THE EFFECTS OF PRACTICUM PRACTICE ON TURKISH PRESERVICE EFL TEACHERS' BELIEF SYSTEMS

Research article

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Abstract

Researches related to teacher cognition have regained momentum over the years, and related problems have been studied from different perspectives. Studies concerning the belief systems of Turkish preservice teachers in the English as a foreign language (EFL) domain are existent but insufficient. This study tries to add to the existent literature by examining the changes in belief systems of Turkish EFL preservice teachers during a 14-week practicum practice. To this end, a case study was carried out at a public university in Turkey. The reflection reports of 53 preservice teachers, which were written both at the beginning and the end of the practicum practice, were analyzed using content analysis. The results revealed that certain changes in participants' belief systems appeared during the practicum practice. The changes clustered around five main categories: the use of mother tongue in language instruction, the affective aspect of teaching, teaching mechanism, the use of technology in language instruction, and the relationship between theory and practice. We discuss the results in relation to the related literature and provide implications along with suggestions.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, teacher education, preservice teachers, teacher cognition

1. Introduction

The process of learning a language has many facets and is influenced by a variety of factors, including those related to the student, such as individual differences, background, or attitudes toward the language, or those related to the teacher, such as pedagogical or linguistic competencies, experiences with teaching languages, or beliefs about language teaching. Though the focus of English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction is typically on the learners, teachers undoubtedly play an important role in this complex process. Trying to understand EFL teachers' cognition and belief systems is valuable in that it will sure help us to understand the foreign language learning and teaching process better.

Belief systems are dynamic and built with time and experience. One of the steps involved in the construction of EFL teachers' belief systems is the practicum practice which serves to prepare preservice students for classrooms with the aim of improving their teaching

skills, competencies and awareness in language teaching (Gebhard, 2009; Kagan, 1992; Tüfekçi Can & Baştürk, 2018). Understandably, related studies show that practicum as a first step of teaching shoulders the significant part of teachers' competency for their future experiences (Fang, 1996; Gan, 2014; Gebhard, 2009; Qiu, Xie, Xiong, & Zhou, 2021; Yuan & Lee, 2014). Practicum enables preservice teachers both to enhance their teaching knowledge and skills and to transfer their teaching skills into practice within a structured context and under supervision (Iaochite & Costa Filho, 2016).

Yet, practicum is not particularly related to its function as a bridge between theory and practice. It is also a significant step in which students' attitudes towards language and their perspectives, beliefs or experiences about the teaching profession and teaching experience may change. As Taylor and Littleton (2006) point out, preservice teachers continually reconstruct their perceptions and beliefs of the teaching profession as well as their understanding of the tasks of teaching since they are learning to teach. In this regard, practicum experiences of preservice teachers are thought to provide decisive clues about their teaching beliefs. Accordingly, Zeichner (1980) claims that both informal and formal experiences are 'socialization influences' and emphasizes that teachers' teaching at schools are more powerful in impacting teachers' beliefs than their formal university experiences. These discussions construct the main framework of the current study, and we aim to analyze the changes in preservice EFL teachers' beliefs systems about teaching English during practicum practices.

2. Literature Review

The cognitive and instructional practices, change and learning to teach, beliefs as conceptual portrayals that signal a reality, truth, or trustworthiness to its holder are crucial issues of language teaching (Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Zheng, 2009). Kagan (1992) defines teacher beliefs as implicit assumptions related to teaching constituents such as students, learning environment, and subject matter. As a substructure of one's general belief system and colored by former experience, teachers' beliefs which influence how teachers react to situations, what choices they make, and what strategies they adopt underlie planning, decision making, and behavior of teachers in the classroom (Löfström & Poom-Valickis, 2013; Zheng, 2009). In general, teacher beliefs consist of a set of beliefs about the general educational field and subject-specific content (Borg, 2009). Calderhead (1996) classifies teachers' beliefs into five main categories as beliefs about the learning process including learners, about teaching process, about subjects or curriculum, about learning to teach, and about self and teaching role. Accordingly, an in-depth analysis of practicum in terms of teachers' beliefs both contributes to the professional development of preservice teachers and draws remarkable attention to the role of their past experiences and individual differences. More specifically, understanding the beliefs of preservice teachers is of great importance since changes in teachers' behaviors is only possible with changes in their personal beliefs (Kagan, 1992).

