An Interpretive Study into Elementary School English Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Turkey

Mehmet Sercan Uztosun

University of Exeter, UK
sercanuztosun@gmail.com

Abstract

This exploratory study seeks for understanding the relationship between Turkish elementary school English teachers' espoused beliefs about the effective ways of teaching English and their self-reported practices. 6 teachers, who were working at different state schools in a town located in the Northwestern part of Turkey, were interviewed. Interpretation of the data revealed inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and practices. Although there was a strong consensus that English should be taught communicatively, all participants reported that their teaching practices mainly focus on vocabulary and grammar. A number of factors hindering this consistency were mentioned such as exam-based educational policy, time constraints and overloaded syllabus. In the light of these, this study recommends changing the focus of current English testing system to using the language communicatively and implementing an adaptable curriculum where language learning objectives will be shifted from preparing students for the examinations to improving their competences in productive skills.

Keywords: *Teachers' beliefs and practices; English as a foreign language; English language teaching in Turkey*

Introduction and Background

The status of English in Turkish educational system seems contradictory. In curriculum, developing learners' communicative skills is declared to be the main objective of English language teaching (Talim Terbiye Kurulu, 2006). However, proficiency in English is tested through examinations which only include multiple-choice questions that neglect productive skills and this leads learners to focus on getting through examinations rather than developing communicative skills.

This dichotomy is the main preoccupation of this research study aiming at understanding the main focus of English language learning and teaching in Turkey. In the push to understand this complexity, the current study deals with teachers' beliefs because beliefs are considered to be the indicators of individuals' decisions, choices and behaviours (Borg, 2001; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Pajaras, 1992). This is because beliefs are seen as the basis of action (Borg, 2011) and understanding teachers' beliefs potentially provide profound insight into several aspects of teacher's professional world (Gahin, 2001). Wedell (2009) underlined the role of teacher's beliefs in implementing a change in educational system and asserted that teacher's beliefs should be an integral part of educational changes.

In the light of these, Rokeach (1968) defines beliefs as the best indicators of the decision made by individuals in the course of their lifetime. Richardson (2003) approaches 'beliefs' in a broader perspective and underlines its role in addressing individual's understanding, premise or proposition about the world around us.

In the light of the findings of previous studies on teachers' beliefs, Calderhead (1996) suggested five areas of teacher's beliefs: *beliefs about learners and learning, beliefs about teaching, beliefs about subject, beliefs about learning to teach,* and *beliefs about self and the teaching role.* According to Calderhead, these issues could be interrelated where teachers' beliefs about subject, for instance, may be closely related to their beliefs about teaching.

In this study, three of these areas were addressed - *beliefs about subject, beliefs about learning* and *beliefs about teaching.* Firstly, concerning teachers' beliefs about the subject, there are three theoretical views of language in the literature: *structural view, functional view* and *interactional view.* The first one refers to four aspects of language including phonological units (e.g., phonemes), grammatical units (e.g., clauses, phrases, sentences), grammatical operations (e.g., adding, shifting, joining, transforming elements), and lexical items (e.g., function words and structure words) (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Secondly, functional view (communicative view) addresses the role of language as a tool for expression of functional meaning. Interactional view, on the other hand, sees language "as a vehicle for realisation of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individual" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986:17).

Secondly, knowing the nature of learning is essential for teachers to provide appropriate learning environment where learners can achieve expected learning outcomes determined by teachers' understanding of what is learning (Williams and Burden, 1997). In identifying the conceptions of learning, Gow and Kember (1993) present six main categories that can be related to different approaches:

- A quantitative increase in knowledge
- Memorisation
- The acquisition of facts, procedure, etc. which can be retained and/or used in practice
- The abstraction of meaning
- An interpretative process aimed at the understanding of reality
- Some form of personal change

(Gow and Kember, 1993, cited in Williams and Burden, 1997:61)

Different teaching methods are proposed for these six categories of learning. These categories refer different aspects of language. For example, while the first two categories rely on grammatical and lexical items, the third one is more practical in nature. This type of learning refers to Presentation, Production and Produce (PPP) model which rely on skill-based teaching. On the other hand, 'the abstraction of meaning' and 'an interpretative process aimed at the understanding of reality' concern communicative use of language and lastly, 'some form of personal change' refers to personal development through learning to think, learning some social skills and learning about the world (Williams and Burden, 1997).

