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Evolvement of Pre-service Language Teachers' Beliefs Through Teacher Education

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Abstract
In language teacher education, beliefs of language teachers about language learning and teaching have a powerful effect on the way they teach. Therefore, the quality of teacher education programs should be considered as an influential variable that might cause changes in pre-service language teachers' beliefs. The main purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify the beliefs future English language teachers hold toward learning and teaching, and the impact of the courses given in the program on altering their beliefs about learning and teaching a foreign language. The data gathered from twenty-three first year and twenty-one final year language teacher candidates through an open-ended questionnaire form were analyzed using content analysis. The results revealed that the program created an increase in their awareness and an improvement in their understanding of the processes inherent in foreign language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Pre-service language teachers' beliefs, English language education program, Language learning, Language teaching

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Introduction

Beliefs are frequently defined in relation to knowledge and behavior and teaching is viewed as a cognitive process that involves thinking (Borg, 2001). The study of beliefs in different fields has led to the emergence of a variety of meanings that has made adoption of a specific working definition of beliefs difficult (Pajares, 1992). Nevertheless, a number of researchers agree on the definition of beliefs as "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (Richardson, 2003, p. 2). Teacher beliefs function as lenses through which their interpretations, behaviors, and decisions are refined and they are, therefore, considered powerful constructs that influence the way teachers perform their profession (Cross, 2009; Eryaman & Riedler, 2009; Johnson, 1999; Richards, 1998). The images of teacher as teacher-as-thinker (Richards, 1994) and the teacher as decision-maker (Freeman; 1996; Nunan, 1992) signify teachers' conceptualizations of their work and the processes of thinking and decision making that mark their teaching (Richards, 1994).

Pre-service teachers enter education programs with strongly held pre-conceived beliefs about learning and teaching they have already generated by being immersed in educational environments during their schooling (Shulman, 1987; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984; Eryaman, 2006, 2007). These preconceptions about learning and teaching are constructed from two main sources (1) their learning experience as language learners, and (2) ideas learnt from pedagogical classes and experiences gained from school practicum during teacher education programs (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Their beliefs about language learning and teaching mainly originate from teachers they observe throughout classroom experiences before graduation from high school (Bandura, 1986; Lortie, 1975). School and instructional experiences form a framework that serves as an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975). Researchers support this claim and assert that undergraduate students preparing to become teachers enter the programs with prior experiences as learners that have already shaped their beliefs about the subject matter and instructional practices during their formal learning process (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Gregoire, 2003; Riedler & Eryaman, 2016; Rust, 1994; Yüksel & Kavanoz, 2015). Nonetheless, there is also enough evidence to support that that pre-service teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching may be influenced by ideas gained from pedagogical classes and experiences from school practicum during teacher education programs (Johnson, 1994; Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Through continuous observation and imitation, their previously established set of paradigms is adjusted and they are enculturated into teaching (Pajares, 1992). In line with this, their immature beliefs are challenged during teacher pedagogy programs (Lortie, 1975).

The empirical studies that have focused on change in pre-service teachers' beliefs in different contexts appear to have yielded incongruent findings. There are two sets of claims about the impact of teacher preparation on teachers' beliefs. One line of research asserts that teacher preparation programs and teacher training programs fail to alter pre-service teacher beliefs and in case they are influential, only restricted changes are detected (Johnson, 1994; Richardson, 1996; Tatto, 1998; Tillema & Knol, 1997). The other strand of research posits that teachers' beliefs are primarily affected by their educational experiences including schooling and teacher preparation classes, professional education and classroom experience (Borg, 2003; Özmen, 2012). There is evidence to support that pre-service training leads to a change in teachers' beliefs (Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Chai, Wong & Teo, 2009; Farrell, 1999; Nettle, 1998).

Studies on teacher cognition claim that student teachers' personal beliefs are deeply rooted and have a tendency to remain relatively stable throughout pre-service education programs (Eryaman, 2008; Mattheoudakis , 2007; Peacock, 2001; Tatto, 1998) due to the fact that prior beliefs are constructed early and hence reinforced over a long period of time (Pajares, 1992). The ample research on pre-service L2 teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching reports that teacher education has either no or little influence on the development and transformation of pre-service teachers' beliefs (e.g. Agathopoulou, 2010; Çapan, 2014; Kunt & Özdemir, 2010; Peacock, 2001).