The teacher education programs generally offer both theoretical and practical courses to prepare preservice students for real classrooms practices. The theoretical courses are epitomized by practicum which mirrors preservice teachers' pedagogical and personal changes. Researches related to the effects of practicum practices in EFL preservice teacher education

programs are not abundant in specific but generic studies show that practicum is the key component of teacher education and the nature of learning and teaching as well as familiarization with classroom routines, techniques and skills are efficiently recognized through practicum (Barton, Hartwig, & Cain, 2015; Johnson, 1994; Woods, 1996).

In a longitudinal study, which is related to our research concern, Mattheoudakis (2007) investigated the belief systems of preservice EFL teachers in Greece. The study, which lasted three years, focused on the impact of teaching practice on the participants' beliefs about teaching. She observed that, in general, engagement in teaching practice had no significant effects on preservice teachers' belief systems. Nevertheless, there were some specific significant changes. For example, she observed that when preservice teachers go through actual classroom experiences, their beliefs about the primacy of teaching grammar becomes stronger.

Reynolds et al., (2021) collected data through written reflection reports and focused on the beliefs of preservice pre-primary EFL teachers. The results of their study revealed preservice belief systems under several categories such as: classroom practice, EFL learners and learning, pedagogical knowledge, teaching, content, goals of language teaching, the role of teaching, subject, schooling, hearsay, self, learning to teach, and the teacher education program. Even though their study encompasses belief systems of EFL preservice teachers, change was not their primary concern.

There are others studies in the related literature focusing on changes triggered by practicum practice in preservice teachers' perspectives (Debreli, 2016; Peacock, 2001; Qiu et al., 2021; Yuan & Lee, 2014). In their longitudinal study in which pretest and posttest questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and reflective journals were employed to explore belief change, Qiu et al. (2021) found that significant belief changes occurred after the three-month teaching practicum within the experimental group in terms of student management, teaching evaluation, and student learning. In line with this study's primary purpose, Chaaban et al. (2019) investigated preservice teachers' roles and beliefs changes during ten-week practicum experience and concluded that preservice teachers' initial beliefs underwent subtle changes about their roles as future teachers.

In the Turkish context, preservice EFL teachers' belief system has been addressed in a couple of studies. Ataş (2022), for instance, found changes concerning "…questioning selves as teachers, teaching profession in general, use of technology in the classroom, using teaching techniques, and classroom management." (p. 280). In another recent study, İlerten et al. (2023) explored preservice EFL teachers' reflections about the practicum practice during COVID-19, and they emphasized the need for further modifications in the EFL practicum practices. Tüfekçi Can and Baştürk (2018) explored the ELT preservice teachers' opinions about practicum, and the results showed that practicum gave a remarkable chance to (re)consider what teaching and learning entail from the perspective of practice schoolteachers and teacher trainers, and to re(assess) their self-evaluation of their performance and it was a way of building new identity as an EFL teacher.

The related literature emphasizes and obvious contribution of practicum practices in exploring preservice teachers' development and changes in their belief system from different perspectives. As Borg (2009) claims, the recognition that we cannot effectively comprehend teachers and teaching without knowing the thoughts, knowledge, and beliefs that impact teachers' actions has been crucial to the advancement of teacher cognition research. The related literature also suggests that further and more contextual studies are needed to reach analytical generalization concerning the effects of practicum practices on preservice EFL teachers' belief systems. With this orientation in mind, the following research question is the main concern of the current study:

How does practicum practice affect preservice EFL teachers' belief systems concerning foreign language teaching?