With reference to these different approaches about language, language learning and teaching, this study attempts to reveal Turkish EFL teachers' beliefs regarding epistemological issues about English: whether it is seen as a subject concerning the acquisition of grammatical structures or the means of communication. Additionally, the current study aims at profiling the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices with reference to the factors leading to consistency or inconsistency between beliefs and practices.

Teachers' beliefs and classroom practices

The process of teaching comprises two major domains: (a) teachers' thought process, (b) teachers' actions and their observable effects (Clark & Peterson, 1986). In the literature, some authors claim that teachers' practices are determined by their beliefs (e.g. Bandura, 1986: Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richards, 1998). Some previous studies also revealed parallel findings where significant relationship was found between teachers' beliefs and practices (e.g. Bai & Ertmer, 2004; Johnson, 1992; Mori, 2002; Woods, 1991).

Bai and Ertmer (2004) focused on in-service teachers' beliefs about using technology in the classroom and observed a positive relationship between their beliefs and using technology. Mori (2002) also found that teachers give corrective feedback in relation to their beliefs. Woods (1991) carried out a longitudinal study focusing on teachers' curriculum-based and student-based views of teaching and found consistency between teachers' decisions and their underlying assumptions and beliefs about language. Johnson (1992) was carried out a study in literacy context in New York. The English as a second language teacher's beliefs were investigated and their teaching practices were observed to understand whether teachers address their beliefs while teaching English. Consistency was found between teacher's beliefs and practices and teachers were observed to provide a teaching procedure relevant to their theoretical orientations.

Despite the connection revealed in the studies mentioned above, Basturkmen (2012) reviewed empirical studies within this scope and concluded that there is a limited correspondence between teacher's beliefs and practices. The studies discussed below supports this disparity.

Duffy and Anderson (1984) found that only four of eight reading teachers employed practices that reflected their beliefs. Hoffman and Kugle (1982) investigated whether teachers' types of verbal feedback are related to their beliefs about reading and no significant relationship was found. Similarly, Yim (1993, cited in Gahin, 2001) focused on grammar teaching from a communicative orientation and found no consistency between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. Another study was carried out by Karavas (1993, cited in Gahin, 2001) who investigated the consistency between teachers' beliefs and practices in Greece. He found that teachers' classroom practices are not congruent with their beliefs, which was highly communicative. Young and Sachdev (2011) focused on teachers' beliefs about the application of a model of intercultural communicative competence. They involved experienced English language teachers from the USA, UK and France. The data, which was collected through diary, focus groups and questionnaires, illustrated disconnection between teachers' beliefs and their current classroom priorities.

Gahin (2001) conducted a research study within the same scope in Egyptian context. The findings of the data, which was collected through questionnaire, interviews and classroom observations, illustrated that the majority of teachers' espoused beliefs mismatched their classroom behaviours and different factors were discussed as possible reasons for this inconsistency such as larger classes, lack of resources, workload, time constraints and low pay.

Another study, which was carried out in Thailand, also supports Gahin's findings where the majority of teachers were observed to be more passive than their expressed beliefs (Maiklad, 2001). Similar to Gahin, external factors were discussed such as lack of resources, overload contents to teach, students' and teachers' conditions, societal expectations, exam-based assessment and the unofficial role of English in Thailand.

This concern of investigating the relationship between teacher's beliefs and practices also becomes the impetus of some research studies conducted in Turkey. The results were conflicting: while some studies found a connection between teacher's beliefs and practices (e.g. Caner et al., 2010: Hatipoglu, 2006), others revealed a disconnection (e.g. Seban, 2008; Uzuntiryaki et al., 2010).

