Exploring Student Teachers' Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching: A Longitudinal Study

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This paper presents a four-year longitudinal study of student teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching over the course of an English teacher education (ELT) program. The study attempts to track possible changes in the beliefs and to analyze the impact of an ELT pre-service program by taking the program itself as a dynamic variable. Interviews were conducted with 49 student teachers for four years, and the data were processed through a mixed-method design. The results of the study indicate that different phases of the program resulted in various changes at certain degrees. Student teachers' engagement in the teaching practicum seems to have a higher impact on the development of the beliefs about language learning and teaching. The findings may be influential in developing and designing more effective ELT programs.

Keywords: teacher beliefs, pre-service teacher education, beliefs about language learning and teaching

Beliefs of language teachers about language learning and teaching have a significant impact on their practice. The studies on student teachers' (STs) beliefs highlight that STs carry with them some strong ideas and beliefs about education influencing the way in which they process the input during their program (Pajares, 1992). Furthermore, STs are believed to use their previous educational experiences to interpret the input provided in their teacher education program (Kagan, 1992). As much of the research indicates, the previously-constructed beliefs are likely to remain unchanged after graduation (Peacock, 2001; Powell, 1992; Wubbels, 1992). Such findings have led us to focus on two critical issues: The mechanics of STs beliefs' change should be studied empirically in different countries and contexts, and the findings of those studies must be utilized to reshape the current content and structure of teacher education programs.

While we still do not have a crystal clear portrait of how beliefs are constructed during STs' educational lives, the findings of some promising studies provide persuasive evidence. For example, Nettle's (1996) findings indicated both change and stability in STs' beliefs during their program. Later, Nettle (1998) confirmed these findings in his study in which the first-year STs' beliefs were analyzed after the practicum. In this respect, the literature concerned may be broadly classified into two kinds of studies: some research emphasizes changes in the beliefs of STs (Winitzky & Kaucak, 1997), while others do not (Tillema & Knoll, 1997).

One reason why the findings are quite different from each other may be that we generally possess little or no information about the program of study and content of English language teaching (ELT) programs in which belief studies were conducted (Mattheoudakis, 2007). Bramald, Hardman, and Leat (1995) rightfully mention that the nature and the quality of teacher education programs are not taken into consideration as an influential variable in studies about STs' beliefs. Those programs are mostly regarded as a constant rather than as a dynamic variable (Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000).

Along this line of thinking, this paper presents a longitudinal study on STs' beliefs about language learning and teaching. The details of the ELT program are also discussed to explain how the structure and the content of a program may influence the findings. Thus, the study aims at enriching our perception of the development of STs' beliefs by pointing to the correlation between belief changes and the phases of the ELT program at Gazi University in Turkey.

Student Teachers' Beliefs

As is generally acknowledged, STs' beliefs can be tracked back to early experiences, from primary education up to tertiary level. Besides, the beliefs of university teachers about the learning and teaching may exert a notable impact on the educational experiences of students in tertiary contexts (Calderhead, 1996; Errington, 1985, 2001; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; McDiarmid, 1990; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Tatto, 1998). As for teacher education programs, the leading question underlying most of the research into STs' beliefs is whether these programs result in drastic cognitive developments, and if so, whether these developments influence the classroom behavior of novices and their approach to education in general. Surely, the assumption of the researchers is that STs' beliefs and ideas on how learning and teaching should be conducted will shape STs' practices in classroom teaching.

Although teachers' beliefs are characterized in various ways, the literature is centered around two major categories; namely, (1) teaching as a process of knowledge transmission, and (2) teaching as a process of knowledge construction (Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle, & Orr, 2000; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Teo, Chai, Hung, & Lee, 2008). The transmissive view addresses the tendency of teachers toward didactic teaching during which students adopt a passive role. In this view of teaching, the teacher is the source of knowledge and the authority, identifying the objectives, pace of teaching and methodology, also known as traditional teaching. The other view is the constructivist view of teaching, stressed by Chai, Teo, and Lee (2009) as "the importance of students' efforts to make sense of their experiences and the teachers' role in facilitating this process" (p. 353). Generally, most of the studies have revealed that students adopt an eclectic approach integrating traditional and constructivist views of teaching (Brooks, 2002; Entwistle et al., 2000; Minor et al., 2002; Van Driel, Bulte, & Verloop, 2007).

Second language teacher education (SLTE) and STs' beliefs

The content and context of teacher education programs and specifically the ratio of theoretical and practical courses vary significantly depending on the nature of the program, the cultural values, norms and expectations of the society. Richards (1990) notes that the second language teacher education (SLTE) programs should provide opportunities for the novice teachers to acquire skills and competences of effective teachers. To this end, ELT programs offer both theoretical courses and practical courses. These programs usually have a teaching practicum module in the last year.