3. Method

The current study was carried out with a qualitative research paradigm. A case study was conducted in an EFL teacher education program at a public university in Turkey. Data were collected through reflection reports (RR), first and second for each participant, and were analyzed through content analysis with an inductive approach. The details of the process are provided below.

3.1. Study group

The current study was conducted at a teacher training program at a public university in Turkey during a practicum course that lasted for 14 weeks. The preservice teacher practicum course at this university, which is the main concern of the current study, has two dimensions. The first dimension is theoretical, and it is managed by teacher trainers who are members of the faculty of education. The second dimension is related to the practical aspect of the practicum and is managed by the administrators and the teachers at specific public high schools in the same district; the administrators and the teachers in these schools have practicum training.

The preservice teachers who are involved in this official practicum course attended theoretical lectures for two hours at the university and practiced teaching for six hours a week in the specified high schools. The theoretical sessions involved both theoretical aspects of teaching and learning and discussions related to the teaching practice of the teacher candidates, while the practice sessions mainly focused on the practical aspects of the language teaching and learning process.

In total, 53 undergraduate students participated in the study. At the time of the current study, the participants were continuing their teacher training program. The ages of the participants varied from 23 to 28 ($\bar{x}$= 24), and most of them were females (n_m= 11; n_f= 42).

3.2. Data Collection

At the beginning of the practicum course, the preservice group mentioned above were informed about the nature of the study and were clearly told that participation was not

mandatory; all the members of the group agreed to participate in the study. In the second week of the course, the participants were asked to write reflection reports about what they thought about teaching English as a foreign language in general; they were not prompted nor directed to write about certain aspects of the teaching and learning process, but rather they were left to their own devices to decide on which aspect of the process they were going to dwell on. The prompt was as follows:

Please write your thoughts on teaching English as a foreign language. Your views should include aspects such as teaching English as a foreign language, how you teach English (the way you teach English), and why you prefer to teach English this way. You are not supposed to write a scientific report; just express your own ideas.

The first writing session took one hour and was performed during a lecture hour and in one sitting. At the end of the practicum course, which lasted for 14 weeks, the participants were asked the same question and the procedures were carried out in the same manner as in the first session. At the end of each session, the participants were asked to transcribe their written productions and email them to the researchers. At this stage, each participant was appointed a numerical code to make further referencing easier.

3.3. Data Analysis

When talking about qualitative research paradigm, it is often stated that, unlike with the quantitative paradigm, there are no solid and clear-cut steps with the qualitative research paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Still, we cannot deny that there are conventional steps that can be used during the analysis process. For example, (Dörnyei, 2007) suggests the following steps in the process: "(a) transcribing the data, (b) pre-coding and coding, (c) growing ideas-memos, vignettes, profiles, and other forms of data display, and (d) interpreting the data and drawing conclusions." These steps were adapted by (Ünaldi, Kaçmaz, & Baykara, 2021) as follows:

Step 1: Research team discussions

Step 2: Planning

Step 3: Sampling of the participants

Step 4: Administering the interview

Step 5: Transcription

Step 6: Pre-coding and coding the data

Step 7: Research team discussions about the themes that emerged

Step 8: Interpreting and drawing conclusions

In the coding stage of the current study, an inductive approach was taken. In this type of approach, "…the researcher relies on views of participants, and discusses their views within the context in which they occur, to inductively develop ideas in a study from particulars to abstractions." (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 298). In the process, the transcriptions, both first and second RRs of the participants, were read at least twice by the researchers. During these readings, the researchers looked for patterns related to the changes that took place during the practicum sessions.

Subsequently, the two RRs of each participant were checked against each other to ascertain the trajectory of changes that took place during the process. These points were taken notes by the researchers to be used in the analysis stage. For example, the following statement is an excerpt from the RR of one of the participants: *"...my initial thoughts about the practicum were completely overwritten by my three months inter-teacher experience. The way I expected it to be inside the classroom and the way it really turned out to be, were unanticipated by me."* This excerpt could be a foreshadower of participants' beliefs about the teacher training program, or the relationship between theory and practice.