In their case study focusing on the learner-centeredness in Turkish context, Hatipoğlu (2006) found a strong relationship between beliefs and practice. She observed that teachers present an appropriate classroom environment to their beliefs about learner-centred learning. Caner et al. (2010) investigated teachers' beliefs about foreign language teaching practices in Turkey. The study focused on the early phases of primary education. The school did not seem a regular type of Turkish primary school because it offered English classes at the first three years, which was not the case in Turkish educational exam. This study involved two English language teachers and the data was collected through questionnaire and observation. The results showed that the teachers provided relevant teaching procedures to their reported beliefs.

Seban (2008) carried out a qualitative research study in Turkey and investigated the relationship between primary class teachers' beliefs about teaching writing and their instructional practices and found inconsistency between teachers' practices and self-reported beliefs. Uzuntiryaki et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study aiming at exploring Chemistry pre-service teacher's beliefs about constructivism and understanding whether there is parity between their beliefs and practices. The findings showed no clear connection between beliefs and practice, in that classroom practices did parallel the constructivist elements with the issues suggested in interviews.

Taken together, these contrary findings show that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practices is still debatable. In response to this intriguing complexity, this study attempts to profile English language teachers' beliefs about the ideal foreign language teaching environment in Turkey and understand whether English language teaching is informed by teachers' beliefs.

The status of English in Turkey

Two motivation types seem predominant for Turkish learners in learning English: integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation concerns the interest to a foreign language shown in a society (Lambert, 1974, cited in Gardner and MacIntrye, 1991). In Turkey, English is seen as a world language and many people struggle to learn it effectively because knowing English means to be distinct from other people. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, refers to "the practical value and advantages of learning a new language" (Lambert, 1974: 98). This role of English is also emphasised by Ministry of National Education (MEB) stating that "teaching and learning of English are highly encouraged as English has become the lingua franca, namely, the means of communication among people with different native languages" (Talim Terbiye Kurulu, 2006: 16).

The curriculum of English teaching in Turkey shows that there are attempts to follow the current trends in English language learning and teaching fields. However, the status of a foreign language in a country cannot solely be identified according to the theoretical views but it is also important to know what types of testing procedures are offered to test learners' proficiencies. Considering these two issues, in essence, there is a big dilemma, in that teachers are expected to develop students' productive skills and the proficiencies of learners are tested through structure-based examinations.

This approach of neglecting productive skills makes it a perennial problem to learn how to use language effectively because learners do not need to develop their productive skills to prove their proficiencies in English. When the structures of language tests are examined, (e.g. Secondary School

Placement test (SBS), Foreign language test (YDS), Foreign language proficiency examination for state employees (KPDS) and Foreign language proficiency examination of Interuniversity committee (ÜDS)), it is clear that they do not test learners' proficiencies in using the language but solely include multiple-choice items that address learners' competencies in reading, vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, Turkish learners of English aim at getting through these examinations rather than developing productive skills, and hence, many learners know the structures of English thoroughly but cannot speak or write in English even at basic level.

The sample of the current study included teachers whose students would take SBS to be enrolled in secondary education. SBS is administered centrally by MEB and students who have just completed 8th grades are invited to take the exam. It includes 80 multiple-choice types of questions in five different disciplines: Turkish, Mathematics, Science, Social Science and Foreign Language. Foreign language is offered in four different languages: English, German, French, and Italian. English was the foreign language of the schools where this study was carried out. English test includes thirteen multiple choice questions which concern students' lexical and grammatical knowledge.

The aforementioned disconnection between communicative theoretical standings of policy makers and accuracy-based conceptualisation of good language learner is the main concern of the current study. In doing so, with reference to teachers' beliefs, this study aims at understanding whether teaching procedures are designed according to the theoretical approaches proposed by MEB or to the content of language tests.

Methodology

Research framework

This study is informed by the interpretive paradigm. According to the ontological perspective of this paradigm, "reality is socially and discursively constructed by human actors" (Grix, 2004: 61), and therefore, social world cannot be explored but understood because it is dependent on the social actors which cannot be generalised to other contexts. Interpretivists believe that knowledge is something personal, subjective and unique (Cohen et al., 2007). This epistemological position leads to studies aiming at revealing individuals' world views which may result in understanding the social world. For that reason, individuals' beliefs, values and attitudes are one of the focal points of interpretive studies.