Freeman and Johnson (1998) point out that "learning to teach is a long-term, complex developmental process that operates through participation in social practices and contexts associated with learning and teaching" (p. 402). This statement implies that there is a need for the adoption of a constructivist view of teaching in SLTE. Similarly, Crandall (2000) mentions the changing trends in SLTE in the 1990s, referring to (1) a theoretical shift from behaviorism to constructivism, (2) the heavy influence of STs' prior learning and beliefs, (3) the realization that SLTE programs did not adequately prepare STs for real classroom teaching and (4) the growth of professionalism among ELT practitioners.

We can infer that the critical role of STs' beliefs and the need for STs teaching in real classrooms have been understood clearly over the last two decades. However, Wright (2010) laments that "research on the interactions of STs' prior knowledge and beliefs about language learning and teaching, and program goals, course content and teacher educators' cognitions and pedagogy in ongoing SLTE programs is almost non-existent" (p. 269). Although the tendency in the current literature acknowledges the importance of STs' beliefs in shaping their teacher identities and practices, only a limited number of studies have reported a modification in SLTE programs.

Even though STs' beliefs still await being taken into consideration in SLTE, changing winds have surely challenged the transmissive and behaviorist pedagogies. The growing evidence indicates that experiential (Dewey, 1938), constructivist, and social constructivist views of learning (Lantolf, 2000) have been adopted, which in turn has led to the widespread implementation of reflective practice in SLTE pedagogy (Schön, 1983, 1987; Wallace, 1991).

The reason why SLTE does not adequately benefit from the studies that address the critical role of STs' beliefs leads us to focus on the discussion of teaching theoretical courses like second language acquisition (SLA). SLA courses, which normally must have a vital role in shaping the STs' beliefs, are claimed to remain too theoretical and abstract (Markee, 1997). Therefore, most of the STs cannot associate these courses with the practical methodology courses and the teaching practicum. Lightbrown (1985) notes that SLA studies can actually convince STs to adopt communicative approaches to ELT and help understand why communicative approaches are more effective than behaviorist or purely cognitivist methods. Macdonald,

Table 1
Three Phases of the ELT Program

Phases	Courses Offered in the ELT Program
Phase 1 Year 1 & 2	Academic English (four skills separately), Educational Sciences (around 10 credits), Linguistics I and II, Language Acquisition, Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching I and II, Special Teaching Methods I
Phase 2 Year 3	Special Teaching Methods II, Teaching English to Young Learners I and II, Creative Drama, Teaching Language Skills I and II, Educational Sciences (6 credits)
Phase 3 Year 4	Practicum I and II, Testing, Material design and adaptation, Elective courses (Discourse analysis, Pragmatics, Semantics, Sociolinguistics), Educational Sciences (6 credits)

Badger, and White (2001) confirmed the suggestion mentioned above in their study in which SLA courses were found to have a significant impact on STs' beliefs. However, the extent to which such theoretical courses contribute to a change in STs' beliefs depends on the nature of teaching, the syllabus, and the curriculum of the program.

Within this theoretical frame of STs' beliefs and SLTE pedagogy, the present study analyzes the impact of the phases of a typical ELT pre-service program and aims to explore the influences of each phase on STs' beliefs about language learning and teaching. The structure and content of the program in which the study was conducted in four years were also taken into account so that the program itself as a dynamic variable could be included in the data analysis process. The findings may illuminate our thinking about what aspects of a SLTE program should be modified to support STs' belief change.

The Study

Context

The present study emerged from our need to explore the impact of the ELT pre-service education program at Gazi University, Gazi Faculty of Education in Ankara. The ELT program at Gazi University offers a national curriculum that is based on a constructivist view of education and reflective approach in pre-service teacher education. Among many other reasons such as the general trend in teacher education and impact of national academicians, the major reason behind offering a constructivist program is the language teaching policy of the European Union adopted and currently implemented in Turkey (Çakır & Balçıkanlı, 2012).

STs at Gazi University ELT program have to complete a one-year teaching practicum in the fourth year. The practicum is carried out at state primary or secondary schools. STs are assigned to a particular classroom for each semester. English as a foreign language is a compulsory subject in both primary (starting by 4th grade) and secondary schools in Turkey, and the number of teaching hours varies from 4 to 10, depending on the grade and type of school. In the practicum, STs are to stick to the prescribed curriculum that is developed and run by the Ministry of Education. The first semester practicum is based on observation of the students, teachers and the school system. In the second semester, STs start out teaching every week for one course hour (40 or 45 minutes). The methodology trainer observes each ST twice during the semester. However, STs are to write reflections and submit them weekly to their trainer. STs also plan their own lessons, prepare original materials and submit them weekly. The one-day practicum is supported with a ST and trainer interaction (called "feedback-sessions").

