



Towards an Understanding of Prospective EFL Teachers' Beliefs about and Knowledge of L2 Oral Communication: A Sample from Turkey

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we aimed to identify prospective EFL teachers' beliefs about and knowledge of L2 oral communication, explore the impact of L2 oral communication courses on the beliefs and reflect upon future L2 communication practices. The participants of the current research comprised of one course tutor and ninety-four prospective EFL teachers. Data was gathered via one questionnaire including three sections. The findings depicted that prospective EFL teachers had positive beliefs about L2 oral communication and benefited from the course. Some implications of the study for language teacher education were also discussed under the available concurrent literature.

Key words: *teacher cognition; oral communication; prospective EFL teachers; language teaching*

1. Introductory Remarks and Rationale

Teacher cognition has long been the focal point in educational realms and triggered special concerns of several scholars synthesizing it from a myriad number of different perspectives. A variety of terms refer to identical concepts (Tsui, 2003) including beliefs (Pajares, 1992), knowledge (Golombek, 1998), and attitude (Woods, 1996). Despite these distinguishing features, Borg identified 'teacher cognition' inclusively as 'what teachers know, believe and think' (2003, p.81). Accordingly, in recent years, language teacher cognition has been increasingly engaged (Borg, 2006; Freeman, 2002) despite its complex and elusive nature.

In this mainstream research, pre-service teacher cognitions have been recognized to be a central concern with respect to specific curricular areas such as grammar (Farrell, 1999; Johnston and Goettsch, 2000; Phipps & Borg, 2009), writing (Burns, 1992; Tsui, 1996) and reading (Meijer, Verloop, Beijaard, 1999; Tercanlioglu, 2001) and also diverse language areas as prior learning experiences (Hayes, 2005), language learning processes (Peacock, 2001), pedagogical content (Andrews, 2003), and other areas. Further, teacher cognition has also emerged as a multidimensional concept closely related with notions such as beliefs and knowledge. Thus, throughout this article, we will use the term teacher cognition to embrace beliefs and knowledge inclusively by precluding the concept of 'practice' aside to a certain extent as the participants do not teach actively by now. Yet, we will include their in-class 'practices' as learners from the course tutor's lens in accordance with Kagan's (1992) suggestion that beliefs must be inferred from both words and actions.

In the meantime, the rationale underpinning this research are twofold: First, the development of prospective teachers' beliefs about language learning commences from the period when they were actual language learners and continues until the time they were in teacher education programs (Vibulphol, 2004). Taking this as a starting point, it is worth investigating this development not until they were in the program but also during the course of the program as previous studies regard teacher training courses as a constant rather than a variable (Bramald, Hardman, & Leat, 1995). In this study, therefore, we consider the related course as a variable which potentially influences PTs' beliefs about L2 oral communication. Second, accordingly, oral communication is of paramount importance at graduate level in diverse teaching and learning settings (Morita, 2002), yet unfortunately many EFL students in university classrooms reveal inadequacy and frustration in participating in oral activities (Leki, 2001; Morita 2004). The presumptive reason behind these undesired feelings may be attributed to PTs' existent beliefs. However, very few studies have focused on this close relationship so far (for example; Cohen & Fass, 2001; Phipps & Borg, 2007; Yue'e & Yunzhang, 2011). This study, therefore, aims to explore PTs' beliefs about L2 oral communication considering oral communication course as a variable by employing a multi-method research design.

2. Conceptual Framework

As a versatile concept, 'teacher beliefs' have been defined from a variety of perspectives including professional, pedagogical and epistemological proponents (for example, Borg, 2003; Harvey, 1986; Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). To illustrate, Kagan (1992) defines beliefs as tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught' (p.65), while Harvey (1986) defines them as 'a set of

conceptual representations which signify to its holder a reality or given state of affairs of sufficient validity, truth and trustworthiness to warrant reliance upon it as a guide to personal thought and action' (p.146).

Even if the construct of beliefs has been examined from different perspectives (Pajares, 1992), what appears to be plenary is that teachers' beliefs has emerged as a major area in language teaching research during the last 15 years, since the relationship between beliefs and classroom practices are considered to coincide or not interactionally in the language teaching and learning contexts (e.g. Altan 2006; Diab 2009). An ample range of research has, thus, documented that teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are strongly influenced by teachers' experiences both as language learners and as teacher candidates (Borg, 2003, 2006) and these stated beliefs can be resistant to change (Pickering, 2005). To offer an insightful inspiration for language teacher education agenda, an extensive number of scholars examined the belief impact on what teachers do in the classroom (Borg, 2007; Burns & Knox, 2005; Diab, 2009; Horwitz, 1985; Peacock, 2001; Phipps & Borg, 2007).

