



WCES 2014

## Pre-Service Teachers' Attitudes To Foreign Language Teaching; Change Or Status Quo?

Fatih Yavuz<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Balikesir University, Balikesir 10100 Turkey

---

### Abstract

This article is devoted to examine four basic foreign language learning issues mostly discussed. The effect of methodology, the use of L1, how to or not to use technology and lastly the contribution of homework; it should or shouldn't be given. The aim is to search the pre-service teachers' ideas about the issues mentioned above. The main research point is whether or not language teaching can move from status quo. The findings show that it is status quo and change to some extent.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of WCES 2014

*Keywords:* Pre-service teachers, foreign language teaching, use of L1, giving homework, use of technology in ELT

---

### 1. Introduction

Language teaching has always been seen successful if the result is positive on learners' side. So the debate for decades is how to teach a foreign language; to follow the conventional way and adhere to a strict approach /method or to combine one or more of them to teach eclectically. This research mainly focuses on learning the beliefs of pre-service teachers about foreign language teaching after they have been trained for four years by teacher trainers at faculty level. It is the matter of discussion whether or not training helps those to change the way they are planning to teach or they are in a way maintaining the status quo. The methods have all claimed to be teaching foreign language by various approaches and techniques. From the behaviorist school emerged Audiolingualism seeing foreign language education as habit formation and believing that all learners can be conditioned. (Richards and Rodgers, 2010, 53). The mentalist view opposing to behaviorism state the importance of human cognitivism and expect

---

\* Fatih Yavuz. Tel.: 0905324739567

E-mail address: [yavuzf@balikesir.edu.tr](mailto:yavuzf@balikesir.edu.tr)

learners induce the rules of the language they are working on. (Brown, 2007, 66). Humanist school noticed the absence of feelings that block a person's learning so they aimed to remove the emotional barriers such as anxiety and fear before foreign language acquisition. (Brown, 2007, 98) While the traditional approaches focused on structure teaching the modern approaches in language learning aimed to teach a language to use; communicate. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, 123) Another discussion is the use of the first language (L1) in the learning of a second/foreign language. While some such as behaviorist schools believe it is a must to speak the target language forever in the class and never compare with L1 as it can cause interference, others consider the significance of a learner's L1 which creates him more cognitive learning atmosphere and the others try to allow both L1 and L2 in the classroom. (Harmer, 2007, 63), (Swan, 1985, 96). The idea of giving homework is another matter of argument in foreign language teaching. Some methodologies see homework as a burden and insist on the removal of that activity in language teaching. Most approaches see it as a sign of individual learning and feedback for teachers or the more traditional approaches accept homework as a way of home conditioning. (Kohn, 2007) The last issue discussed in foreign language teaching society is to integrate technology into language learning. How to integrate technology is the dilemma in language teaching; two opposing ideas emerge here; technology will replace teachers and the latter is that it will help students and teachers to teach more effectively. (Dudeney and Hockly, 2007, 9) All in all, these issues have been discussed not only by the applied linguists but also by the future teachers at academic level in language teaching programs of universities in the world.

## 2. Research Method

This study was conducted with the aim of investigating the attitudes of pre-service English language teachers towards the approaches so far. The subjects are 93 fourth-year students at English language teaching program of Necatibey Education Faculty, Balikesir University. Four open ended questions were asked to the subjects to determine their views on the issues tried to be explained in introduction. These are:

1. Which method/s would you use in your teaching?
2. What is the place of L1 in your teaching?
3. Are you planning to use technology in your teaching; how?
4. How are you planning to give homework or no homework?

The questions have two legs; one is to see what they are planning to do when they become teachers. The other is to see the effect of teacher training courses at faculty level. These courses can be ordered as Approaches in ELT, Second language Acquisition, Linguistics, teaching language Skills, Methodology and Teaching English to Young Learners. The research aims to observe if we as teacher trainers can change the way we teach language or to find an answer to the question of "Are good teachers born or can they be made?" The answers were analyzed and classified. The research is qualitative here so the statistical values were not included in the findings.