As mentioned before, each participant had two RRs, one written before the practicum sessions and one written at the end of the term after all the sessions ended. During the analysis stage, each participant's RRs, both before and after, were analyzed together in unity. The emerging categories and themes were noted, and they were compared with the categories and themes that emerged from other RRs.

3.4. Ethical Consent of the Research

Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Human Research Ethics Committee approved that the research was ethically convenient. (Human Studies Ethics Comittee/Protocol NO. 2022.12.354. Date: 30.12.2022).

Ethics committee consent information

Name of the committee that made the ethical evaluation: Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Human Research Ethics Committee

Date of ethical evaluation decision: 30.12.2022

As a result of the meeting numbered 2022/12 in the ethics evaluation document, it was decided that "There is no objection to the feasibility of the Research/Project in terms of scientific research ethics".

4. Findings and Comments

In this section, the data obtained through the reflection reports were analyzed in line with the stages of coding the data, finding the themes, organizing the codes and themes, defining and interpreting the findings.

The analyses of the RRs of the participants yielded five main themes in terms of belief changes. These themes are related to (1) the use of mother tongue (L1) in language instruction, (2) the affective domain of teaching, (3) teaching mechanism, (4) the use of technology in language instruction, and (5) the relationship between theory and practice. These themes are exhibited in Table 1.

Table 1

Emerging Themes Related to Changes in Belief Systems of Preservice EFL Teachers during the Practicum Practice

Emerging theme	Number of the participants	Percentage
Changes in beliefs about the use of L1 in lessons	19	35,85
Changes in beliefs about the affective domain of teaching	16	30,18
Changes in beliefs about teaching mechanism	13	24,25
Changes in beliefs about the use of technology in classroom	8	15,09
Changes in beliefs about the relationship between theory and practice	6	11,32

Changes in beliefs about the use of L1 in language instruction

The results of the analyses of the participants RRs clearly indicate that participants' beliefs concerning the use of L1 in lessons changed during the practicum practice. As seen in Table 1, the change in beliefs about the use of L1 while teaching English is the most common one among the participants (35%). In the RRs of the participants that were written before the practicum sessions began, most of the participants seem to have believed that their students would get maximum benefits if the teachers used a maximum amount of English while instructing. However, when they tried this principle in real classroom environments, the participants experienced a common disappointment. For example, in their RR Participant 22 clearly stated that they would maximize the use of English and minimize the use of Turkish in

the lessons by saying, "*I will try to speak English as much as I can with minimal help from Turkish. This way, they will be exposed to English, and I believe that this will help my students improve their English.*"

However, when the second RR of the same participant was analyzed, we can see a clear change in this idea. The participant wrote, "*At first, after I entered the classroom to speak only in English, and my priority was to teach English by speaking only English. But when I spoke English in a real classroom environment, I realized that the students did not understand it and I decided to explain the grammar topics in Turkish.*" Participant 24 goes through nearly the same experience; in their first RR, they stated assertively: "*I will speak English with my student most of the time. I will minimize the use of Turkish in my classes as much as possible.* However, in the second RR of the same participant, a change can be observed: "*I have found that it is useful and productive to express the key points in the lessons in Turkish, for students to understand better and to convey the subject by making it easier with visual aids.*" Similarly, in their second RR, Participant 23 mentions a failure in trying to maximize the use of English during lectures as follows: "*For example, in the trainings we received at the university, we were mostly taught not to use Turkish in the classroom, and when I tried this, I failed.*" In their RRs, most of the participants seem to have realized serious problems with the all-English approach, and as a result, some of them tried to find practical solutions to the problem.