Even though it is overwhelmingly reiterated that teacher education exert a substantial effect on teachers' decision making, practices and student achievement (Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, Thwaite, 2001), very surprisingly, there is little research to investigate preservice foreign language teachers' beliefs both on international (Diab, 2009; Graham, 2006; Horwitz, 1985, 1988; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006; Numrich, 1996) and national basis (Altan, 2006; Altan, 2012; Polat, 2010). Indeed, teacher trainers should consider pre-service teachers' prior beliefs as any material utilised in the teacher education program is to compete with these existing beliefs (Farrell, 2006; Richards and Pennington, 1998). Horwitz's (1985) study evidenced that exploring prospective teachers' beliefs would optimize sustainable improvement in foreign language methods class by eliminating aversion toward language learning. In the same vein, Numrich's (1996) study with preservice EFL teachers highlighted that preservice ESL teachers' beliefs may be based largely on images from their formal language learning experiences, and in all likelihood, will represent their dominant model of action during the practicum teaching experience' (p. 450). Diab (2009) also investigated prospective EFL teachers' beliefs about language learning and found out that some of their beliefs may construct an impediment to prolific language learning, and later teaching.

Moving on the context of this study, for instance, Altan (2006) investigated 436 advanced language learners' beliefs about language learning in Turkey and the results of the study yielded a significant similarity among the responses of all groups learning English, French, German, Arabic and Japanese with the exception of a few items which are respectively different from other. To further his work, Altan (2012) investigated the beliefs of 217 undergraduate students enrolled in English Language teacher education programs at seven state universities in Turkey and concluded that the prospective Turkish EFL teachers hold a variety of beliefs both fostering or impeding successful language learning. Moreover, Polat (2010) studied the effectiveness of instructional materials on preservice EFL teachers' beliefs after a semester-long pedagogical treatment. The data was collected from 90 pre-service EFL teachers and the findings suggested that change was not observed too much but some beliefs of the participants became more favorable.

Additionally, a rudimentary component of this study, knowledge, has emerged as an important term to describe what a language teacher thinks, knows, believes and also does. An array of terms have been used to define this concept demonstrated in an extensive table in Borg (2006) such as specific pedagogical knowledge (Spada & Massey, 1992), practical knowledge (Meijer et al., 1999), personal practical knowledge (Golombek, 1998), knowledge about language (Borg, 2005), and so forth. Knowledge has been argued together with beliefs without any clear distinction (Calderhead, 1988) as these terms are regarded as dynamically and closely associated constituents (Hoy, Davis, Pape, 2006; Meijer et al., 1999) seen as a continuum (Woods, 1996). For instance, Woods (1996) emphasize the nesting nature of these concepts and coined the acronym BAK (Belief, Assumptions, Knowledge). Likewise, Tsui (2003, p.61) defines knowledge as 'personalized, idiosyncratic, and highly context specific' to capture attention to the close relationship between belief and knowledge.

A number of scholars have nevertheless attempted to verbalize a degree of difference between beliefs and knowledge (Abelson, 1979; Nelson, 1987). For example, Abelson (1979) stated six aspects of beliefs distinguished from knowledge: (i) there is no consensus about beliefs, (ii) beliefs are often about the existence of entities (such as God), (iii) beliefs often involve "alternative worlds" (e.g., an ideal world), (iv) beliefs involve affective or evaluative components, (v) belief systems are more open, including more personal experiences, and (vi) beliefs can be held with varying degrees of certitude (cited in van Dijk, 1983).

In line with the reviews above, this study employs a perspective regarding beliefs and knowledge as interrelated concepts, yet in an array of different names of knowledge system, we select 'practical content knowledge' by disregarding 'individuality' because we take into account the course tutor's evaluative results as a parameter to decide on their 'knowledge of L2 oral communication' but not their personally stated knowledge (for example, in Connelly and Clandinin's 1996 notion of personal practical knowledge). To illustrate more, practical knowledge refers to actions included in a specific context and situation (Calderhead, 1988; Connolly and Clandinin, 1987), while content knowledge can be explained as the knowledge of the subject matter to be taught, such as mathematics, literature, or language (Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989). Unifying these two conceptual definitions, we, here, use a new concept of knowledge as 'practical content knowledge' denoting all experiences that PTs gained in the L2 classroom context with the specific guidance of an instructor.

Given the concern here with the impact on beliefs about and knowledge of L2 oral communication as a particular area of language learning and teaching, very few studies have focused on the concentric relationship between teachers' beliefs and L2 oral communication (for example: Cohen & Fass, 2001; Phipps & Borg, 2007; Yue'e & Yunzhang, 2011). For instance, Cohen ve Fass (2001) examined instructional practices and beliefs of 40 language teachers and 63 language teachers about in-class oral communication and its assessment and concluded that there is a rigorous need for guidance both to teachers and learners as to how to make teaching and learning really communicative in nature and for teacher training related to how oral communication assessment can be conducted in the classroom. In the same vein, Phipps ve Borg (2007) investigated the beliefs of three English language teachers enrolled in DELTA program in Turkey and found out three major differences between their stated beliefs and practices, which are correcting oral mistakes, doing group work for oral discussions and teaching grammar in a controlled manner. Very recently, Yue'e and Yunzhang (2011) explored the beliefs and instructional practices of two English Language teachers teaching oral communication and revealed incongruent findings. They focused on the potential reasons of this inconsistency and stated that some internal and external factors impede them from practising what they believe in fact. The strenuous relationship between beliefs and oral communication merits further attention to attain an in-depth understanding, which comprises the underpinning tenets of our paper.