## 3. Findings

This part of the research classifies the answers of the four questions. The first question was about which method to use in classroom. The answers are interesting that some prefer the traditional grammar translation method (GTM) claiming that in crowded classes with low-motivated students it is impossible to apply a communicative methodology. They also add that in a structural examination based curriculum the other methods don't seem to work at all. If the national education policy isn't changed they believe that they will find themselves teaching structure and translating sentences from L1 to L2. The realities of the education system in Turkey force them to choose GTM in foreign language teaching. Other group of students prefers using Suggestopedia or Total Physical response because they state that anxiety is the key element in foreign language learning and negative feeling causing anxiety should be removed so that anxiety can be lowered. Few in the group respond the question that they will be using an eclectic methodology. Their ground is that the learner, activity and material type would change the way they teach. The methodology would then vary from grammar teaching to be a communicative or a task/project based one. The other answers can be categorized as using communicative methods with the techniques of Role-playing and drama. They also added using more motivating visual teachings like puppets will be included in their teaching. The

second research question was to know how they consider L1 use in the classroom. The answers show that very few (just one among the ninety-three) supports the forever L2 policy in foreign language teaching. The others all support the L1 use for the following reasons;

- a. They believe that when teaching something new, especially a new structure it is impossible not to use the first language.
- b. When correcting errors, it is a must to use L1. They claim that while correcting students may misunderstand if they are corrected in target language while their L1 will raise their consciousness.
- c. At the beginner level. The pre service teachers rationalize that for the beginners it is not that easy to use L2 all the time as they may get confused and limited if they sometimes do not refer to their L1.
- d. While teaching young learners. This is another issue about which they have no doubt. The idea is that learners are too young to be instructed in the target language so to associate new learning item with the L1 would be effective and long lasting.
- e. L1 may be used to check comprehension is another case for pre-service teachers.
- f. To decrease anxiety in the classroom is the other rationale behind their L1 use decision.
- g. To relax the students is the last point in the answers. They defend that using L1 will relax the learners.

The third open-ended question was about the use of technology. In general they pointed out that technology is inevitable part of education general and language education in particular. When they are asked to give sample applications from technology they stated that technology can be seen all parts of life including education but here what is meant by technology is computer assisted language learning. None of the pre-service teachers alluded to the use of overhead projectors. The software programs they are planning to use are webquests and blogs, smart boards for interactive teaching, hot potatoes and concordancers. Besides specific computer programs and web 2.0 technologies, the pre-service teachers in this study declared that they wanted to use the traditional computer software such as Microsoft PowerPoint. When talking about internet based teaching they reported that they were planning to use internet based authentic materials such as pictures, videos and films in teaching of pronunciation, vocabulary and target language culture. As for the last question in the research the pre-service teachers were more creative; their common answers about giving or not giving, amount, and type of homework are as follows. The answers are in two groups. The first group believes that homework is a necessity for learners. It is crucial for repeating what they have learned at school. Homework is gainful for vocabulary teaching; also homework is a way for learners to become autonomous by increasing individual responsibility. Moreover, students spend their times more effectively if they are given homework. Further homework directs students other resources than the teacher. Those accepting that homework must be given had different suggestions for homework type. One of the ideas is to give more interactive and communicative homework such as puzzles task-based project type homework rather than the fixed homework giving. They add that homework should be motivating and entertaining as well as it is instructive. They also take the attention to the fact homework should be attainable in the sense that the doers are the students not their parents. The web based homework giving is another issue the pre-service teachers are involved. Teachers suppose that homework can be more motivating and effective if they are given on the web. The last issue the pre-service teachers indicated is that homework should be done not by individuals but also by more than one student so that they can learn cooperatively. The other finding is that pre-service teachers prefer homework that does not direct learners' attention to form such as grammar and structure but to the communicative aspects of language such as listening and speaking. The other view among the pre-service teachers is not to give homework at all. They presume that instead of giving homework a teacher may increase the amount of practice during class hour or they believe giving homework causes loss of motivation in positive learning.

#### 4. Result

The findings in this research can be examined in two aspects;

- a. What is status quo? How it is being done?
- b. Can education change the status quo? How do the pre-service teachers consider teaching?

The current language teaching situation in Turkey unfortunately welcomes a structural foreign language teaching methodology depending on the reasons below:

- a. National education policy urges structural teaching by giving learners structure based examinations such as Foreign Language Proficiency Examination which is given twice a year by Student Selection and Placement Centre (ÖSYM).
- b. The crowded classrooms are seen to give the only option to foreign language teachers; to teach English structurally depending on grammar analysis and application of the structural knowledge into sentence translation.
- c. The individual lack of interest and low motivation caused by environment, school administration, parents and students, the teaching material and teacher him/herself also play a vital role in structural teaching. If the social milieu is not concerned in the communicative aspects of a foreign language, it would be hard for a teacher to change the tradition.