Changes in beliefs about the emotional aspects of teaching

The affective domain includes the manner in which we deal with things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1973). The results of the RR analyses suggest that participants' beliefs about the emotional aspect of teaching have gone through some common changes. The analysis results of the RRs indicate that a total of 16 teacher trainees (30,18 %) started to think differently about the emotional aspect of teaching when first and second RR results are compared.

In the first RRs of the participants, there seem to be no concern for the emotional aspects of teaching; however, quite a few of the participants' second RRs indicate an emergence of ideas related to this domain, which clearly indicates a change. For example, Participant 22 states that "*The most important thing I learned here was that I had to establish the right type of bond with the students.*" Similarly, Participant 38 emphasizes a change in their belief system using these words: "*That's why my priority changed from teaching something to making students love the subject; teaching English was sidelined.*" Participant 40 even goes further to say that "*When I entered the classroom during the internship process, I realized that I was in that class not to teach English to my students, but to teach them that they are valuable.*" And by the end of the practicum sessions, Participant 46 seems to have believed that a bond between the teacher and the students is the key to successful teaching and summarized their ideas with these words: "*I've realized that if I can create a bond between me and my students, everything will be easier.*

Changes in beliefs about teaching mechanism

In the broadest context, teaching mechanism refers to choices made by teachers while teaching, i.e., their preferred way of teaching (Teo, Chai, Hung, & Lee, 2008). Many of the teacher trainees who participated in the current study reported changes in their beliefs concerning teaching mechanism. When the first and second RRs were compared, it was evident that 13 participants (14,25 %) changed their views about the matter. Participant 34 shares this type of change as follows: "*Also, one of the biggest things I've learned is to explain a subject in context. I tried this and saw how well it worked. Then I decided to continue this way.*" Another participant also reports on this type of change: "*I used to believe that a good lesson plan would always solve the problems. However, I realized that no matter how prepared I am for the lesson, there might always be some unexpected issues while teaching. Therefore, I understood that a language teacher always needs B plans.*" (Participant 14).

Other instances of changes in beliefs related to classroom practice include topics such as teaching grammar, warm-up activities, and coursebook-driven teaching as some of the participants mention started to believe that while teaching grammar L1 could be used more effectively compared to L2. A few of the participants mention a realization of the importance of warm-up activities about which they seem to have not been fully convinced during theoretical studies. Some others realized that what the coursebook was trying to focus on was different from the needs of the students.

Changes in beliefs about the use of technology in language classrooms

The next theme to appear after the analysis of RRs was the changes in participants' beliefs about the use of technology in language classrooms. The use of technology in our context refers to the use of "…both hardware (laptops, cell phones, tablets) and software (the internet, email), either designed specifically for language learning and teaching or simply useful for it." (Richards, 2015).

Eight (15,09%) participants reported changes in their beliefs concerning the matter. For example, Participant 25 "*I realized the importance of smart boards. As the activities are more fun, colorful, and heartwarming; they attract the student's reaction and increase their interest in the lesson.*" Participant 30 shares the same idea by this statement: "*I observed that when students support the subject with web 2.0 tools, they attend the lesson more willingly.*" And Participant 31 emphasizes the change as follows: "*I used to think that Web 2 tools don't have to be in every lesson. But now I think it should be used in every lesson.*"

Changes in beliefs about the relationship between theory and practice

Another theme that emerged during the analyses process of the RRs is the gap between theory and practice of language teaching. Six participants (11,32%) voiced their ideas on the matter, and all of them shared changes in their beliefs about the relationship between the theoretical and practical aspect of teaching. For example, Participant 14 expressed their ideas as follows: "*First of all, I saw that many of the points discussed in the university lectures were not like that in the classroom.*" Participant 22 also mentioned a moment of realization during

the practicum sessions: "*While I was teaching in a real classroom environment, I realized that I could not fully use some of the theoretical courses we took at the university.*" Participant 34 stated the impracticality of what they covered during university lectures in these words: "*First of all, I realized that the theory is not very valid in practice. We learned a lot about what should be like in university lectures, but in the practicum class I saw that it was mostly up in the air. I have observed that this theoretical knowledge we have learned is impossible to use in practice exactly as it was taught.*"

It is obvious that the participants went through certain changes in their beliefs about theory and practice during the practicum sessions. The participants, in their RRs, reported mismatches between theory and practice in issues such as classroom management, instructing in L2, group and pair works, and formative assessment.