3. The Present Study

3.1. Research context

The present study emerged from the deart of importance attributed to the close relationship between the concepts of beliefs and oral communication skills in both international and local EFL contexts in Turkey where prospective EFL teachers were chosen as the target research group. The teacher education program in Turkey was redesigned in 2007 to bring communicativeness and contextuality to the classrooms. In doing so, four courses related to oral communication skills were infused into the currently updated program; namely, effective communication, oral communication skills I, oral communication skills II and oral expression and public speaking. In the course of research, the participants completed the first two of above mentioned courses. Yet, as the first course is taught through the Turkish language, it is out of the scope of the present research design. The content of the second course is as follows:

Oral Communication Skills I

This course offers a variety of different communication-oriented speaking activities such as discussions, individual presentations and other interactive tasks providing opportunity for students to improve their oral competence by developing effective language use in both formal and informal contexts. By exploring components of communicative competence, this course aims to equip students with the necessary skills to become successful communicators as well as language teachers. Students will utilize the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired in listening and pronunciation courses in delivering brief informative, persuasive presentations. Students will develop a good command of supra-segmental features (pitch, stress and intonation) as well. In addition, students will be acquainted with the use of audiovisual aids (OHP, Powerpoint, posters) and techniques which will help them become effective speakers.

The syllabus of the course was provided elaborating more on the course content, which PTs were exposed to during fourteen-weeks time. This syllabus was designed at the beginning of the semester, yet the course tutor shaped it according to the tension of the students. The final version was as follows:

Table. 1 Syllabus of the course

Oral Communication Skills I

Week 1	Introduction to the course
Week 2	Introducing oneself in terms of background information, current state, and future expectations and plans
Week 3	Speaking on the student life in campus and in the city
Week 4	Speaking on the places that worth seeing in the city
Week 5	Speaking on the customs and traditions in our nation and other nations
Week 6	Speaking on the interesting superstitions cross-culturally
Week 7	Speaking on the fests and festivals in our nation
Week 8	Mid-term exam
Week 9	Speaking on the life of the handicapped people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Describe a day of a blind person -How would the world seem different if you did not have the sense of sight? -Imagine that you woke up one day that you were deaf. What sounds would you miss most?
Week 10	Speaking on the dreams of the students

Week 11	Watching a film and speaking on the theme
Week 12	Speaking on the English Language teachers' qualifications
Week 13	Speaking on a model English Language teacher (based on videos)
Week 14	Final exam

As depicted clearly, the course aimed at improving PTs' practical knowledge rather than theoretical or pedagogical knowledge. Accordingly, the sessions were carried out based on student involvement and interaction. To serve this aim, the course tutor stated some points as to how he maintained the lesson. Prior to the lesson, the course tutor completed his preparations based on the syllabus but sometimes it did not work in the class and the topic was changed in accordance with the feedback received by the students. From time to time, the tutor faced difficulty in choosing the best exercise or in preparing alternatives for emergency cases because of heavy workloads (approximately 40 hours a week). Still did he state that he was quite willing to integrate technological components into the course. Songs and videos were the most frequently used instruments to generate a topic-related discussion in class. In the course of discussions, he never interrupted PTs' speaking but later he corrected the mistake implicitly. Further, he stated that he would be happier if the lesson became more student-centered rather than teacher-centered. In this regard, it is worth explaining how PTs were evaluated in the related course. A multi-faceted evaluation criteria were feasible in the lesson; namely, classroom participation, improvisations lasting for 3-5 minute tasks. To exemplify one of the tasks, the course tutor stated that, in the last week of the semester (refer to the syllabus in part 3), PTs videotaped themselves as a model ELT teacher and then brought them to the classroom to initiate a discussion as to whether s/he was a good model or not.

3.2. Research objectives

The data from this multi-method study was to address the following research questions:

1. What are prospective EFL teachers' beliefs about L2 oral communication?
2. What are the relationships among PTs' beliefs and background variables (age, gender, overseas experience and personal content knowledge)?
3. To what extent does L2 oral communication course contribute to PTs' beliefs?
4. How does the course tutor evaluate the course and PTs' cognitions about communicativeness?

3.3. Participants

Participants were a course tutor, male and with a 15-year ELT experience, and a total of 94 prospective EFL teachers (female=53, male=41) ranging from age 18 to age 24 (M= 21) in the first year of a 4-year teacher training program leading to a Bachelor's Degree (B.A) in Foreign Language Education. Freshmen students were selected as the target population of this study as they were actively involved in L2 oral communication courses. Of these 94 PTs, only 12 PTs had overseas experience during varying periods from 2 weeks to 4 months. Upon investigating the grades of PTs regarding L2 oral communication course, 80 was seen as the lowest mark, while 100 was the top point.