Among the studies depicting insignificant or no change in language teachers' beliefs, the aim of the study by Kunt and Özdemir (2010) was to identify possible variations regarding the beliefs of

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pre-service English language teachers who took methodology courses at the beginning and at the end of their teacher education program. In order to understand the degree of change, they applied Horwitz's (1988) *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) as an instrument. The results showed that the beliefs of participants remained constant or changed to a small extent in certain areas suggesting that prospective teachers' involvement in methodology courses appeared to make a little or no impact on their beliefs. Çapan's (2014) examination of the development of pre-service EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction over a period of 10 weeks also demonstrated no change except for the importance of conscious knowledge; the only change observed after the practicum course was a decline in the participants' positive beliefs about the need for conscious knowledge of grammatical structures and their function. Similarly, Agathopoulou (2010) identified little change after the student teachers in her quantitative study took second language acquisition theories course. This course created no influence on seven out of the twelve beliefs held by the participants. The change was not impressive and failed to include all of the 'erroneous' beliefs. Another study providing evidence of stability in beliefs was conducted by Peacock (2001) who investigated changes in the beliefs of 146 trainee ESL teachers about second language learning over their 3-year program. He found that beliefs changed very little over the trainees' 3 years of study of TESL methodology. Majority of student teachers still had the belief that learning a second language simply means learning vocabulary and grammar rules.

Notwithstanding the substantial research on stability of pre-service teachers' beliefs, a number of researchers' presented findings that contradicted with the claims about the inflexibility of prior beliefs and insignificant effect of teacher education program on pre-service teachers' professional development (e.g. Bush, 2010; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Chai, Wong & Teo, 2009; Farrell, 1999; Grijalva & Barajas, 2013; Mattheoudakis, 2007). In their naturalistic inquiry into development in student teachers' beliefs, Cabaroğlu and Roberts (2000) observed that of the 20 student teachers participated in their study, only one participant's beliefs remained unchanged while in the other 19 cases there were notable changes. This result led the researchers to assert that "belief development was cumulative and gradual" (p.392). Bush (2010) also documented significant changes in pre-service teachers' beliefs over a three year period. The changes in beliefs were seen in several areas including "the length of time for acquisition, difficulty of language acquisition, the role of culture, the role of error correction, the importance of grammar, and the efficacy of audio-lingual learning strategies" (p.318). Likewise, the purpose of the longitudinal study by Grijalva and Barajas (2013) was to single out pre-service teachers' beliefs about English language teaching and learning and to understand how their beliefs changed because of gaining experience during their preparation as English teachers. Their findings suggest that pre-service teachers steadily became cognizant of the complicated issues inherent in teaching and the teaching preparation process provided them with the opportunities and theoretical basis to understand such complexities.

In Singaporean context, Chai, Wong, and Teo (2009) investigated the change in Singaporean pre-service teachers' epistemic beliefs and in their beliefs about learning and teaching over the course of their teacher preparation program by using an online survey before and after the nine-month long course work and practicum. Their findings demonstrated significant changes in epistemological beliefs and their pedagogical beliefs. They found that Singaporean pre-service teachers became more relativistic in their epistemological beliefs while adapting less constructivist-oriented beliefs about teaching. Furthermore, at the end of their teacher preparation program, they acquired the belief that language learning is an innate ability. Mattheoudakis (2007) also explored the evolution of EFL teacher beliefs about learning and teaching in Greece during a three-year teacher education program using BALLI. The results indicated that while there was a gradual and significant development in student teachers' beliefs during the program, their engagement in the teaching practice made a low impact on the development of their beliefs. Macdonald et al. (2001) enquired into EFL student teachers' beliefs before and after a twelve-week second language acquisition theories course given in a TESOL program and came to the conclusion that there was a movement away from the behaviorist views of learning which the subjects had previously held. The views of both undergraduate and postgraduate participants differed significantly before and after the course on issues relating to learning and language, which indicated its impact on some of the beliefs of their student teachers.

