Being an English Teacher in Turkey: Future Teachers' Perspectives

Dr. H. Sezgi SARAÇ
Başkent University, Ankara, Turkey
hsarac@baskent.edu.tr

Abstract: This study aims at identifying prospective teachers' perceptions with respect to positive and negative aspects of being an English teacher in Turkey. To this end, a qualitative research design was used and the participants were future teachers (n=40) studying at the department of English language teaching in Turkey. In order to gather data, each participant was interviewed via structured questions. During these interviews, the prospective teachers were asked to put forward their negative and positive associations with the terms: "teacher", "English teacher" and "English teacher in Turkey". The collected data imply those prospective teachers' beliefs and values as well as perceptions over teaching and working as an English language teacher in Turkey. The results also denote how future teachers evaluate the present conditions, which are financial and moral, the practitioners work in Turkey today.

1. INTRODUCTION

As highlighted in the related literature, actions and identities are closely bounded with personal beliefs (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992; Witcher, et. al. 2001). Belief, as a system, acts as a perceptual filter while adhering meaning to the outside world and reality (Puchta, 1999). Richardson (1996) defines beliefs as psychologically related apprehensions, presumptions or intentions over the world that is perceived to be true. Thus, a system of belief functions as a personal guide that helps a person to define and understand the world and himself (Pajares, 1992). Teachers' beliefs are stated to have a form of structured set of principles and they are derived from practitioners' experiences, practices and personality (Borg, 2003). Zheng (2009) indicates that a teacher's system of beliefs is the substructure of his general belief system and effected from former experience. Beliefs inspire teachers' planning, decision making and in-class behavior.

Calderhead (1996) distinguishes five main areas of teachers' belief which are beliefs on learners and learning; on teaching; on subject; on learning to teach; on self and on teaching role. Since it is not possible to observe or measure individuals' beliefs directly, people's statements can be used as resource to make inferences from (Rokeach, 1968; Johnson, 1994). Even though beliefs are tacit, the importance of doing research on English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers is underscored by Zheng (2009) as beliefs have an effect on what the practitioners state and how they act in the classroom, which, results in shaping their own beliefs again.

While emphasizing the importance of teachers' belief, it should also be noted that the actual setting of teaching and contextual factors are to be taken into consideration. The realities of teaching conditions, such as school setting, workload, motivation, parental and administrative pressure on teachers might act as a hindrance to put beliefs into practice (Duffy, 1982, Mohammed, 2006). Khonamri and Salimi (2010) propose that there is a complex and sometimes inconsistent relationship between practitioners' beliefs and practices, which might be related to contextual factors and classroom life the teachers face with. Therefore, teachers' knowledge alone is not sufficient to understand practitioners' behavior and way of prioritizing problematic issues, which requires the elaboration of teacher beliefs (Zheng, 2009).

Thus, the aim of this study is to examine pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs in a dichotomy of positive and negative associations with three different but interrelated concepts which are: being a teacher, being an English teacher and finally being an English teacher in Turkey. The research questions guided the method and procedures of study are as follows:

What are the pre-service teachers' positive and negative associations with the concepts:
   a. "teacher"?
   b. "English teacher"?
   c. "English teacher in Turkey"?

2. METHOD

A qualitative research design was used and the participants were future teachers (n=40) studying at the department of English language teaching in Turkey. In order to gather data, each participant was interviewed via structured questions. During these interviews, the prospective teachers were asked to put forward their negative and positive free associations with the terms: "teacher", "English teacher" and "English teacher in Turkey". As stated by Brown and Rodgers (2002) free association was introduced as a method of psychological research by Sigmund Freud. In one of the forms of free association method, right after the researcher states a word, the participant is asked to utter an immediate response which comes to his mind. The pre-service teachers who took part in the data collection procedure were asked to put forward their free associations with an unlimited number of words, phrases or sentences. The participants' associations were recorded to be transcribed and coded under different themes. Since there was no limitation with the number of productions, each participant's all of the utterances were taken into consideration and categorized in accordance with the themes. Therefore, the total number of associations was not limited to the number of participants but to that of associations put forward for each concept. In addition, the association stated by only one participant was left out to exclude non-repeating data. The findings were presented in frequencies and percentages.