Table 2. Demographic information of the participants (N= 94)

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18-20	61	64.9
	21-23	20	21.3
	24-24+	13	13.8
Gender	Male	41	43.6
	Female	53	56.4
Level	1	94	100
Grade	90-100	70	74.5
	80-89	24	25.5
	70-79	-	-
	60-69	-	-
	0-59	-	-
Overseas Experience	Yes	12	12.8
	No	82	87.2
TOTAL		94	100

3.4. Instrumentation and data collection procedure

To gather data, we utilized one questionnaire, one reflective journal writing and one on-site interview with

course tutor. The questionnaire included three sub-sections, one beliefs sub-section, one course related considerations sub-section and one demographic features sub-section. We designed these three sub-sections of the questionnaire after an extensive review of literature (Feryok, 2008; Horwitz, 1985, 1987, 1988; Polat, 2010). The first sub-section consisted of 22 items on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, indicating the degree to which PTs agreed to disagree with the statements regarding their beliefs about L2 oral communication. The second sub-section included 16 items based on the same scaling system specifically designed to elicit PTs course related considerations in order to gain more insights about the effectiveness of formal instruction on their belief system. The third sub-section was about PTs demographic features (student number, age, gender, overseas experience). As the sample group comprised of prospective English Language teachers, L2 was coded as 'English' to make it more concrete and specific. To illustrate, instead of the item 'I can speak a foreign language well', we changed it as 'I can speak English well'. Different from other research studies, student numbers were required to match them with their grades given by the course tutor. Yet, the participants were reminded that their names be kept anonymously and be never used for evaluative purposes. Each participant was assigned a pseudonymy as PT1, PT2, and so on, referring to each prospective EFL teacher.

Content and face validity of the first and the second sub-sections of the questionnaire were established via the procedures of expert review and a pilot study. Prior to the implementation, a panel of experts consisting of five professionals in the field were requested to examine the first and the second sub-sections of the questionnaire for comprehensiveness and acceptability. Based on the feedback received, these two sub-sections were revised and piloted with a group of 18 PTs. To check the reliability of the questionnaire, the instrument was analyzed through the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (Cornieles, 2003) and the reliability was $\alpha = 0.76$, which showed a high level of reliability. In addition to quantitative inquiry, a week later, all participants were requested to write a reflective learning journal guided by 6 probing questions. Due to time and institutional constraints, an interview was not possible to conduct. Instead, an on-site semi-structured interview with the course tutor was arranged to elaborate more on what was happening in the class.

3.5. Data analysis

The statistical software package SPSS (version 16.0) was utilized for all quantitative data analysis. Descriptive statistics were computed to examine overall frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. To investigate whether there were significant differences between PTs' beliefs and background variables such as age, gender, overseas experience and success, mixed-way variance analysis (ANOVA), Independent samples T-tests and Scheffe tests were applied. For the data gathered via PTs' reflective learning writings, a qualitative content analysis approach was adopted to make valid inferences from the data (Weber, 1990). On the other hand, the semi-structured interview was transcribed and then coded by employing a thematic analysis method (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997) to elicit information for the last research question.

4. Results

This section presents the analysis of the findings under five main themes: (1) *beliefs about L2 oral communication and background factors*, (2) *combining beliefs with personal practical knowledge*, (3) *reflections of course-related considerations*, (4) *documenting more on the issue: reflective journal writings*, and (5) *commentaries from the course tutor: an objective eye*.

4.1. Beliefs about L2 oral communication and background factors

Participants responded to 22 items concerning their beliefs about L2 oral communication by ranking a Likert scale of 1 to 5 and the means and Standard deviations were computed to the selected items on the scale and redepicted in Table 3. The results convey that PTs possess positive beliefs about L2 oral communication as clearly shown by the most frequently chosen items with a mean rate of higher than 4.00 (items 1, 2, 9, 12, 13, 18, 19, 21, 22). This shows that (1) PTs consider speaking to be quite important ($\bar{x} = 4.77$, $SD = 0.66$) and (2) to the most important part of language learning ($\bar{x} = 4.21$, $SD = 0.83$). Further, (9) they expressed their great willingness to have a good command of speaking ($\bar{x} = 4.56$, $SD = 0.85$), as (12) they believe that an English language teacher should speak well ($\bar{x} = 4.56$, $SD = 0.85$). In doing so, they think (18) meeting native speakers ($\bar{x} = 4.37$, $SD = 0.80$), and (22) living in a native country ($\bar{x} = 4.59$, $SD = 0.83$) as the most valid ways of learning how to speak a foreign language well. At last, their high scores on items 9 ($\bar{x} = 4.12$, $SD = 0.98$), and 19 ($\bar{x} = 4.45$, $SD = 0.81$) show that they regard pronunciation as an indispensable and important component of excellent speaking.