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Regardless of the potential effect of teacher education programs on pre-service teachers' beliefs, previous literature on pre-service teachers' beliefs uncovers the need for transformation of pre-service teachers' beliefs in order to enable them to teach in new ways (Deng, 2004). In his Cognitive–Affective Model of Conceptual Change, Gregoire (2003) proposes that the process of altering teacher beliefs requires allowing teachers to articulate their beliefs, establishing conditions, which permit break down of pre-existing beliefs, and accepting that the process of conceptual change takes time. Thus, providing teachers with the necessary time to reflect on their beliefs is paramount to identification of their beliefs.

Weinstein's (1989) research echoes the need to make beliefs explicit in teacher education because of two reasons: first, by understanding pre-service teacher beliefs, teacher educators can be effective in teaching future teachers. Second, teacher educators' investigation of their own implicit theories contributes to strengthening of teacher education programs. Johnson (1994) expanding Weinstein's view claims that "understanding teachers' beliefs is essential to improving teaching practices and professional teacher preparation programs" (p. 439). In keeping with the aforementioned reasons, the goal of the study was to explore how student teachers conceptualize language learning and teaching and whether the education they receive during their undergraduate program creates a change in their language learning/teaching beliefs. With this aim in mind, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What beliefs do pre-service language teachers hold regarding learning English?
2. What beliefs do pre-service language teachers hold regarding teaching English?
3. Are there any differences between senior and freshman student teachers' perceptions with respect to language learning and teaching?
4. How do pre-service language teachers think their beliefs about language learning and teaching have changed since they started language teacher education program?

The Study

This phenomenological study aims at exploring the impact of language teacher education program on the perspectives of teacher candidates about language learning and teaching and understand the extent of evolvement in their beliefs. In order to have a more holistic picture of pre-service language teachers' belief structures about language learning and teaching, a qualitative approach was adopted unlike the quantitative approaches utilized in the majority of the studies in the field of beliefs. We used an open-ended survey format to elicit student teachers' beliefs.

Participants

A total of forty-four ELT undergraduates participated in this study. Because we wanted to see the effect of the program on their beliefs regarding foreign language teaching and learning, we selected our participants from the first and the fourth year students (N=23, N=21 respectively). At the beginning of the academic year, freshman and senior students were requested to express their opinions about language learning and teaching through written reports. While 33 of the participants were female, 11 of them were male. The age range of pre-service teachers was from 18 to 22 years (mean age = 21.08, SD = .28). All the participating freshman students attended the compulsory prep class (where the main foci were four language skills along with use of English) offered by the same department faculty prior to enrolling in undergraduate courses. All the participating senior students were regular seventh semester students who have not taken any fourth year courses before. During their three-year education, seniors were offered pedagogical courses such as second language acquisition, teaching methodologies and linguistics.

Data Collection

Since open-ended responses enable the researchers to obtain a direct view of a respondent's own thinking (Roberts et al., 2014), an open-ended survey was administered to the participants at the

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beginning of the academic year; specifically prior to the beginning of school practice course senior students have to take in order to graduate. The time selected for the administration of data collection tool was intentional. We hoped to explain the possible changes in their beliefs without the intervention of school practice course, which highly requires reflective practice processes that can be instrumental in changing their "prior knowledge about the cognitive, social, emotional, and political aspects related to teaching" (Garza & Smith, 2015, p.12).The survey included the following three open-ended questions asked to both groups of students:

1. In your opinion, what is the best way to learn English?
2. In your opinion, what is the best way to teach English?
3. Have your thoughts about language learning and teaching changed since you entered the ELT program? If yes, how?