5. Discussion

The results of the current study indicate that some changes in Turkish preservice EFL teachers' belief systems were observed after the teaching practicum sessions that lasted for about 14 weeks. The changes in their belief systems clustered around five main themes as the use of L1 in language instruction, the affective aspect of teaching, teaching mechanism, the use of technology in language instruction, and the relationship between theory and practice. As the researchers, we anticipated that during and after the teaching practicum sessions some changes were bound to happen, and these changes would have clustered mostly around the practical aspects of teaching. To an extent, our anticipations were in place; many of the participants went through changes in terms of the mechanics of teaching. However, this type of change is obviously interwoven with other changes in participants' belief systems that took place during the practicum process.

The most prevalent change in the belief systems of the participants of the current study seems to be related to the use of L1 in foreign language instruction. This issue is one of the controversial issues in the EFL/ESL domain (Richards, 2015). Long ago, it was suggested by Atkinson (1987) that the potential use of L1 in EFL classes were ignored in teacher training programs, and the issue is still under discussion (Cook, 2001; Hall & Cook, 2012; Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2020). As Tsagari and Giannikas (2020) suggest, the perspectives of both teachers and students concerning the use of L1 in language teaching classes are not sufficiently supported by the researches. The data gathered from both parties could lay the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of how L1 and L2 are used, which could guide language pedagogy practice.

In terms of EFL teacher education, particularly in our context, preservice EFL teachers share the common idea that the all-English approach to teaching English is not an effective strategy; their ideas and beliefs seem to have changed after encounters with the actual classroom environments. The related literature concerning change in preservice EFL teachers' belief systems indicates similar confusion among teacher trainees (Çapan, 2014). After a comparison of preservice and in-service EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of L1 in EFL classes, Taner & Balıkçı (2022) claimed that preservice EFL teachers are much in favor an

"English only" approach while in-service teachers took a more flexible stand on the issue. After qualitative analyses of changes in preservice English teachers' beliefs, Suárez Flórez and Basto Basto (2017) observed some changes in participants' beliefs concerning the use of L1 in language instruction. At the beginning of the practicum practice, the participants believed the usefulness of the "all-English" approach, but their beliefs changed "…because it was easier to teach English using the learners' mother tongue since the students understood the topic more easily." (p. 175).

Our findings are in line with these findings as many of the preservice EFL teachers who participated in our study started with an "English only" attitude and went through negative experiences with it, which led to changes in how they approach the issue. In the related literature, there are also discussions implying that teacher trainees' beliefs about using L1 in EFL classes might change from culture to culture. In their study, Wach and Monroy (2020) found that Spanish teacher trainees expressed negative attitudes towards the use of L1 in EFL classes while Polish preservice teachers showed reversed patterns about the issue, and the conclusion they reached was "…a contextually mediated complexity of teacher-trainees' belief systems." (p. 855).

Our findings indicate that preservice EFL teachers went through changes in their belief systems concerning the emotional aspects of teaching. In the second reports of the preservice teachers who participated in the current study, some emotional themes emerged; interestingly, these themes were not present in their first reports. In their second reports, the participants emphasize the emotional bonds between the teacher and the students. Research findings suggest that emotions take their roots from thoughts and beliefs (Scherer, 2009); beliefs and emotions are deeply interwoven. In the related literature, it has been suggested that the emotional aspects of preservice teachers have been neglected (Ji, Oubibi, Chen, Yin, & Zhou, 2022), and the critical role that teacher emotions play in their professional beliefs, well-being, and effectiveness has also been highlighted (Fried & Mansfield, 2015). In their study, Ji et al. (2022) analyzed emotional changes in preservice teachers that took place during practicum practices and concluded that "… preservice teachers' emotional trajectories are complex and dynamic, positive emotions are decreasing, and negative emotions increase as time goes by." (p. 1).