The ELT program at Gazi University has two major limitations. The first: STs' prior language learning experience is mostly based on a grammar-based and an exam-oriented secondary school system. In order to be accepted to an ELT program, the students in Turkey need to take an examination called "Foreign Language Examination" (FLE) that is offered by Student Selection and Placement Center nationwide. The FLE includes 80 multiple-choice test items assessing grammar, academic vocabulary knowledge with some sub-skills of reading. The examination has been proven to exert a negative washback effect on students (Yıldırım, 2010). The second, the program is the most crowded one with a population of 1,260 undergraduate students in 2011. The number of faculty is only 38.

This study attempted to analyze the content of a typical ELT program in terms of certain phases that were identified by the author (Table 1). Three phases were utilized to observe how the program influenced belief development. Phase 1 covers the first two years of the program during which STs are introduced to academic English courses, some educational sciences courses and applied linguistics courses. In Phase 1, the only practical course is "Special Teaching Methods I" (4 hours per week) offered in the spring semester of the second year. Phase 2 represents the third year of the program in which the

courses are completely practical and based on the performance of the STs in teaching attempts. Phase 3 includes the practicum as well as some methodology and linguistics courses.

Participants

Among 243 students enrolled in the program in 2007, 60 STs were invited randomly by email, but only 49 STs wanted to take part in the study. Thus, 49 participants were followed up from the first year (September 2007) until the end of the program (May 2011). Their age ranged between 18 and 21. Forty-four of the participants were female (89.8%), which is common in ELT programs in Turkey.

Attempts were made to ensure homogeneity among the participants. Specifically, the variables that might influence the results, such as educational background, socio-economic demography and their aim to attend an ELT program were tightly controlled before the research. The trainers who taught the methodology courses were taken into consideration during the study, which means all the participants took 16 credits of core methodology courses and the complete practicum from the same trainer.

On the other hand, the study has various limitations. The sample of 49 STs may not represent the whole population. The number of participants was limited due to the nature of the qualitative design. Also possible idiosyncratic differences among participants cannot be controlled in any way. Taking these limitations into account, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Research Objectives

The aims of the present four-year longitudinal study are listed below, as follows:

- *Identify* the current status of the STs' beliefs about language learning and teaching when they enter the ELT program in 2007,
- *Track* the changes in STs' beliefs about language learning and teaching during four years of the ELT program,
- *Explore* the impact of each phase of the ELT program on STs' beliefs about language learning and teaching,
- *Examine* the areas of the ELT curriculum which have a low, a high or a neutral impact on the STs' belief development.

Data Collection

The study is based on a mixed-method design. To explore in greater depth the STs' belief development, two different semi-structured interviews were conducted with the set of questions given in the appendix. All the interviews were conducted by the author in English. The first interview was conducted at the end of each academic year starting by May 2008. The first interview was also utilized at the beginning of the program (September 2007) with the newcomer STs. The aim of this first interview was to gather data concerning the beliefs of the participating STs about learning and teaching a foreign language. The second interview was applied only once when the participants completed the program in May 2011. The second interview aimed at gathering data that related to the ideas of STs about the curriculum of the program and their experiences as STs during four years. Two pilot interviews were conducted during the summer school in 2007 and some of the interview questions were refined accordingly.

Forty-nine STs participated in the interviews. Each ST was invited to the research and they were informed about their rights to secure the ethical grounds of the study. The participants were assigned nicknames to secure their privacy. Each interview lasted around 30 minutes. All of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

As for collecting data concerning the demographical features of the participants, a short questionnaire was developed and administered in 2007 when the participants were enrolled to the program. This questionnaire included items about age, gender, motivation for becoming a teacher, socio-economic status and educational background.

Data Analysis

The software Nvivo was used to assist in organizing the gathered data derived from the transcriptions of the interviews. The data were categorized under the major educational views on teaching a foreign language, namely, traditional view, constructivist view (Wright, 2010), and the mixed view. One more category, "Other," was added to classify the data that were neither related to other categories nor clear enough to code them safely as a finding. These categories were also utilized to classify the data in terms of (1) learning, (2) teaching and (3) being a learner/teacher. In the process of data analysis, three scholars cross-checked the coding of the transcriptions, and refined the categorized data in light of a cyclical reading process. Consensus was achieved upon discussions on differences and flaws. The trustworthiness of the data was enhanced through this process (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

The demographic data gathered through a questionnaire were analyzed using computer software. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were utilized for the analysis. The demographic findings were referred to ensure the homogeneity and identify the characteristics of the sample group. However, those specific data were not exploited to categorize or compare the findings.