The completion of the qualitative questionnaire took around 40 minutes. The open-ended form was created in Turkish in order to reduce probable misunderstandings and "ensure accurate information retrieval" (Welch & Piekkari, 2006, p. 420). In order to enable them to fully express themselves, they are requested to make their beliefs explicit using their own words in their native language (Tsang, 1998). Their statements given below were translated by the researchers.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to reach descriptive and interpretive accounts of the phenomenon. The constant-comparative method was employed in order to determine themes within the participants' written reflections (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The responses were thoroughly read, coded and emerging themes were highlighted. This procedure was repeated across participants to identify the shared themes and patterns. For cross-sectional comparisons (freshman vs. senior), the propositions under each theme were counted and quantified as frequencies and percentages.

Through this analysis, we were able to highlight the ways our participants constructed their knowledge within the program as well as their beliefs related to language learning and teaching beliefs. Consensus was achieved upon discussions on differences in order to enhance trustworthiness of the data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The accuracy and credibility of the findings were determined through member checking (Creswell, 2003). While coding the responses given to the first research question, we recognized that what they say about the best way of learning English refer to learning theories, thus operated within the framework of learning theories, which are given in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1. *Codes and descriptions for language learning beliefs*

Codes	Description
Nativism	L2 learning is similar to L1 acquisition process, which takes place through exposure to authentic oral input.
Behaviorism	L2 learning occurs through imitation, repetition, and reinforcement; it is learned in a procedural manner.
Cognitivism	L2 learning is the acquisition of knowledge, where the learner absorbs information, carries out cognitive operations on it, and stores it in memory.
Constructivism	L2 learning is actively constructed through the reorganization of the learners' mental structures.
Social Constructivism	L2 learning occurs because of interactions between the individual and the situation.
Experiential Learning	L2 learning develops through meaningful experiences in everyday life that lead to change in an individual's knowledge and behaviors.

The propositions that implied the aforementioned descriptions were labeled accordingly. For example, in case the importance of repetition and practice was mentioned, it was coded as behaviorism, or when chatting with foreigners is highlighted as a way of learning English, it was considered as an

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implication of social learning. Speaking in English with peers was considered as an indication of social constructivist approach to learning.

As for the second research question, which is concerned about their language teaching beliefs, similar coding steps were followed. Instead of starting with predetermined categories, themes were created based on the meaning of the data. The themes were clustered under five categories: methodology, technique and activity, material, classroom atmosphere and teacher attribute (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Codes and descriptions for language teaching beliefs*

Codes	Description
Methodology	Propositions that talk about general classroom procedures
Technique and activity	Propositions that refer to a particular strategy or a specific practice activity
Material	Propositions that refer to instructional materials
Classroom Atmosphere	Propositions that refer to leaning environment
Teacher Characteristics	Propositions that talk about the impact of teacher characteristics on learning

The third research question involved understanding the impact of the education they received. The responses that reported change were coded.

Results

The results are presented in the order of research questions. In order to protect respondent privacy and to ensure anonymity rather than real names, pseudonyms were created and used for the quotations.

Language learning beliefs

The responses given to the first research question seeking participants' beliefs on the best way to learn English are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3*: Freshman and Senior students' language learning beliefs*

	Freshman		Senior	
Codes	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
Nativism	2	3.1	13	19.1
Behaviorism	6	9.2	7	10.3
Cognitivism	28	43.1	10	14.7
Social-Constructivism	7	10.8	11	16.2
Experiential Learning	19	29.2	22	32.4
Constructivism	3	4.6	5	7.4
Total number of Propositions	65		68	

Even though a similarity was observed in the total number of propositions, there were notable differences between freshman and senior students' responses. While the majority of senior students held experiential (32.4%), nativist (19.1%) and social constructivist (16.2%) beliefs regarding the best way of learning English, freshman students hold rather cognitivist (43.1%), experiential (29.2%) and social constructivist (10.8%) beliefs. The high frequency of cognitivist propositions found in the freshman group is a finding that deserves discussion. The high frequency observed in the responses is most possibly due to our participants' rather exam oriented high school experiences. This is also a proof that despite the importance given to the development of communicative competence in the national curriculum, the exam-oriented practices of teachers at Turkish high schools allow little space to achieve this goal and students are not given sufficient opportunities to improve their language

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skills. Indeed, two of our freshman participants clearly mentioned the influence of centralized university entrance exam on their language learning beliefs:

> *"When I was studying for the university exam I used to believe that one can learn English by studying grammar and vocabulary, but here I understood that knowing grammar rules does not mean knowing the language"* (Nurgül, Freshman)

> *"I used to think that grammatical knowledge was the core of language learning. For this reason, I rarely practiced language skills while getting ready for the exam…."* (Arzu, Freshman)

Similar to our findings, in Peacock's (2001) study on language learning beliefs of TESOL trainees, the participants viewed language learning simply as learning vocabulary and grammar rules. Contrary to the freshman, our senior participants focus more on nativist and experiential language learning.