In this claim, the complexity and dynamicity of preservice teachers' emotions make perfect sense; however, our findings contradict with theirs as the second reports of the participants in our study indicate positive emotions; in time and with some experience, they seem to have realized the possibility of better and effective teaching through creating bonds with their students. It is obvious that emotional experiences vary from person to person and from context to context; individual differences and contextual dynamics are obviously at play.

We also noticed changes in the beliefs of preservice EFL teachers concerning teaching mechanism. Among these issues, we can see beliefs about teaching in context, teaching grammar, lesson planning, warm-up activities, and coursebook-driven teaching. Among the participants, there was a realization of the importance of teaching grammar in context. The participants' initial beliefs about teaching grammar using L2 also shifted towards a practical

use of L1. Some of the participants realized the importance of warm-up activities in actual classroom settings, and some of them realized the gap between the coursebook and the needs of the students. The related literature indicates findings in a similar vein but in different dimensions. Suárez Flórez and Basto Basto (2017) analyzed the change in belief systems of preservice EFL teachers and found changes in beliefs about the place of memorization and translation techniques in language instruction. In their study, Reynolds et al. (2021) found that after the practicum practices, preservice EFL teachers started to believe that a teacher-centered teaching approach should be abandoned. These findings indicate that changes in belief systems of preservice teachers concerning teaching mechanism or practical issues about foreign language instruction show variety, and this shows that changes in belief systems of EFL preservice teachers are highly context dependent.

Beliefs of preservice EFL teachers concerning the use of technology in language instruction also changed to certain extents. It seems that common belief changes among the participants occurred regarding the issue. After experiencing actual classroom dynamics, the participants seem to have acknowledged that technology is an indispensable part of language teaching practice. Similar recent findings are available in the related literature. For example, Park and Son (2022) found that after preservice EFL teachers experience or observe successful integration of technology in language instruction, their beliefs changed and they started considering using technology in their practice. More importantly, they found a heavy reliance on the education they got from the training program, which implies a problem.

When the topic is technology, constant and rapid changes and updates are inevitable. Preservice teachers' dependence on the technology training they get from the programs they are involved in is sure to limit their adaptation to these changes and updates. In this sense, training preservice teachers about the use of technology in language instruction does not seem to be enough. Related literature suggests providing teacher trainees with strategies for continuing professional development (Son, 2018).

When the results of the RRs were analyzed, another important issue worth mentioning appeared. Nearly all the concepts in the RRs that are manifested by the participants using expressions such as, "*I have learned that…*" or "*I have realized that…*" are among the learning outcomes of the teacher training program that they are attending, and they are dealt with firmly by the academic staff. There is an obvious gap here. This could be regarded as confirmation of the need to bridge the theoretical aspects of teaching with their practical counterparts. Regarding this issue, the practicum practice ideally should offer opportunity for preservice teachers to apply their theoretical knowledge and link theory and practice (Meijer, Zanting, & Verloop, 2002). But the reality seems to be a bit bleak. For example, Yin (2019) reports that the training did not fully equip preservice teachers to deal with the reality of the classroom environment, since it simply supplied them with an idealized perspective of the classroom. She proposes strategies to better integrate university courses with real classroom practices to give preservice teachers with the most help possible to use their knowledge during their practicums. Preservice teachers' beliefs about the use of technology in the Turkish context were also discussed in previous studies; there is also indication of a gap between theory and practice

concerning this issue. For example, in the Turkish context, Merç (2015) found a "…mismatch between teacher training programs and real-world classrooms in terms of technology integration in EFL instruction." (p. 229)

