997 cited in Atay, Kasioglu, & Kurt, 2010). In a similar vein, pre-service teachers might be paying more attention to the flow of the lesson than to displaying their personal traits or placing students in the center.

Interviews could help clarify the differences between the two groups’ responses, so future researchers may incorporate them into the study for further triangulation. Also, beliefs of teachers from private and
state schools could be compared. These lines of research can provide further insight into teachers’ beliefs in their English teaching.

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References