> *"If I depart from my own English learning experiences, English is best learned by making it a part of our lives. It is important that we love the language and it becomes a part of our routine. And of course, English is best learned by speaking."* (Ahmet, Senior)

> *"I believe that English is best learned by listening and speaking. People should learn English just like they learn their mother tongue without depending on heavily on grammar rules."* (Mehmet, Senior)

This difference may stem from the pedagogical information and micro-teaching experiences seniors gained throughout their education. In line with this finding, the study conducted by Grijalva and Barajas (2013) report that pre-service teachers believed that English is learned by practicing the language and being involved in a number of learning activities. Following Grijalva and Barajas (2013) we also suggest that our senior students were affected by the courses given in the program.

In cognitivist approach, the emphasis is on promoting mental operations and therefore "the issues of how information is received, organized, stored, and retrieved by the mind" are emphasized (Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p.51). The participants expressed their cognitivist approach as follows.

> *"[English is best learnt] by reading, researching and writing a lot. You need to revise what you have learnt at school everyday." (*Sebahat, Senior)

> "*[English is best learnt] by putting the knowledge gained theoretically into practice."* (Erkan, Freshman)

> *"People remember what they see instead of what they hear. So learning should be supported by visuals. Then oral practices help improvement of English."* (Aslı, Freshman)

Riley (2003) describes three notions of the language learner; in behavioristic psychology, the learner is accepted as a physical organism, while learning is perceived as a decontextualized model of information processing in cognitive psychology and finally, there is constructivist, sociocultural and experiential psychology where the learner is viewed as a person with a social identity in a culture (as cited in Kohonen, 2006). The conceptualizations of our participants' beliefs about language learning seem to display a similar picture with freshman students following the principles of behavioristic and cognitivist psychology, and senior students inclining to adhere to social-constructivist and experiential psychology of learning.

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Language teaching beliefs

The responses given to the second research question seeking participants' beliefs on the best way to teach English is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: *Freshman and Senior students' language teaching beliefs*

Codes	Freshman F	Senior F
Methodology		
Communicative Approach	1	10
Eclectic	-	3
Deductive	4	3
Learner-centered	3	4
Inductive	3	6
Task-based	-	1
Skill-based	2	1
Computer assisted	2	-
Number of propositions	15 (26.7%)	28 (39.4%)
Technique and activity		
Repetition	-	1
Integration of four skills	-	2
Interactive tasks	3	7
Using audio-visuals	-	1
Games	4	2
Speaking tasks	7	1
Multi-modality	1	1
Error-correction	-	2
Authentic tasks	-	3
Using infotainment	-	1
Individual work	1	-
Reading tasks	1	-
Vocabulary activities	2	-
Number of propositions	19 (33.9%)	21 (29.5%)
Materials		
Authentic Materials	2	1
Audio-visual materials	-	4
No coursebook	3	-
ICT tools	2	-
Number of propositions	7 (12.5%)	5 (7%)
Classroom atmosphere		
Stress-free and enjoyable	4	5
Interesting	3	-
Number of propositions	7 (12.5%)	5 (7%)
Teacher Characteristics		
Personal Qualities	7	7
Pedagogical qualities	1	5
Number of propositions	8 (14.2%)	12 (16.9%)
Total number of propositions	56	71

The responses show us that regardless of their year in teacher education, all the participants unanimously see teacher attributes and attitudes as elements of best language teaching practices (14.2% and 16.9% in freshman and senior groups, respectively). While both groups highlighted the