The teacher training programs of education faculties at universities in Turkey are fighting against the status quo training the pre-service teachers to free themselves from the burden of grammar translation method. Although the curriculum at university level tries to cover all modern approaches in foreign language learning related to the recent findings and discussions in English language teaching, the findings from our study reveal that pre-service teachers still presume to be applying grammar translation method in the classroom. This is the point education has no word; unless the factors behind the grammar translation logic are changed, any academic pre-service teacher instruction at university level will have no effect except for examinations that they have answer according to what they are expected to. But also teachers' must seek alternatives to methods rather than alternative methods. (Kumaravadivelu, 1994 quoted from Pica, 2000, 3). So the personal creativeness and experience will, most of the time, work better than the theory. When we analyze L1 use in foreign language classroom, it is obvious that either literature in the field or the commonsense among the foreign language teachers have the perplexity in supporting to which side. The imperialist view is one of the reasons why 'forever L2' policy is not accepted by heart. Foreign language teachers do not change their nationalities or culture when they speak English in the classroom but also they can't behave as if they don't know the native language of the learners. The ambiguity caused by the course book or the topic itself force the teachers to use L1 in the teaching of the foreign language. So the findings and the theory agree on this issue. The use of technology on the other hand is not something difficult for the pre-service to teachers to cope with as most of them have been grown up with computers. The recent theory also supports the application. So the expectations from the pre-service teachers for the use of technology seem to be met positively. The type of software they are planning to use is the ones they are acquainted with so this means the curriculum overtly direct the choice of the technology based activities in the foreign language classroom. Surprisingly tradition is also in technology; many of the experienced in-service teachers consider technology use as using projectors in Microsoft power point presentations while pre-service teachers are beyond that belief. The last point in this research is setting homework. The attitude against homework is not envisaged unconstructive. The reaction is to the type of homework; the common idea is that homework should not be a burden which is supported by the theory. Homework is the bridge between school and home, it gives feedback where teachers need more work and it increases individual responsibility for learning. So the behaviorist type of homework setting will not serve to the purposes mentioned above. This view is also favored by pre-service teachers.

## 5. Conclusion

"Good teachers are born, not made." This is partly true accepting the innate abilities of teachers but this study shows that good teachers can be made as well. Findings show us that some of the presuppositions of the pre-service teachers included in this study are based on the curriculum and their training at university level. But the ideas that the ELT programs at universities do not support come from the realities of the national education system and public schools. A proper ELT curriculum must be developed to meet the expectations of foreign language learners. But this doesn't seem to be changing the status quo by itself unless national education policy and teacher training curriculums are in tune. Status quo would never win in foreign language teaching but a change must have strong grounds to be agreed widely. Apart from the other things teachers must be reflective. A reflective teacher is the

person who tries to gain a better understanding of teaching what seems to be complicated or unstructured or untechniqued things. (Moon, 2005, 1). Teachers believing their own potential should be able to induce what to apply skip or change in their teaching. National Educational policies should be directing the teachers to refer to their own potential and feel themselves able to apply best teaching possible under that circumstance. The only thing for the Ministry of education would be then drawing the broad objectives of foreign language education.

## References

- Brown, D. (2007). *Principles of Language Learning And Teaching*, White Plains, NY : Pearson Longman, 66-98
- Dudeny, G., Hockly, Nicky. (2007). *How to Teach English with Technology*, Pearson Longman, 9-13.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *How to teach English*, Pearson Longman, 63-67.
- Kohn, A. (2007). Rethinking Homework, *Principal*, January/February 1-4, Accessed at <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/rethinkinghomework.htm>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000) *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press 123-136.
- Moon, J. (2005). Guide for Busy Academics No. 4: Learning Through Reflection. *Higher Education Academy*.
- Pica, T. (2000). tradition and transition in English Language Teaching methodology, *System* 28(2000) 1-18 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X\(99\)00057-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(99)00057-3) Accessed at: 12.12.2012
- Richards, J., Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press 54-67
- Swan, M. (1985). A Critical look at the Communicative Approach (2), *Oxford Journals Humanities ELT Journal* Volume39, Issue 2 . 76-87.