On the other hand, items 4, 8, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 20 received relatively low means ($\bar{x} < 4$). When investigating the most striking responses, item 14, 15 and 16 show that (14) PTs can speak English correctly ($\bar{x} = 3.44$, $SD = 0.93$) both with (15) their class fellows ($\bar{x} = 3.70$, $SD = 1.02$) and (16) a native speaker ($\bar{x} = 3.60$, $SD = 0.88$). The five items received the lowest means, indicating a bit disparaging beliefs of PTs (items 3, 5, 6, 7, 11). To elaborate, PTs posit that (6) one cannot learn a language in 1 hour a day ($\bar{x} = 2.82$, $SD = 1.19$) and (7) it is not easier to speak than understand English ($\bar{x} = 2.57$, $SD = 1.10$). Nevertheless, even if items 3 and 11 ranked low by PTs, the implication of these items is quite positive. They state that speaking an English is very difficult and they feel shy

when speaking English with other people. These two items were responded less, reflecting such a positive meaning that speaking English is not difficult at all and they feel confident while speaking with a foreigner.

Table 3. Mean scores on PTs' beliefs about L2 oral communication (N= 94)

Items	Mean	S.D.	Range
1. It is important to speak English.	4.77	0.66	2-5
2. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning how to speak.	4.21	0.83	2-5
3. Speaking English is very difficult.	2.36	0.95	1-5
4. Everyone can learn to speak English.	3.49	1.10	1-5
5. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, it would take them less than one year to speak it very well.	2.71	1.07	1-5
6. You cannot learn English in 1 hour a day.	2.82	1.19	1-5
7. It is easier to speak than understand English.	2.57	1.10	1-5
8. Learning to speak is different from learning other skills.	3.73	0.99	2-5
9. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	4.12	0.98	1-5
10. I feel confident in speaking English.	3.55	1.03	1-5
11. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	2.77	1.17	1-5
12. I want to speak English very well.	4.56	0.85	2-5
13. I believe I will learn to speak English very well.	4.52	0.68	2-5
14. I know how to speak English correctly.	3.43	0.93	2-5
15. I can speak with my class fellows in the classroom.	3.70	1.02	1-5
16. I can speak with a native speaker easily.	3.60	0.88	1-5
17. I am pleased with my speaking progress.	3.32	0.95	1-5
18. I would like to meet people who speak English as a native language.	4.37	0.80	2-5
19. Pronunciation is important in speaking English.	4.45	0.81	2-5
20. If learners are allowed to make mistakes while speaking, they will make better progress.	3.96	1.10	1-5
21. It is important to practice a lot to improve speaking skills.	4.64	0.58	1-5
22. It is best to learn English in a native country.	4.59	0.83	2-5

4.1.1. Gender and beliefs

Independent samples t-tests were performed to compare the male and female groups. We can see from Table 4 that the only item with a significant mean difference is Item 14, *I know how to speak English correctly*, with a significance level of 0.00 ($p < 0.05$). This shows that male PTs claim to be better than female counterparts at knowing more how to speak English correctly. Rather than item 14, no items produced a meaningful difference in terms of gender differences.

Table 4. Results of t-tests comparing mean scores between two gender groups (N= 94)

Items	Male (\bar{x} , S.D)	Female (\bar{x} , S.D)	p
Item 14	3.71 (0.93)	3.21 (0.88)	0.00*

* $p < 0.05$

4.1.2. Age and beliefs

To delineate more on PTs' beliefs about L2 oral communication, three different age groups (1. Group: 18-20, 2. Group: 21-23, 3. Group: 24-24+) were compared to reveal whether there is a significant effect of age factor on PTs' beliefs. Three-way ANOVA and Scheffe tests were employed and the results were shown in Table 4. The results elicited a significant difference in the 3rd group (24-24+) only at such two items as item 12, *I want to speak English very well* and item 13, *I believe I will learn to speak English very well*.

Table 5. Results of ANOVA and Scheffe tests comparing mean scores on age groups (N= 94)

Items	Age (1)18-20 (n=61) (\bar{x} , S.D)	(2) 21-23 (n=20) (\bar{x} ,S.D)	(3) 24-24+ (n=13) (\bar{x} ,S.D)	F(ANOVA) Scheffe test
Item 12	4.59 (0.82)	4.20 (1.06)	5.00 (0.00)	3.79* (3) > (1) > (2)
Item 13	4.57 (0.62)	4.20 (0.89)	4.77 (0.44)	3.41* (3) > (1) > (2)

* $p < 0.05$

4.1.3. Overseas experience and beliefs

A series of t-tests were conducted to check the potential significant difference of beliefs between PTs with and without overseas experience. Of all sampling group, only 12 participants had overseas experience, while 82 did not have such an experience. This divergence created a significant difference on PTs' beliefs about L2 oral communication in terms of items 6, 16 and 17. For instance, those with some overseas experience agreed more (6) *that one cannot learn English in 1 hour a day* ($\bar{x} = 3.50$, S.D= 0.90; $p = 0.03$), (16) *that they can speak with a native speaker easily* ($\bar{x} = 4.08$, S.D= 0.67; $p = 0.04$), and (17) *that they are pleased with their speaking progress* ($\bar{x} = 3.92$, S.D= 0.79; $p = 0.02$).