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importance of teacher personal qualities, seniors differed in their emphasis on the pedagogical knowledge. The basic between-group differences were observed in the methodology, technique, and activity categories (26.7% and 39.4% for methodology; 33.9% and 29.5% for technique and activity in freshman and senior, respectively). The responses suggest that despite the fact that senior students expressed their beliefs regarding best language teaching from a wider and more holistic perspective, freshman students took language teaching more discretely and expressed their beliefs from a simplistic perspective. The following two quotes illustrate how senior students can utilize their theoretical background while describing the best way to teach English language;

> "*I think the best method to teach English is the task-based method. Accordingly, while the language to be presented should exemplify authentic use, the tasks should make the learners use language for real communicative purposes."* (Eda, Senior)

> *"English should be taught through speaking and learner-centered teaching methods. Instead of using classical grammar translation method, communicative approach or multiple intelligence method should be preferred because these methods encourage students' active involvement."* (Esra, Senior)

Apparently, the following quotes from two freshman students show that they do not have the sufficient methodological background to elaborate on their beliefs.

> *"In my opinion, an English teacher should use English in the classroom and try to integrate games into the lesson to promote student participation."* (Pırıl, Freshman)

> "*There should be a lot of practice accompanied with theory"* (Umut, Freshman)

The most eminent difference between senior and freshman students' written comments was definitely in the quality and depth of their descriptions. Senior students' reflected their beliefs through using educational jargon that signals their acquisition of field specific content knowledge during their pedagogical courses. The terminology utilized by senior students, but not by freshman students, might be considered as an indication of their transformation and enculturation into the profession.

Change in language learning and teaching beliefs

As Table 5 illustrates, more than half of the student teachers reported that their beliefs regarding language teaching and learning changed over time (60% of freshman and 76% of senior). 40% of freshman and 24% of senior students reported no change in their beliefs, which might appear to support the existing research on the inflexibility of teacher beliefs and the lack of impact of the initial teacher education program on pre-service teachers' beliefs. However, the cross-sectional analysis of the responses reporting "no change" showed that the great majority of these respondents (12 participants out of 14) were actually the participants whose responses for the first research question (the best way of learning English) fell into social-constructivist (N=4), constructivist (N=3) and social learning categories (N= 7). As these beliefs reflect the type of knowledge and skills that the program aimed at developing, it was observed that these beliefs were enhanced and remained constant.

Table 5. *Percentages of change in respondents' language teaching and learning beliefs*

	Change (%)	No change (%)
Freshman	60	40
Senior	76	24

The most notable changes reported by both senior and freshman students are seen in grammar and vocabulary areas, and in their approach towards language skills. Both groups reported that in the past they considered grammar and lexical knowledge as two vital components of language, and approached language skills as separate entities. In our freshman group, beliefs regarding the importance of grammar and vocabulary have evolved and they started prioritizing listening and

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speaking skills in an integrated manner. Senior students, on the other hand, consider not only listening and speaking but also the integration of all four skills in a contextualized manner.

> *"I used to think that I could learn English through reading and writing. But when I started this program, I realized that speaking and listening are the most important skills. When these two are learned the other skills and knowledge improve spontaneously."* (Beren, Freshman)

> *"Before, I thought that one can learn a language by studying only vocabulary, grammar and listening. I also thought people should start speaking only after they reach a certain proficiency level. But now, I think grammar should never be taught explicitly. I have also understood that all skills support each other, for example reading and writing contribute development of listening and speaking abilities."* (Öznur, Senior)

Several previous studies reported similar changes regarding beliefs about vocabulary, grammar, and communicative skills. For example, Mattheoudakis (2007) reported that while majority of students entering teacher education program emphasize grammar and vocabulary more, this percentage of agreement decreases at the end of the second year, and that the importance of communication reaches the highest level at the end of the final year. That pre-service teachers' viewing grammar as an essential component of learning a language changed after their enrollment in the program is also in line with Çapan's (2014) findings, which also depicted a decline in the positive beliefs of pre-service teachers toward conscious grammar knowledge.