Results

Demography

The analysis of the STs' answers to the questionnaire showed that the participants were quite a homogeneous group in terms of their educational and

Table 2
Results of the Interview Sessions in September 2007

Beliefs About	Traditional/ Transmissive		Constructivist		Mixed		Other	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Learning	44	89.8	5	10.2	-	-	-	-
Teaching	37	75.5	-	-	7	14.2	5	10.2
Learner/Teacher	41	83.6	3	6.1	5	10.2	-	-

socio-demographic background, and their motivation in enrolling an ELT program. They all were native speakers of Turkish who learned English as a foreign language after the age of nine or ten in state primary schools. Following their primary education, they all chose an English major in secondary education. This is typical in Turkey since the only way to get prepared for the "Foreign Language Examination" is to choose English as a major in upper secondary education.

The age of the participants in 2007 ranged between 18-20 (SD 0.3). Forty-four (89.8%) of the STs were female and the remainder of 5 (10.2%) were male. They mostly came from the middle class families. All student teachers were full-time undergraduates in Gazi Faculty of Education, English Language Teaching program at Gazi University.

Findings

The discussions of the qualitative data were organized in terms of the research objectives, shorter versions of which are as follows: (1) identifying the current status, (2) tracking the changes in STs' beliefs, (3) exploring the impact of the program, and (4) examining the ELT curriculum. The verbal data were quantified through coding and categorization in order to illustrate the change more clearly. Critical remarks and ideas of the participants were also presented in quotations for providing an in-depth discussion of each research question (RQ).

Research question 1: Identifying the current status

The findings used to test the first research question were based on the first interview sessions held in 2007 when the STs enrolled in the program (Table 2). The first interview results indicated that most of the STs held a transmissive/traditional view of language teaching and learning (F=44, 89.8%). The details are presented in Table 1. 89.8% of the STs believed that learning a foreign language effectively was a result of memorizing

vocabulary items and practicing grammar so as to construct an infrastructure to develop the communicative skills. They mostly perceived foreign language learning as a set of some cognitive operations. Only 5 participants (10.2%) mentioned various socio-affective language learning strategies and study skills that help develop communicative competence in the target language.

As for the beliefs regarding teaching, 75.5% (F=37) had a transmissive /traditional view of teaching L2. While around 14% held a mixed view (F=7), the views of 5 participants (10.2%) were either vague or incomprehensible, thus categorized as 'Other.' The STs believed that an English teacher was the source of the knowledge and had the complete authority in managing the classroom and deciding on what and how to learn. The findings about the learning/teacher were parallel with those of learning and teaching. The STs referred to the traditional teacher roles in defining a typical English teacher (F-41, 83.6%). Similarly, the participants viewed the language student as a passive learning who rarely practices language in a constructivist way (F-3, 6.1%). In 2007, only 5 (10.2%) possessed a mixed view about learners' and teachers' roles.

Research question 2: Tracking the development

When the STs were asked to reflect on the source of these beliefs in 2007, unanimously and normally, they all referred to their L2 learning experiences in primary and secondary school education. The influence of the secondary school, during which they had studied for a grammar-oriented examination (FLE) to be accepted to an ELT program, was heavier than that of the primary school. Some critical highlights of the interviews are as follows:

> In order to speak English, first we must have some grammar and vocabulary knowledge. After learning some grammar and vocabulary, we can start practicing speaking.

Table 3
Classification of the Beliefs at the Beginning of the ELT Program (2007)

Area of Questioning (Semi-structured questions) See Appendix	**Core Relevant Narrative Formed from Quotation** (Key content summarized through relevant quotations and linked by formulated meaning statements)	**Emergent Themes** (Initial themes arising within quotation)	**Sum of Constructivist Mixed Views**	
			F	**%**
Beliefs about language learning	Language learning should start with learning grammar and vocabulary. (ST2, ST25,ST26, ST30, ST39, ST43)	Transmissive and traditional view of teaching	5	10.2
Beliefs about language teaching	Teacher explains grammar rules and translates reading passages. (ST2, ST7, ST11, ST23, ST28, ST32, ST37, ST40, ST49)	Grammar translation method, behaviorist applications of language teaching	–	–
Beliefs about being a language learner	Students should memorize rules and vocabulary items. Learning how to speak English can be realized in an English speaking community. ST4, ST10, ST14, ST19, ST33, ST42, ST47)	Rote learning, memorization, short-term study habits	2	4.08
Beliefs about being a language teacher	Teachers provide exercises and tests. (ST17, ST23, ST31, ST41, ST49)	Source of knowledge, knowledge transmitter	1	2.02

I generally memorize rules and structures so that I can use them when necessary. In lycee [high school], we needed to memorize thousands of vocabulary items and rules to achieve in the university exam.