Table 6. Results of t-tests comparing mean scores between groups with and without overseas experience (N= 94)

Items	PTs without overseas experience (n= 82) (\bar{x} , S.D)	PTs with overseas experience (n= 12) (\bar{x} , S.D)	p
Item 6	2.72 (1.20)	3.50 (0.90)	0.03*
Item 16	3.52 (0.89)	4.08 (0.67)	0.04*
Item 17	3.23 (0.95)	3.92 (0.79)	0.02*

* $p < 0.05$

4.2. Combining beliefs with practical content knowledge

To compare the potential differences resulting from varying personal practical knowledge, ANOVA tests and some post hoc tests were performed to make multiple comparisons among two grade levels, PTs with 90-100 grade levels and PTs with 80-89 grade levels. These points were the outcome a one-semester evaluation process guided by the course tutor, giving these grade levels by assigning a range of tasks and examinations explained above. Only one item (item 10) produced significant difference in PTs' related beliefs with a significance level of 0.05. As displayed in table 7, more successful PTs feel more confident ($\bar{x} = 3.70$, S.D= 0.94; $p = 0.02$) than those with lower grade levels ($\bar{x} = 3.13$, S.D= 1.19).

Table 7. Results of ANOVA tests comparing mean scores between two groups with different grade levels (N= 94)

Items	Grade Levels		p
	(1) 90-100 (n= 70) (\bar{x} , S.D)	(2) 80-89 (n= 24) (\bar{x} , S.D)	
Item 10	3.70 (0.94)	3.13 (1.19)	0.02*

* $p < 0.05$

4.3. Reflections of course-related considerations

A questionnaire involving 16 items about the oral communication course that they were provided during the first semester of the program was given to the students to deduce whether the course fostered their positive beliefs or not. The results of the quantitative inquiry analyzed via descriptive statistics (for mean rates, standard deviation and range) showed that PTs contended Item 1, *oral communication course is effective to learn how to speak English* ($\bar{x} = 4.45$, S.D= 0.74), Item 2, *it encourages them to communicate in English* ($\bar{x} = 4.41$, S.D= 0.68), Item 3, *the course is enjoyable* ($\bar{x} = 4.02$, S.D= 0.90), Item 12, *it helps me to improve my pronunciation* ($\bar{x} = 4.20$, S.D= 0.78), Item 15, *teacher speaks English most of time* ($\bar{x} = 4.00$, S.D= 1.00) to a large extent ($\bar{x} \geq 4.00$). On the other hand, table 8 exhibits that PTs agreed items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 16 with relatively lower mean rates. Of all, Item 10, *the course is student centered* ($\bar{x} = 2.66$, M= 1.17), and Item 16, *the number of speaking-related courses in the curriculum is sufficient* ($\bar{x} = 3.17$, M= 1.08), received the lowest mean scores.

Table 8. Mean scores on course-related considerations (N=94)

Items	\bar{x}	S.D.	Range
1. Oral communication course is effective to learn how to speak English.	4.45	0.74	2-5
2. It encourages us to communicate in English.	4.41	0.68	2-5
3. The course is enjoyable.	4.02	0.90	1-5
4. I participate the course actively.	3.61	1.01	1-5
5. Appropriate methods and techniques are used in the lesson.	3.80	1.00	1-5
6. More meaningful activities should be provided.	3.98	0.89	1-5

7. I need natural contexts to practice my speaking skills.	3.98	0.84	2-5
8. The coursebook includes sufficient exercises.	3.63	1.09	1-5
9. I can accomplish the activities.	3.96	0.85	1-5
10. The course is teacher-centered.	2.66	1.17	1-5
11. The course is student-centered.	3.48	1.02	1-5
12. I helps me improve my pronunciation.	4.20	0.78	2-5
13. I helps me improve my cultural insights.	3.84	0.92	1-5
14. Enough time is devoted to speaking ability.	3.49	0.97	1-5
15. The teacher speaks English most of time.	4.00	1.00	1-5
16. The number of speaking-related courses in the curriculum is sufficient.	3.17	1.08	1-5

4.4. Documenting more on the issue: reflective journal writings

When the qualitative data were subjected to content analysis, the following areas emerged in line with the questions asked to all 94 PTs in a written form:

4.4.1. Factors promoting or obstructing PTs' willingness to communicate

As to the factors promoting willingness to communicate, 33 of all participating PTs pointed out the significant role of the teacher in the course. They described the teacher as humanistic, supportive, modest and also open to voices from individual language learners whose feelings and needs are divergent. Moreover, activities were remarked as another issue to pay more attention for more miscellaneous and entertaining vicinity to speak up (31 PTs). Accordingly, the warm atmosphere of the class was posited as another encouraging factor to increase interaction in the course (9 PTs). On the other hand, some PTs shed light on the importance of topic selection further inquired with another question and explained as a sub-theme below (24 PTs). In contrast, the vast majority of the participants claimed that crowded classes and noisy environment were the main discouraging factors digressing them from effective communication (53 PTs). Furthermore, PTs stated that if the teacher became insensitive, intolerant and impolite, they would feel hesitant to participate in the discussions (23 PTs). They also accentuated some emotional factors affecting their willingness to communicate such as lack of self-confidence, shyness and inefficacy related to the discussion topic (18 PTs). Some of these 18 PTs further commented that when their peers laughed at their pronunciation while they were talking, they were negatively affected by this behavior.

4.4.2. Topics that they like most to discuss in the class

Overall, PTs stated that they preferred to discuss easy topics which did not require a beforehand preparation and a specific jargon. Particular areas asserted included daily events (29 PTs), cultural topics (21 PTs), educational issues (16 PTs), sport events (6 PTs), student life (5 PTs), animals (4 PTs), technological innovations (3 PTs) and social problems (3 PTs).

4.4.3. Opinions related to activities performed in the course

The majority of the participants revealed that they liked the activities done in the 'Oral Communication Course' as the selected topics were closely related to their lives and that they benefited much to discuss these topics (68 PTs). On the other hand, the rest of the PTs stated that the activities were rather simple and boring and so they proposed to revise discussion topics to create a more lively and enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom (26 PTs). In this vein, ten PTs suggested watching films in English, while 14 PTs recommended to play dramas and games to make the discussion colorful because the topic was too simple and too complex, they felt frustrated.

4.4.4. Suggestions for the betterment of communication environment

PTs suggested five themes for the betterment of communication environment: (a) the participation of a native speaker to the courses (24 PTs), (b) the inclusion of group and peer work (17 PTs), (c) the permanent use of English during the the course (13 PTs), (d) the involvement of colorful activities (13 PTs) and (e) the integration of technological opportunities such as the Internet applications; for instance, online chat, social media and so forth (12 PTs).

4.4.5. Other points that PTs want to add more on the issue

This section was provided in case we failed to notice some points that PTs wanted to share. In this regard, most of the PTs unfortunately left this part blank (73), while 11 of them focused on the need for more listening activities. Further, 10 of PTs emphasized that the films brought to the classroom should be without subtitle.

4.5. Commentaries from the course tutor: an objective eye

The final step was to explicate the feedback that the course tutor provided concerning PTs' cognitions about L2 oral communication. Five questions were asked to him and the responses are presented here in verbatim. The

first question was whether the lesson was really based on student involvement or not. The following quotation is the representative of the view he expressed:

'The course is mainly based on the topics and materials I prepared beforehand, but sometimes students' choices direct me to another vein in the course of the lesson. From time to time, I ruin communicative principles just not to discourage them. Of course, I wish more productive sessions with more interactive students. For example, the topic that we discussed in the last week of the semester was an output of the students. They videotaped themselves as a model ELT teacher and they commented on it. I was very pleased with such innovative ideas, yet this does not become possible all the time.'

The interview went on with a question different from the planned one. We asked whether he was pleased with the participation of PTs or not. He commented that there were some students who were always participating and that there were few who were always silent. To get them involved into the discussion, he stated that he directed the turns to those students but it created a pressure on them. Very surprisingly, he mentioned that there were some factors inhibiting their productivity. Accordingly, we requested him to elaborate on these factors and illustrative comments included:

'I can understand that they are quite willing to improve their communication skills, but the class comprises of 40 students and allocated time consists of only three sessions of 50 minutes each week. That means each student can speak only 3.75 minutes each week. Do you think that this will be enough? As the class is so crowded, unpleasant noises become inevitable and the time for each student decreases and lastly topic is a serious matter which designates the faith of the course.'

Then, another question was asked related to the limitations of the course. He stated that there is no problem with the proficiency level of the students, but the students from other nationalities, Arabian and African, may experience some difficulties in the majority of Turkish students. He maintains as follows:

'International students regard their accents as strange or their friends cause this undesired feeling, but that situation creates a cold atmosphere. Accordingly, group works lead to a chaos where everybody wants to collaborate with their own friends. Additionally, physical conditions are not as desired. It may become difficult to interact on the desks fixed to the floor. Also, exam factor is a great pressure on their creativity and productivity.'