Echoing these, the impetus of this enquiry is to understand teachers' beliefs and practices with particular attention to their individual viewpoints. In this respect, it is intended to provide an insight into the social context through discussing the congruency between teachers' espoused beliefs and classroom practices.

Purpose of the study

The current study attempts to profile whether Turkish in-service English teachers' espoused beliefs are congruent with their classroom practices. Parallel to this, it is attempted to understand the role of teachers' beliefs in providing particular kind of teaching procedure.

To address these issues, this paper reports findings to the following research questions:

1. What are Turkish elementary English teachers' beliefs about the effective ways of teaching English?
2. What are Turkish elementary English teachers' beliefs about their current practices?
3. What are the reasons for connection or disconnection between teachers' beliefs and practices?

Participants

MEB made significant changes in the structure of Turkish educational system in 2012. The compulsory education was increased from 8 to 12 years and divided into three phases each of which involves four years of schooling. However, since the participants experienced the old educational system, it is worth discussing its structure to understand the backgrounds of participants and their students. In the old Turkish educational system, elementary education was compulsory and involved two phases. The first phase comprised five years of schooling and the other three years encompassed the second phase.
In Turkey, teachers working at state schools have to follow the syllabi and use materials which are designed by MEB. Students take 3 hours English classes per week in the first phase and 4 hours in the second phase.

The participants of this study include 6 teachers of English working at elementary state schools in a town located in the Northwest part of Turkey. The current study was carried out in that town because of its accessibility to the researcher. The population of the town is 39.000 and it has seven secondary and twelve elementary state schools.

Four elementary schools were selected. School A and C are located in the city centre where families have higher socio-economic backgrounds compared to other schools (see Table 1). Random sampling was used in selecting the participants. Although 8 teachers were invited, two teachers were not available due to administrative commitments. The biographic information of participants is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. The Biographic Information of the Participants

Code	Gender	Degree	Years of Experience	School
T1	Female	B.A	2	A
T2	Female	B.A	1	A
T3	Female	B.A.	1	B
T4	Male	B.A	15	C
T5	Male	B.A	10	C
T6	Female	B.A.	2	D

As displayed in Table 1, all participants hold bachelor degrees. While four teachers were novice teachers, two teachers had more than 10 years of teaching experience.

Data collection and analysis

Research studies show that beliefs can be investigated quantitatively or qualitatively. In quantitative studies, researchers generally use surveys and implement pre-identified scales to check correlations between variables. One of the most commonly used scales is Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI).

Using quantitative methods to investigate beliefs receives criticism because "they are not suitable for examination of issues that require reflective thinking owing to the pre-categorized nature of the questions" (Maiklad, 2001: 74). Quantitative methods "only measure beliefs in theory and not actual occasions of talk and writing" (Kalaja, 1995: 197). Using quantitative methods is useful in reaching larger data set and conducting statistical analyses to check differences between variables but

limitative in providing in-depth data. However, to understand beliefs, it is significant to address the reasons behind them. Therefore, using qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, narrative writing, and journal keeping seem more appropriate to investigate beliefs because they can yield in-depth data. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to collect data through observing teachers' classroom behaviours. For that reason, rather than teachers' observed practices, their self-reported practices were addressed in this study.

Interview was used as a data collection tool. Interview is an effective method in understanding complex and deep issues (Cohen et al., 2007) and regarded as a major research tool to explore how interviewees interpret their world and make sense of their experiences (Brown & Dowling, 1998). The interview was semi-structured. This type of interview allows for flexible and natural conversational environment as it includes general themes rather than specific questions (Borg, 2006).

After selecting the prospective participants, I contacted school administrators to explain the scope my research study and asked for permission to interview teachers. Afterwards, I informed the teachers about my study and invited them to sign an informed consent form. In this form, the objectives of the study were explained and participants were informed that the participation was on voluntary basis. Participants were assured that any information they gave would be solely used for the research purposes and their anonymity would be preserved. Before data collection, I asked interviewees' permission for audio recording. During the data collection, no questions were directed which were not committed to personal privacy and which might cause harm, detriment and unreasonable stress during the interviews. The data was only stored in researcher's computer and audio files were deleted after transcription for the sake of participants' personal privacies.