In the academic year 2008-2009, the STs did not display a significant change in their beliefs. The first phase of the program offers only 8 credits of practical methodology courses and 6 more on theoretical aspects of ELT methods and approaches. In

addition to such courses, the STs take many academic English courses, such as "Speaking I and II and Reading and Writing I and II" in the first year. Many (F=43, 87.7%) reported that the methodology that the instructors of these courses adopted was quite 'unusual' for them:

> In all of the courses, we need to speak English. This is difficult. Honestly, we did not practice speaking in lycee [high school] since we did not have time for that. When our teacher wanted us to speak in the classroom, we usually reminded her that we needed to focus on the exam and practice tests.

> In our method courses, our trainer talks about ways of teaching English and shows us some activities which are completely strange and interesting. I do not know whether such activities work in a real classroom.

The third year of the program (2009-2010), which was categorized as Phase 2, is heavily based on a practice- and a student-oriented syllabus that provide opportunities for the STs to perform micro and macro teaching demonstrations. At the end of this phase in May 2010, the STs displayed a significant change in their beliefs about language teaching and learning. This remarkable change can be observed in the sharp increase of the mixed view (F=29, 59.1%). Seventeen (24.4%) of the STs seemed to hold views categorized as 'Other,' which was unexpected. However, it was found that the STs were confused about the teaching principles and techniques they performed because very few STs witnessed that such innovative techniques (typical tasks and activities of communicative approaches) worked in practice:

> This year I have prepared and presented more than ten demonstrations. Well, we simply learn to teach English different than our learning experiences. We will see if they are really useful in the future.

> We cannot give instructions in Turkish. We don't talk about grammar rules directly because we need to do elicitation. We don't write Turkish equivalents of the unknown words. We don't translate reading passages for our students, and we do not do reading aloud. I mean these all describe the way I learned English. Now I need to believe that all these are wrong. Perhaps they are. I need to see it for myself.

In the last year (2010-2011), the third phase of the study, the STs began to teach in the practicum. The results indicated that the practicum had a significant impact on the STs beliefs. Thirty-two (65.3%) of the participants reported a constructivist view of language teaching, and 11 (22.4%) seemed to hold a mixed view.

The number of 'Other view' decreased to 6 participants (12.2%), which was promising.

Table 3 displays the classification of the STs beliefs at the beginning of the teacher education program (in 2007) with frequencies and percentages of the constructivist and mixed views in this year. The core narrative represents the commonly referred statements in STs' defining learning, teaching, being a learner and a teacher. One can infer that STs in 2007 viewed language learning and teaching under the influence of the traditional high-stakes examination. Thus, the negative washback of the "Foreign Language Examination" can be regarded as rote learning, memorization, and low order thinking skills among students, which were also found as the emergent themes in 2007.

Table 4 below shows the classification of the STs beliefs at the end of the teacher education program (in 2011) with frequencies and percentages about the constructivist and mixed views. At the end of the program, the change in STs beliefs approximated to an academic perspective; for example, most of the STs viewed language learning as a process through which individuals tried to develop their communicative competence. In addition, the non-linguistic elements, such as motivational factors or the roles of the teachers can be categorized under a constructivist view of language learning, as STs believed the teacher is a mentor and a counselor.

The common response to the interview questions in the last year was that "It was convincing to see that all of those activities, tasks and games worked in practice" (İpek, last interview in 2011). The reason why the practicum was so influential might be found in another comment of a participant: "We practiced and rehearsed teaching English in the third year...even how to use our body language and voice. And witnessing that what we learned is applicable and realistic has made me feel secure and confident" (Burçak, last interview in 2011).

Many of the participants (F=45, 91.8%) noted that the weekly reflections that they wrote after their teaching attempt in the practicum and the feedback of the trainer and the peers were influential in shaping their beliefs. "Generally, the response of our trainer to my reflections referred to our SLA or methodology courses. She always answered my questions by leading me to think about the academic knowledge" (Samet, last interview in 2011). The impact of reflective writing and feedback sessions throughout the practicum seemed to help STs associate their teaching experience with the ELT literature and make sense of their actions in front of real students. Also, the STs (F=39, 79.5%) underlined that feedback sessions encouraged and convinced them to use those "unusual teaching techniques."