Implications of findings for teacher education programs

Three implications related to EFL preservice teacher education could be deduced from the current study. The first one is to rethink the first academic term in the teacher training programs when preservice teachers experience real classroom dynamics. The results of the current study suggest that, at least for our own context, earlier encounters with the actual classroom dynamics will be helpful for preservice EFL teachers. The problem with the current situation is that when they experience the real classroom atmosphere and realize changes in their beliefs and attitudes, these changes seem to trigger a need for action on their side. However, since the practicum practices in Turkey are in the last year of the teacher training program, the trainees end up having to resort to their own resources to deal with both the theoretical and practical issues. There are, of course, supervisors and teachers to help trainees to overcome such issues, but the nature of the practicum practice does not allow the trainees and the supervisor for reflective teaching; the issues can only be dealt with only superficially. Because when we think about the process of learning to teach, we look at a longitudinal process which involves personal theories of teaching, observations, discussions, numerous trial and errors and a lot of reflection.

The second implication of the current study could be related to the need to understand the unique contexts of teacher training programs and the trainees involved in them; the related literature is a manifestation of this uniqueness. What one group of preservice EFL teachers experience in one culture or in a specific context, is different from what another group with the same attributes experience, albeit not fundamentally but contextually. Therefore, any teacher training program should involve dimensions regarding the specific context of teaching that the trainees will be involved in and the needs of the trainees that might surface in that specific context.

The gap between theory and practice that the preservice EFL teachers voiced is another important issue to be dealt with. Turkey has a strictly centralized higher education system, and teacher training programs are a part of it. This situation has a certain level of bearing on the academicians working as teacher trainers. In the Turkish context, a considerable amount of the EFL teacher trainers working at state universities have strong backgrounds concerning the EFL theories as they start their carriers as theoreticians; naturally, their research paradigms are mostly theory-driven. A serious proportion of EFL research studies in Turkey revolve around quantitative attitude surveys. This should mean that EFL research studies look like they are disconnected from classroom practices, which is also an important stand-alone research problem on its own. To a certain extent, this could be one of the sources of the problem that preservice EFL teachers experience when they are trying to make connections between theory and practice.

Learning to teach is a complex issue and to understand teaching as a profession and teachers in particular we need to think about the "unobservable dimension of teaching-teachers' mental lives." (Borg, 2009, p. 163). This insight is more than acceptable. This is actually what we have tried to achieve in the current study. However, we believe that, in our context, the unobservable is deeply connected with the observable. In the Turkish EFL teacher education context, up until 2020, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) imposed a centralized and fixed curriculum to teacher training programs. With a bold decision to decentralize the curriculum-related issues in teacher training programs, YÖK delegated its authority to local teacher training programs, and the local changes are still in progress. The imposed curriculum made insignificant references to classroom discourse, if any, and this is the observable part of the problem that we are trying to deal with. As Walsh (2011) points out "…language teachers can improve their professional practice by developing a closer understanding of classroom discourse and, in particular, by focusing on the complex relationship between language, interaction and learning" (p. 1).

6. Conclusion

A deeper understanding of EFL teachers' cognition and related belief systems looks like the new agenda in foreign language teacher education research. From years of experience and observation, it is our claim that the practicum practices in EFL teacher training programs in Turkey needs revision. It is clear that teacher training programs should be aligned with language classroom dynamics; it holds true in theory, and the results of the current study confirm this need. In addition to this, the results of the current study once again confirmed the uniqueness of each teacher training program; as the related literature suggests, changes in belief systems of preservice EFL teachers during practicum practices indicate a variety. The results of the current study brought about a new research trajectory, at least for our own context. In terms of Turkish EFL teacher training programs, our further research concerns are likely to revolve around a deeper understanding of the effects of EFL practicum practices on preservice teachers, the uniqueness of teacher training programs, and the emphasis on the connection between EFL teacher training programs and EFL classroom discourse.

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