Interview themes were identified with reference to three main areas of teachers' beliefs proposed in the literature: *beliefs about teaching*, *beliefs about subject* and *beliefs about self and the teaching role* (Calderhead, 1996). Interviewees were asked to explain their beliefs about the effective ways of language learning, teaching and their current teaching practices. The interviews were conducted in Turkish and lasted around 17 minutes.

Regarding the data analysis, the data was transcribed verbatim and the themes and interpretations were coded and categories were constructed considering the recurring themes in interview protocols.

Pilot Study

The pilot study was carried out with an English teacher working at an elementary state school in order to avoid possible problems which might occur in the main study. The analysis of the interview showed that the predetermined themes were useful in revealing teachers' beliefs and understanding the reason behind particular beliefs and practices.

Findings and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the data revealed that teachers were in agreement about the function of language. All participants supported that using the target language communicatively should be the main objective of foreign language learning. This showed that teachers are in line with curriculum designers.

On the other hand, this study found that teachers' practices were not congruent with their beliefs because all participants remarked that their opinions about ideal teaching did not match their teaching practices. They confirmed that they only focused on structural forms of the target language.

This finding supports the findings of some previous studies where no consistency was observed between teachers' beliefs and practices (e.g. Duffy & Anderson, 1984; Gahin, 2001: Hoffman & Kugle, 1982; Karavas, 1993; Maiklad, 2001; Seban, 2008; Uzuntiryaki et al., 2010; Yim, 1993; Young and Sachdev, 2011).

This disconnection was reported to be the main factor reducing participants' satisfaction of their teaching: *'If I were a student here, I would consider myself as I did not know English'* (T1). Table 2 illustrates the categories of answers. The number of interviewees that mentioned the categories is shown in parentheses.

Table 2. Teachers' Beliefs about Ideal ways of teaching English and Current Practices

Ideal	**Practice**	
Speaking (6)	Exam-driven (4)	Reading (3)
All four skills (2)	Disregarding other skills (4)	Translation (2)
Using different resources (1)	Following the course book (4)	Writing (1)
	Vocabulary (3)	Pronunciation (1)
		Speaking (1)

Effective ways of teaching English

All participants agreed that English should be learned communicatively and the main objective should be improving students' speaking skills because *'you cannot consider yourself that you know a foreign language unless you can speak in that language'* (T1). According to another participant, *'it is not very important if you do not know how to write in English. The important thing is communication. Therefore, students should develop their speaking skills'* (T4).

The quotes illustrate that all participants considered language as a tool for communication. For that reason, they remarked that improving students' speaking skills should be the main concern of English language teachers. Besides speaking, some teachers stated that teachers should aim at developing students' all four skills including reading, writing, speaking and listening:

"Language is integrated. Therefore, all skills should be included in teaching process. It is meaningless for students to focus on one or two skills." [T3]

These quotes showed that participants were aware of the functions of language as a communication tool because learning a foreign language requires using it effectively. This supported that they followed the current trends in the field.

Current teaching practices

Despite their communicative perspectives, all participants remarked that they could not provide teaching procedure appropriate to their beliefs. They confirmed that they only focused on reading, grammar and vocabulary because students' main objective in learning English was to get through SBS because English success was based on their performances in this examination:

"We are teaching English according to the SBS exam. Therefore, students are currently studying on multiple-choice tests and we aimed at teaching how to answer these questions

correctly. They are trying to memorise everything. For that reason, I believe that English is not taught thoroughly." [T1]

As a result of this exam-based educational policy, participants declared that they disregarded other language skills: '*We generally focus on vocabulary items because vocabulary is very important in the exam'* (T2). Another point about the current practices was the overreliance on the course books: '*You have to follow the course book because SBS is designed according to the topics and vocabulary covered in textbooks'* (T3). In this vein, there was a consensus that their practices mainly relied on reading and vocabulary. Additionally, two participants stated that they used translation as a teaching method:

"In pre-service education, lecturers suggested us not to use mother tongue while teaching English. But it is not possible to put this into practice. Students do not understand anything when you do not translate. All students try to translate and if they cannot understand, they ask me to translate. [T2]*"*

Only one interviewee reported that he was trying to refer to all four skills and *'pay attention to students' pronunciation, present listening and speaking activities where necessary and give importance to their writing skills'* (T4).