Table 4
Classification of the Beliefs at the End of the ELT Program (2011)

Area of Questioning (Semi-structured questions) See Appendix	Core Relevant Narrative Formed from Quotation (Key content summarized through relevant quotations and linked by formulated meaning statements)	Emergent Themes (Initial themes arising within quotation)	Sum of Constructivist Mixed Views	
			F	**%**
Beliefs about language learning	Students should be led to become inquisitive and open to communicate. (ST7, ST13,ST21, ST34)	Developing communicative skills, contextual learning, socio-affective strategies, interaction with authentic materials	43	87.7
Beliefs about language teaching	Teachers use written or oral contexts and guide students to discover language use and usage. (ST1, ST9, ST22 ST23, ST29, ST32, ST36, ST45, ST48)	Using tasks, contextual teaching, language competences, being humanistic, promoting use of L2 in the class	44	87.7
Beliefs about being a language learner	Learners try to develop their communicative competence. (ST6, ST9, ST19, ST23 ST25, ST35, ST40, ST41, ST46)	Motivation, diminishing affective filter, personalizing language learning, use of real life resources, developing language skills	40	81.6
Beliefs about being a language teacher	Teachers are patient, resourceful, fun and friendly. (ST3, ST8, ST14, ST18 ST20, ST28, ST39, ST44)	Facilitator, mentor, counselor, critical thinker	41	83.6

Research question 3: Exploring the impact of the program

The findings that helped examine the RQ 3 were parallel with those of RQ 2. The participants believed that the most influential phase of the program was Phase 3 (F=47, 95.9%). Nineteen participants (38.7%) agreed that Phase 2 followed Phase 3 in terms of its effect on their belief change. One participant pointed out that *"We simply* learned everything which we put into practice in the last year." As for the second year (as the part of Phase 1), 17 of the STs (34.6%) believed that this year had some impact, mostly reminded them of the methodology course they took in the second semester. However, the first year of the Phase 1 had little or no impact (F=3, 6.1%). Again the STs unanimously agreed that the practicum was influential, and the interaction with the trainer and the

peers supported the experiential learning process. One ST noted:

> We brought many new teaching techniques to the EFL classes in state schools. The students were quite surprised at first, but then they begun to react positively because they saw our effort and sincerity. I wish I had learned English the way we taught in the practicum.

Although the responses of the STs have led us to infer that the Phase 3 is the most influential one, we should underline that the program is complementary in nature. In other words, the first year, which was found to have the lowest impact on the belief development, is actually critical in developing the L2 communicative competences of the STs. Moreover, the theoretical courses that were repeatedly reported to be boring and irrelevant were found effective in the feedback sessions during practicum. Therefore, an inference that the Phase 1 and 2 are weak and limited may not be accurate.

Research question 4: Examining the ELT curriculum

The fourth research question aimed at exploring what phases and components of the ELT program should be modified to help STs develop more effective beliefs. In examining the research question, the data gathered through the first and second interviews were exploited. Therefore, the suggestions are based on merely the participating STs' perspectives. The STs agreed on the three major limitations of the program, presented in Table 5.

Educational sciences courses are around 20 credits (with the electives) in the ELT program and taught in Turkish. The participating STs believed that these courses were about general educational sciences, quite generalized and irrelevant to their education. They also reported that the lecturers of those courses had no background in ELT, which means the teaching principles and techniques taught in these courses are not related to teaching L2. The STs suggested these courses be taught in English by the lecturers with a background in ELT or be excluded from the program.

The STs take various language skills courses in the first year, and the participants believed that these courses might be replaced with some field courses. Some suggested that a content-based approach be applied to these courses. On the other hand, they also acknowledged that these courses helped develop the necessary academic language competences that were critically important in attaining success in the following years.

The STs also regarded the intensity of the third year as a weakness and repeatedly mentioned that they could not find enough time to get prepared for the teaching demonstrations, the number of which is around ten per semester. The STs are to prepare a detailed lesson plan, original materials and the demonstration that is performed in front of

peers and the trainer. Some believed that stress and tiredness negatively affected their performance.

Discussion

The present study has revealed that the STs of Gazi University, ELT program start out their teacher education with various common beliefs and ideas about language learning and teaching. Those beliefs were constructed during their previous education, based on their experiences as language students. Because this group of STs had to take a grammar-based and a traditional test to be accepted to the program, the nature of their preconceptions about learning and teaching L2 were mostly transmissive/traditional. However, the courses specifically that they took in the third and fourth year (Phase 2 and 3) of the program enabled them to change their beliefs about how language learning should be facilitated and what kind of teacher identity they should develop to become an effective EFL teacher. Reflective writing and post-feedback sessions during the practicum were reported to help them build attitudes and actions on a well-established theoretical ground; that is, the practicum actually enabled them to make sense of the theoretical courses such as linguistics, SLA and other applied linguistic courses (see Table 1).