3. FINDINGS

The first set of data is on the participants' positive free associations with the concept "teacher". Totally eleven themes are highlighted by the pre-service teachers, which are: sacred, love, fun, devotion, guaranteed, summer break, ideal job for women and patience.

Table 1: Positive associations on the term "teacher".

Association	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Love	16	17,9
Fun	13	14,7
Devotion	12	13,6
Patience	10	11,3
Summer break	8	8,9
Sacred	6	6,7
Guaranteed	6	6,7
Ideal job for women	6	6,7
Idealist	5	5,6
Up-to-date	4	4,5
Fair	3	3,4
Total	89	100

The most repeated association on the term "teacher" is "love" (N=16). The participants stated this theme in chunks, such as "love for students" and "love for human-beings". The second most repeated association is "fun" (N=13). "Devotion" (N=12) and "patience" (N=10) were stated to be positive associations by the pre-service teachers. The participants indicated that "summer break" is a positive aspect of being a teacher. The participants associated the key term with "sacred" (N=6), "guaranteed" (N=6) and "ideal job for women" (N=6). The other, less uttered associations are "idealist" (N=5), "up-to-date" (N=4) and "fair" (N=3).

On the dichotomy, there exist the negative associations with the concept "teacher". This time, the participants provided associations in fewer themes but with more frequency. There are three themes proposed:

Table 2: Negative associations on the term "teacher".

Association	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Difficult conditions	28	39,5
Low salary	25	35,2
Public Personnel Selection Examination (PPSE)	18	25,3
Total	71	100

Most of the associations are related with the theme "difficult conditions" (N=28). The actual associations grouped under this theme are: "difficult working conditions" (6), "corporal punishment"

(3), "punishment" (2), "responsibility" (1), "receiving orders" (2), "fatigue" (5), "demanding" (2), "service done in the eastern part of Turkey" (3), "dealing with parents" (2), "educational system in Turkey" (2). As the third most repeated negative association (N=18), the participants stated the Public Personnel Selection Examination (PPSE) that is administered before appointing servants to work in state institutions, including state schools in Turkey.

The third set of collected data is on participants' free associations with "English teacher". There are seven main themes stated by the participants related with the keyword given. The data analyzed in frequencies and percentages are as follows:

Table 3: Positive associations on the term "English teacher".

Association	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Enjoyable	21	22,8
Communication	19	20,7
Culture	17	18,5
Privileged	12	13
Job opportunities	10	10,9
Cool	7	7,6
Creativity	6	6,5
Total	92	100

The participating pre-service teachers associate the term "English teacher" with the job being "enjoyable" (N=21) and leaving space for "creativity" (N=6). The most repeated associations were related with the aspects of "communication" (N=19) and culture (N=17). The other statements were on the themes of "privileged" (N=12) and "job opportunities" (10). The participants also stated that the target term associated with "cool" (N=7).

The themes on the negative associations are five in number. Among these themes, "prejudiced ides", "incompetent teachers", "difficult conditions", "bad pronunciation" and "foreign/imported teachers" were included. The findings in frequencies and percentages are:

Table 4: Negative associations on the term "English teacher".