These comments supported that current teaching practices mismatch theoretical approaches proposed by MEB. Teachers are expected to follow a communicative teaching environment but different reasons seemed to obstruct this. This impracticality of educational reforms in Turkey was also addressed in a research study carried out by Grossman et al. (2007) with the aim of understanding teacher educators' attitudes towards curriculum reform implemented in National Educational Development Project (NEDP). The analysis of the survey revealed that 49.5% of 78 teacher educators agreed that educational leaders are not sincere about wanting to reform education and 72.9 % of 124 respondents thought that education in Turkey is too political. With regard to the overall satisfaction about NEDP project, 82.8% of 157 participants reported that it does not meet its overall goals.

The findings of this study confirmed the disconnection between curriculum designers' theories and teachers' classroom behaviours. Considering this, the practicality of theoretical frameworks proposed by policy makers seems problematic. To unpack this complexity, policy makers should not disregard the characteristics of classroom environment, which is essential for designing an implementable curriculum.

Reasons for the disconnection between beliefs and practice

With regard to reasons underpinning this disconnection, as displayed in Table 3, different factors were reported to be influencing teachers' decision-making in teaching English.

Table 3. Reasons for the disconnection between teachers' beliefs and practices

Reasons	
Time constraints	(5)
Overload Syllabus	(4)
Preparing for the exam	(4)
Lack of resources	(4)
Large classes	(3)
Course book	(3)
The status of English	(2)

In this study, time constraints, over loaded syllabus, preparing for the exam and lack of resources were reported to be the main reasons for providing structure-based English language teaching. Some of these factors parallel the findings revealed in some previous studies. Gahin (2001) also referred time constraints and Maiklad (2001) mentioned overload contents to teach, large classes, the status of English and exam-based assessment as factors leading to disconnection between teacher's beliefs and practices.

All participants agreed that, the syllabus was too overloaded to complete in a term: `*When you include extra activities, it is not possible to cover the topics in the syllabus'* (T6). In this respect, one participant pointed out a dilemma that they go through:

"You need to decide, whether to include all activities in the course book and not to worry about completing the syllabus or skip some activities in the course book to complete the syllabus." [T4]

These quotes showed that teachers did not think that the curriculum was implementable because it included topics which were difficult to cover in one term. To overcome this, all participants agreed that 3 and 4 hours of English classes were very limited and they suggested increasing class hours: *'If I had 9 or 10 hours English classes, I believe I could teach English very effectively'* (T2).

Exam-driven policy was seen as another reason which affected their teaching procedure, students' expectations and attitudes towards English learning: *'When you ask students to speak, they ask you to hand out tests so that they can study for the examination'* (T1). Another participant stated that *'when I correct students' pronunciation mistakes, they said that they do not need to pronounce correctly for the exam'* (T3). This also affected students' attitudes towards learning English: *'Their main concern is getting high scores in the exam'* (T6). For that reason, teachers tended to skip activities which referred to students' productive skills and they only focus on vocabulary and grammar. This was because the content of SBS included all topics covered in the course books. This obstructs presenting different activities and the course book was followed all the time so that students would be ready for the exam by the end of the year.

Lack of resources was another problematic issue which reported to affect teachers' current practices. Some participants stated that they did not receive the CDs, and therefore, they either skipped listening activities or read aloud the typescripts. This decreases the effectiveness of listening activities because students could not listen to native speakers. For that reason, it is important to provide audios which will enable students to get familiar with native accent of the target language. Additionally, concerns were voiced about the large classes: *'It is not possible to present speaking activities because some classes have 30 students'* (T4).