While senior students previously advocated the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) which is also supported by their views of each skill as separate entities, after their four year education they mention that their ideas have changed greatly (76%) in favor of authenticity, communicative approach in addition to their opinion about one standard way of learning/teaching. According to senior students, there is no "one fits all methodology" since learners might have different needs.

> *"[Before entering university] I thought that I had a good command of English, then I realized that I cannot speak at all. I understood that knowledge of grammar rules and vocabulary is not enough to know the language. Now, I think that expressing yourself easily is the only proof of knowing English."* (Hatice, Freshman)

> *"In high school, I used to think that English is learned through route memorization. I used to memorize word lists and tried to create formulas to memorize grammar rules. When I started university, I learned that actually there are a lot of different methods, and recognized that I could have learned the usage better if different approaches had been used."* (Sena, Senior)

The extent of reported change in freshman students' beliefs about learning/teaching was less than that of senior students (60% vs. 76%). Yet, although they expressed their views in broader terms, their emphasis was mainly on the authenticity and the importance of practice for developing language skills. A major difference observed is related to their standpoints: while senior students expressed their opinions from a teaching point of view, freshman students tended to verbalize their opinions from a learning perspective. The percentage of change explicitly expressed by our participants support the line of literature reporting development in student teachers' beliefs during the program.

Apart from knowledge and skills mentioned, our participants also stated changes in language learning approaches (see Table 6). The perspectival differences between freshman and senior students become apparent particularly in two categories. While expressing their beliefs at present, freshman students mentioned "exposure to authentic language learning experience" and highlighted the importance of "practice" for language development. Although the change from "rote learning" to exposure to language learning is promising, they still consider learners as receivers. On the other hand, only two seniors explicitly named an approach (GTM) among previously held beliefs. Concerning their present beliefs, they emphasized, "authentic language learning experiences", "communication" and "catering for learner needs via different approaches" as core principles. According senior students' conceptions language learner is experiencer, rather than receiver. This also

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strengthens the above suggestion that while freshman students have a learner's stance, senior students have a teacher's viewpoint.

We suggest that the shift observed in pre-service students' standpoints (from freshman to senior) is an indication of reconceptualization that occurs over time. These self-reported changes show that student teachers' beliefs are not consistent and fixed, and they are in stark contrast to those studies, which postulated that the teacher education programs are incapable of changing pre-service teachers' beliefs (Peacock, 2001; Tatto, 1998). On the contrary, as suggested by Cabaroğlu and Roberts (2000) through personal experience "more theoretical beliefs become concretized" (p. 394).

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Table 6. *Changes reported by freshman and senior students*

Before	**Freshman**	**Senior**	**Now**	**Freshman**	**Senior**
Knowledge & skills	**F**	**F**	**Knowledge & skills**	**F**	**F**
Speaking	-	2	Speaking is the proof of knowing a language	3	
Listening	-	1	Listening & speaking come first	1	
Reading	1	2	Grammar & speaking practices	1	
Writing	1	1	Frequent listening & speaking practices		2
Grammar	8	8	Reading & writing enhance grammar		1
Vocabulary	3	3	Skills-integrated		1
			Grammar in context & implicit grammar teaching		4
			Vocabulary in context & with collocations		1
Approach			**Approach**		
Language learning is an innate ability	1		Exposure to authentic language increases production ability	5	
Route learning	2		Interest and motivation enhance learning	1	
Listening to lectures	1		Exposure to different teaching methods	1	
GTM	-	2	Practice makes perfect	3	
			Grammar and speaking	1	
			Authentic language learning experiences		3
			Communication is at the core of language learning		1
			Different approaches catering for learner needs		3
			Use of technological tools		1