Association	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Prejudiced ideas	25	34,2
Incompetent teachers	15	20,5
Difficult conditions	12	16,5
Bad pronunciation	12	16,5
Imported teachers	9	12,3
Total	73	100

Most of the associations are related with "prejudiced ideas". Within this theme, utterances such as "being compared with native speakers" (N=4), "students' with negative attitude towards English" (N=4), "people regarding that English is too simple" (N=2) were also included. The second most repeated theme is "incompetent teachers" (N=15). "Teachers using classical methods" (N=5), "teachers using Grammar Translation Method only" (N=3), "teachers using inappropriate teaching methods" (N=2) were among the productions included under the category of "incompetent teachers". "Difficult conditions" (N=12) and "bad pronunciation" (N=12) were the other associations put forward. "Imported teachers" (N=9) was also stated by participants. The phrase "imported teachers" is frequently used in Turkish media to name the contemporary issue in national education that 40.000 foreign English language teachers have been planned to be recruited in Turkey. (http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25195744/, 2011).

The next concept presented to the participants to find out their associations was "English Teacher in Turkey". The pre-service teachers proposed associations that were categorized in six different themes, which were "difference", "prestige", "job opportunities", "enjoyable", "superiority", and "privileged".

Table 5: Positive associations on the term "English teacher in Turkey".

Association	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Difference	13	25
Prestige	11	21,1
Different job opportunities	8	15,4
Enjoyable	8	15,4
Superiority	7	13,5
Privileged	5	9,6
Total	52	100

Being an "English teacher in Turkey" was associated with "difference" (N=13) and "prestige" (N=11). "Different job opportunities" (N=8) and "enjoyable" were also among the themes. The concept was proposed to have associations with "superiority" (N=7) and "privileged" (N=5).

The last set of data is on negative associations related with "English teacher in Turkey". The participants associated the term with "imported teachers", "PPSE", "bad coursebooks and materials", "low salary", "bad curriculum", "service in eastern Turkey" and "not being appointed". The findings are as follows:

Table 6: Negative associations on the term "English teacher in Turkey".

Association	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Imported teachers	27	22,5
PPSE	23	19,3
Bad coursebooks and materials	22	18,3
Low salary	19	15,8
Bad curriculum	13	10,8
Service in eastern Turkey	9	7,5
Not being appointed	7	5,8
Total	120	100

Among the negative associations foreign teachers planned to be recruited in Turkey, "imported teachers" (N=27) is the most recurring theme of all. Secondly, "PPSE" (N=23) was stated by the participants. "Bad coursebooks and materials" (N=22) and "bad curriculum" were other themes of association proposed. "Low salary" (N=19), "service in eastern Turkey" (N=9) and "not being appointed" were the last themes analyzed.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of current research is that the participants relate foreign teachers planned to be recruited in Turkey, "imported teachers", and "PPSE" as negative associations to working as an EFL teacher in Turkey. In addition, the curriculum, coursebook and materials used are not appreciated by the participants, either. It can be stated that the participants' reflections upon such issues derive from previous learning experiences. As is stated by Numbirch (1996) practitioners' beliefs are affected from prior learning experiences and these beliefs are influential all through their professional lives.

Even though being a teacher is associated with many positive aspects, such as; "love", "fun" and "devotion", associations on difficult working conditions, low salary and PPSE point at the negative aspects of working as a teacher in Turkey again. Besides, enjoyable, communicative and cultural aspects of being an English teacher are emphasized; however, the prejudiced ideas against the target language and profession, incompetent teachers and difficult job conditions were also mentioned by the participants. In another complementary study, pre-service teachers of EFL also indicate in their memoirs that "teachers who were not specialized in English language teaching", "teachers' inability in using English fluently" and "over-crowded classes ... with poor technology" are problematic issues in English language instruction in Turkish primary school setting (Saraç & Arıkan, 2010).

The current study is limited to a group of pre-service teachers' (N=40) associations. Future research necessitates comprehensive qualitative and quantitative studies on identifying the negative issues in EFL instruction in Turkey. Besides, expert opinions are to be collected on how to eliminate such problems to excel foreign language teaching nationwide.

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Dr. H. Sezgi Sarac holds a PhD from Hacettepe University, specializing in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. She currently works as an Assistant Professor at Baskent University in Turkey and is also the associate editor of the journal Novitas: ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language). Her research areas are curriculum development, pedagogical knowledge, material development and syllabus design

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