The structure of course books was mentioned as another factor. The majority of participants agreed that course books are effective in terms of including different activities for developing different skills. However, as discussed above, due to students' expectations and time constraints, they stated that it was not possible to carry out all activities. On the other hand, two participants believed that the level of course books were not suitable for students because they had to cope with very difficult grammatical rules and vocabularies especially in the 8th grade:

"Course books can be effective in theory but authors do not consider students' and teachers' psychologies. Topics and activities are too difficult for students and therefore, they get bored while studying English." [T5]

The same teacher also remarked that teachers did not have chance to take initiative:

"In the past, I was doing my daily and annual plans. I was writing the objectives of each topic by myself. But now, top-down plans are designed by MEB. Everything we do in classrooms is pre-determined." [T5]

The status of English in Turkey was considered as another influential factor for teachers' practices. Some participants stated that using language was not important in Turkey. Therefore, developing speaking skills was not emphasized in any educational level.

Implications

This study aims at understanding teachers' espoused beliefs about the effective ways of teaching English and revealing the relationship between their beliefs and practices. In doing so, it is intended to identify factors determining teachers' practices in teaching English. Although this was an exploratory case study, the findings allow generating some pedagogical recommendations.

The current study showed that teachers believe in the essentiality of teaching English communicatively. This shows that teachers support the theoretical approaches proposed by curriculum designers. However, despite their communicative perspective, teachers remarked that their current practices solely rely on grammar and vocabulary. This illustrates the disconnection between teachers' beliefs and practices and this is reported to be detrimental to teacher satisfaction because teachers reported that they were not satisfied with their current practices. To overcome this, it is important to understand the reasons for the disconnection between teachers' beliefs and practices in order to avoid factors obstructing teachers to present classroom environment appropriate to their beliefs.

It is seen that the theoretical approaches proposed by curriculum designers are not implemented in classroom. While the objectives of English language teaching are declared to be developing students' all four skills, teachers reported that they only focus on developing students' grammatical and lexical competencies. This disconnection illustrates that there is a problem about the implementability of the English language teaching curriculum in Turkey.

In designing curriculum, taking the classroom practice into account is essential because it is not viable to expect teachers to teach English communicatively while students do not need to communicate in English to prove their competencies. In this respect, the focus of exam system should be changed to using the language communicatively because this study shows that testing tools play important role in teacher's classroom decision-making. Therefore, not only learners' grammatical knowledge but also different competences should be addressed in language tests so that students have a reason to develop productive skills.

Additionally, concerns have been voiced regarding the overloaded syllabus. Teachers remarked that their first duty is to cover all topics included in course books rather than designing appropriate teaching procedure to the needs of the students. For that reason, it may be more effective to design adaptable syllabi where teachers can select appropriate activities according to the needs of their students. In doing so, there was a strong consensus that English language class hours should be increased so that teachers can have time to refer students' productive skills as well.

Another concern was about the lack of teaching resources. Considering the nature of foreign language in terms of representing real life situations, it is important for students to deal with

authentic materials. To address this, appropriate materials should be provided to teachers. Large classes were another problem reported by participants. This is rather important issue because learning a language requires findings the opportunity to use it. Therefore, each student should be involved in language classes, which is very difficult to provide in classes with more than thirty students. To avoid this, language classes should have the environment where each student can use the language communicatively.

Conclusion

Considering that the current study is the first of its type focusing on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in English language teaching in Turkey, this study may contribute to the field. However, it is important to reiterate that there are some limitations of this study.

Firstly, this study did not deal with teachers' observed practices but their reported practices. Therefore, it is not certain whether participants provide relevant information in interviews about their real teaching practices. For that reason, further research studies are required within the scope of investigating the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their observed practices. Secondly, this study did not involve participants from different contexts and findings may not be generalisable to other contexts. It is therefore necessary to conduct research studies involving schools and teachers from different contexts in Turkey. Thirdly, this study focused on teachers' perspectives. To understand the situation in-depth, it is essential to involve other stakeholders such as policy-makers, curriculum designers, course book writers and students. Lastly, this study reported the data collected through one method. To support these findings, it is essential to investigate the issue by implementing different data collection tools.

No study was carried out in Turkish context investigating the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in English language teaching field and enquiries within this scope are useful to portray the educational focus of teacher practices. To unlock this unvoiced issue, further research studies in different fields of education should be devoted to understand Turkish teachers' beliefs and practices and explore whether theoretical approaches proposed by policy makers are addressed in classrooms.

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