RQ 1 investigated the current status of the STs beliefs in 2007 when they first entered the program. The STs beliefs were found to base on a transmissive/traditional view of learning. Rote learning, memorization, and short-term study habits were observed as the major learning strategies that they developed previously as a student. Similar cases were reported in only one study (e.g. Mattheoudakis, 2007). Very few seemed to demonstrate socio-affective learning strategies (F=5, 10.2%). The reason the STs developed such beliefs can be tracked back to the national grammar-based examinations offered even in primary education. STs in English teacher education programs in Turkey are offered high-stakes examinations at every level of education. These examinations are based on a traditional view of language testing and offer questions in multiple-choice format that assess grammar and vocabulary knowledge in isolated and artificial test items (Özmen, 2011; Yıldırım, 2010). Foreign language students taking these examinations generally follow a preparation period through which they learn about grammar and vocabulary with some exam strategies, and they hardly find time to develop their communicative competences. Therefore, the study skills and learning strategies they develop are mostly based on viewing language as a subject matter to be memorized (Balçıkanlı, 2010) and used in examinations to enroll in better schools and teacher education programs. A recent study on STs beliefs conducted in Turkey (Altan, 2012) confirms these findings. RQ 2 tracked the developmental process of the

Table 5
Suggestions of STs for Possible Program Modifications

Area of Questioning (Semi-structured questions)	Core Relevant Narrative Formed from Quotation (Key content summarized through relevant quotations and linked by formulated meaning statements)	Emergent Themes (Initial themes arising within quotation)	F	%
What phases and components of the ELT program should be modified to help STs develop more effective beliefs?	Courses on general educational sciences should be parallel with the ELT courses. They should be either excluded or modified (ST2, ST4, ST11, ST18, ST24, ST27 ST39, ST42 and ST48).	Educational sciences courses, inconsistency of general education courses, instruction language of education courses [L1]	41	83.6
	First-year academic English courses should be replaced with some field courses (ST3, ST8, ST9, ST12, ST18, ST23, ST24, ST29, ST31, ST36, and ST42).	Language skills courses in the first year, Content-based approach to English courses, Field courses, First year general courses	40	81.6
	Third year is very intense. Some courses should be given in the fourth year (ST1, ST4, ST5, ST16, ST23, ST29, ST33 ST34, ST37, ST43, ST46 and ST49).	Intensity of the third year, Overloaded method courses [3rd year]	38	77.5

STs beliefs during four years of the ELT program. Each year, the participants were interviewed at the end of the year and the data were analyzed and compared with the previous years. The findings were similar with the previous research indicating that the models of teacher education based on knowledge transmission do not contribute to STs' belief development (Lamb, 1995). Phase 2 was found to be influential, and at the end of this phase STs reported a mixed view of language learning and teaching that borrows from both traditional and modern views. Nettle (1998) in his seminal study reports both stability and change may be observed in students' beliefs about learning a language, depending on many variables. Some of these variables may be the nature of the professional context and the cultural factors (Sang,

Valcke, Tondeur, Zhu, & van Braak, 2012). Similarly, Prosser and Trigwell (1999) point out that the same teacher may adopt different approaches to teaching in different settings mostly due to the contextual factors. Thus, although STs in Phase 2 seemed to change their beliefs in a significant degree, its impact may be observed in their future teaching situations.

Phase 3 was found to have the most influential impact on the belief development of the STs. The participants held that the practicum, the humanistic approach of the trainer, feedback sessions, reflective writing and feedback obtained at the end of the teaching attempt in the practicum enabled them to make sense of their teaching experience and build up their own style of teaching a foreign language. In a study conducted on the

same group of student teachers, Balçıkanlı (2010) found that a significant change in STs' beliefs contributes to their level of autonomy as teacher candidates. Tercanlıoğlu (2005) revealed similar findings in her research in which beliefs of students were analyzed in terms of gender.

What was also critical in this study was the impact of SLA and linguistic courses on STs' beliefs. If they remained as an intellectual input, such courses are known to have little or no impact on STs' beliefs (Chin & Benne, 1985). However, in the context of this study, those courses did have an impact on the STs' beliefs. Although the interviews conducted in the spring terms of 2008, 2009 and 2010 displayed a low impact of these theoretical courses, the participants reported some significant impacts of those courses in the last interview in 2011, when they were able to associate their teaching actions with these courses thanks to the feedback of the trainer in the feedback-sessions. Cephe (2009) claims that a reflective approach to teacher education promotes an effective belief change in STs during pre-service teacher education. Because Cephe (2009) conducted his study in the department in which the present study was carried out, we can possibly infer that a constructivist view of second language teacher education enables a context in which STs may adopt effective beliefs about language learning and teaching. This is quite a critical finding for the SLTE studies and more research should be conducted to investigate whether a teaching practicum in a reflective atmosphere results in acquiring effective teacher behavior. Considering the homogeneous group of this study and the rich qualitative data gathered in four years, we can safely assume that this critical hypothesis is confirmed in this specific study.