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Conclusion

This paper deals with the results of a research study comparing freshman and senior pre-service language teachers enrolled in English Language Teaching department of a state university in Turkey. Our main aim was to identify pre-service language teachers' beliefs about English language teaching and learning at different stages of instruction while they were taking courses in the program. We assumed that the changes in their beliefs would be a reflection of the impact of the program on their beliefs. The main findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. The most notable difference between freshman and senior students' beliefs is observed with respect to language learning. Freshman students seemed to follow the principles of behavioristic and cognitivist psychology, whereas senior students were inclined to adhere to social-constructivist and experiential psychology of learning. This group viewed language learning as simply mastering vocabulary and grammar rules. On the contrary, our senior participants focused more on nativist and experiential language learning.
2. Intergroup differences were observed regarding language teaching beliefs as well. Although freshman group had rather an intuitive and unsound perspective, senior group displayed a more grounded and in-depth perspective. The latter group emphasized inductive approach and even named particular methods (such as Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching). However, the former group perceived language teaching consisting of specific activities and techniques. Freshman students expressed language learning beliefs which were more intuition and experience oriented while senior students approached second language learning and teaching from an interventionist perspective.
3. Regarding the impact of teacher education program, there are two sets of evidence to claim that the education program had an impact on the development of their beliefs.

a) The visible difference between freshman and senior students' self-reported changes in their beliefs reflect the change in their conceptualization of teaching. Freshman students approach the issue from "learner" perspective and consider "practice" as the most essential path to language development. Senior students, on the other hand, look more from a "teacher" perspective and take language development as the accumulation of "experiences". This finding supports McLean and Bullard (2000) who stated that pre-service teachers were observed to go through certain stages during their teacher education; while at initial stages they view their role as imparting information; at final stages they conceptualize teaching as supporting learning.

b) The fact that differences emerged between freshman and senior students in terms of all three major categories of the current study, namely, beliefs about language learning, beliefs about language teaching, and reporting change overall indicates the instability of beliefs and the potential of courses given in teacher education program to change beliefs. Furthermore, senior students' choice of words, their integration of theory and terminology into their discourse pointed to an increase in their awareness and an improvement in their understanding of the processes of foreign language teaching and learning.

Studies have reported that teachers who lack preparation rely more on rote methods of learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006a). In our study, senior students were found to depend more on experiential/constructivist learning instead of traditional behaviorist rote learning principles, which suggests that they do possess the necessary preparation for language teaching to some degree.

Unlike previous research suggesting that teacher education is a weak intervention, and that by nature, pre-service teachers' beliefs are highly resistant to change (Kagan, 1992; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984), our findings demonstrated the impact of teacher education on changing teacher trainees' beliefs. Particularly, the results revealed that students started to build links between theory and practice creating some changes in previous beliefs. These findings lend support to Bush (2010) and Johnson's (1994) studies since the beliefs of senior year student teachers in the present study also seem to be affected by their formal training as displayed by their elaborate comments and consistent pattern of responses. Overall, the change in senior students' perceptions can be attributed to their undergraduate education that is based on constructivist and learner-centered pedagogies, while the change in freshman students' perceptions might stem from their experiences as language students

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during their preparatory year in the department and language learning experiences in primary and secondary schooling.

To conclude, the findings of this study contribute to the development of our existing knowledge about the potential of language teacher education to positively change pre-service language teachers' conceptions of the complexities of language learning and teaching. We suggest that our evidence of flexibility and development in participants' beliefs justifies a view of teacher training as a variable in student teacher belief development.

Suggestions and limitations

Following Darling-Hammond (2006b), we suggest that English teacher education programs should provide opportunities for teachers to raise their consciousness on the nature of language learning and teaching and to enable them to articulate their beliefs that will inform their practice in their future careers. Further qualitative studies are needed to explore EFL teacher training over a long time so that more insights can be obtained regarding what actually happens in EFL teacher training programs. In a longitudinal design, pre-service teachers' changing or intact beliefs can be explored deeply starting from the initial years of the program to the end of it, and the follow-up can be made when they step into teaching profession. In this way, the consistencies or inconsistencies between their beliefs and practices can be determined, and the reasons for inconsistencies can be detected for further studies.

Undoubtedly, this study is not without limitations. There are two specific limitations to the present study. First, this is a narrow study focusing exclusively on pre-service language teachers at one state university. Therefore, generalizability of the findings may be a limiting factor. Second, the use of a self-report instrument might be considered as a limitation to research. Participants might not have fully expressed their mental and emotional states.

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