RQ 3 focused on the impact of the ELT program. Actually it is not surprising that the findings of the RQ 2 and 3 were similar in that high and low developments tracked during the phases of the program also illustrated the particular impacts that the program made on the participating STs. Teaching practicum year (Phase 3) was regarded as the most influential phase of the program. Also the third year (Phase 2) was claimed to provide the knowledge and skills that were necessary in the practicum. Therefore, the experiential and practical phases of the program were regarded as the most influential ones. As Lamb (1985) suggests, teacher education programs should give extra attention to an educational strategy that helps STs reshape their beliefs about learning and teaching. In this respect, the findings are in line with the suggestion of Lamb (1985). Also Wright (2010) notes that teacher education programs generally neglect the belief change process of STs and that so little has been done up to now. In this study, however, the department at focus seems to achieve what Wright views as a problem by applying a constructivist

curriculum with the techniques of reflective approach in teacher education. A similar study conducted in Greece by Mattheudakis (2007) reported a low impact of teaching practicum on the belief development of pre-service EFL students. Mattheudakis (2007) reported that the reason for this low impact might be attributed to the transmissive/traditional nature of the EFL curriculum and also the grammar-based and certificate-oriented English learning structure of Greece. This study, however, reported on different results gathered in an ELT program that is based on a constructivist view of education.

RQ 4 addressed the suggestions of the STs on possible changes that may be necessary to shape the program for a better impact on the belief development. The STs believed educational sciences courses conducted in Turkish should be either excluded or modified to relate them to the ELT field. These courses were structured mostly by referring to rational-experiential strategies and have already proven ineffective (Joram & Gabriele, 1998). Also the intensity of the third year should be considered in that STs reported a negative effect of this intense year. Further research should investigate this case in detail. However, the intense programs like CELTA are harshly criticized (Wright, 2010).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate STs' beliefs about language learning and teaching in an ELT program by identifying the current status when they first entered the program, tracking the changes in those beliefs during four years, and by exploring their ideas about the impact of the program on their belief development. One of the aims was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the STs' perspectives.

The findings of this study revealed that a teacher education program based on a constructivist view of education might have a significant impact on the belief development of the pre-service STs. Although the first two years were not found significantly influential, the following years led STs to display a significant change in the beliefs, which also indicated a radical difference between the first and the last year of the program. When the theoretical courses are associated with the teaching experiences of the STs in the practicum, they may be influential and convincing in adopting an academic approach to developing effective teacher behavior.

The truth is that beliefs, STs beliefs or any other ones, do not change overnight (Richardson, 1996). The relevant studies were convincing enough to plan a longitudinal study to investigate the transformation of teacher beliefs and to measure the change in beliefs in a long period of time. The current trend in SLTE pinpoints the vital role of reflective practice in belief development; however, little has been done up to now to achieve this goal (Wright, 2010). In this respect, the present study might be complementary to the literature.

Further research may track the STs in their professional careers and measure whether an effective ELT program contributes to teaching contexts of these novices. Such a study would be complementary because Prosser and Trigwell (1999) note that the approaches to teaching that teachers adopt in a given context are seen as being contextual or relational; therefore, the approach adopted by a teacher in one context may not be similar with the approach in a different context. Understanding the real influence of the belief change or development in initial teacher education requires an observation of teachers from their pre-service education to their professional teaching contexts. These and similar findings may also enlighten the studies of the in-service trainers and decision-makers, who possess inadequate information about this issue.

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Appendix

First Interview

1. *About learning*:

a. Please explain how you study English. What strategies, study skills do you use to practice four skills, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation?

b. How do you define learning a foreign language?

2. *About teaching*:

a. How should a teacher teach English? Please describe the principles, techniques, some ways and views. Can you give specific examples of activities, exercises, tasks, assignments?

b. What are the effective teaching strategies, skills and techniques you prefer as a student? What do you expect from an English teacher to help you improve your English?

3. *About learner*:

a. Who is a good language learner? What are her characteristics?

b. What are the specific strategies that a good learner employs?

4. *About teacher*:

a. Who is a good language teacher? What are her characteristics?

b. What specific attitudes does an effective language teacher display? For

example, how does s/he approach to the students? What kind of activities and exercises does s/he use to teach English?

Second Interview

1. *Influence of the ELT program*:

a. What aspects, years or courses of your program have had the most influential impact on your beliefs about language learning and teaching?

b. How did the influential aspects of the program affect your thinking? For example, what were the content of the specific course(s) that made you reconsider your ideas about language learning and teaching?

2. *Strengths and weaknesses of the ELT program*:

a. What are the strengths of the program in terms of your beliefs about language teaching?

b. What are the weaknesses of the program in terms of your beliefs about language teaching?

3. *Necessary modifications on the ELT program*:

a. Do you believe that some courses of the program should be modified to help you become a more effective teacher?

b. Which courses should be modified?

c. Do you think that there are some courses in the program that were inadequate in terms of their impact in your belief development?

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