In response to another question regarding the most salient problems obstructing their communicative success, he asserted three major problems: poor phonetic knowledge, inability to monitor themselves and reluctance to accept peer correction. Yet, he stated that he never interrupted their problematic sentences so as not to reduce their willingness. At last, we inquired how he evaluated his students' cognitive level on the whole and he illustrated his views in the following:

'They have quite positive beliefs about L2 oral communication and most of them are aware of their deficiencies, but they act as they wish due to the above mentioned limitations. They view this course as the only lesson that they can practice their language actively and want this course to be more in number and to last over the whole program. Sometimes, they criticize me and want a native speaker. I like it. This shows that they are trying to find ways to improve their communicative skills.'

Overall, as an objective eye, the course tutor also supported the qualitative and quantitative results based on the PTs' responses. In the next section, all these findings will be extended under the light of the current literature.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring prospective EFL teachers' beliefs about and knowledge of L2 oral communication using mixed method research design and the prima facie general picture to emerge here is that PTs possess positive beliefs about L2 oral communication. Positive beliefs are quite important in both education generally and language learning and teaching specifically (Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002) because they may exert a strong influence on teachers' instructional decisions and practices (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). As claimed by Freeman and Richards (1996), beliefs can affect powerfully what and how teachers learn during language teacher education and these beliefs can be resistant to change (Pickering, 2005), the overwhelming scene in this study seem to be quite pleasant. Further, positive beliefs reflected on PTs' success in the communication course, as stated by Karabenick and Noda (2004), indicating that teachers' beliefs about some content area during English Language learning period can affect their language achievement.

Results also indicated that some background factors appeared to mediate some of these effects. Among these factors, we investigated the impact of age, gender, overseas experience on the PTs' beliefs about L2 oral communication. Male PTs have more positive beliefs toward L2 oral communication than female PTs which is contrary to the finding of Koosha, Ketabi, Kassaian's (2011) study. Likewise, older participants believe that they are better at communicating in L2 than younger participants, which is not in line with the finding of Carroll's (2008) study. On the other hand, the results also indicate that the group with overseas experience has a clear advantage in beliefs about L2 oral communication over the group who stayed at home. This outcome is quite consistent with the research of Collentine and Freed (2004), Segalowitz and Freed (2004), Yashima and Nishide (2008), postulating that studying abroad provides a clear advantage on a wide range of language skills as well as communication.

As in the interview-based study of Sugiyama (2003) and in the qualitative study of Farrell (1999), the PTs in this study also acknowledged that courses in the teacher training program had a strong influence on their beliefs about specific language areas. Most of the participants seem to comprehend the value of these courses in terms of providing active classroom participation (Kim, 2006), but still do some factors obstruct them from participation to the discussions (McKeachie, 2002). As stated by the course tutor, some students chronically, especially international students, avoid taking turns in whole-class discussions (Liu, 2001; Morita, 2002). In this regard, the participants mostly reemphasized the inclusion of cultural elements into the course content, which may point out their awareness of the importance of socio-cultural factors in communication behaviours (Canagarajah, 2007).

As another concern, PTs stated the critical role of instructional materials in their willingness to communicate in the classroom. This role was also emphasized by Tomlinson (2003) because instructional materials may exert a strong influence on learning objectives, teacher and student roles and instructions. In research context, the selection of materials is mostly dependent on teacher's decision, which is reasoned as a result of crowded classrooms, various student demographics and limited time allocation unlike what Ur (1996) suggested as the growing teacher autonomy cause teachers' decision making in selecting instructional materials in EFL classrooms. Moreover, the course tutor stated two issues more regarding the materials in the classroom. First, he occasionally pays attention to PTs' suggestions and alter some parts of the prescribed syllabus. Second, he tries to bring authenticity to the classroom throughout authentic materials. Even if the use of authentic materials has been a controversial issue in the field, Guariento & Morley (2001) stated the effectiveness of authentic materials for high proficiency levels.

Furthermore, PTs verbalized the prominence of excellent pronunciation in communication, supported by the course tutor. In the same line, the Japanese first year university students in Oh's study (1996) also emphasized that excellent pronunciation is significant with a rate of 90% decreasing to 71% after one year period. These findings also imply the globally overwhelmed desire for better pronunciation. This caused accordingly to the PTs' belief that a second/foreign language can only be successfully learned through communication with native speakers (Riley, 2009). However, this assumption cannot be attributed to the exam pressure since the course tutor disregarded phonetic accuracy during the evaluation period as perfectionism may turn out to be a determinant for PTs' oral communication behaviours (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002) unlike the findings of Ng and Farrell (2003), reporting that teachers immediately correct students' errors due to its being time-saving and practical because they believed elicitation is valuable only in theory but not in practice.

In addition to pronunciation, the findings also reveal PTs' needs for academic listening in line with speaking facilities. In this regard, many scholars suggest an interactive discussion format rather than a lecture format (Lucas & Murray, 2002). Numerous studies investigating teacher cognition and classroom practice have shown that there is a symbiotic relationship between what the teacher believes and practices (Burns, 1996; Lam, 2000; Nunan, 1992) and that the limited availability of listening and pronunciation instruction does not derive from the teacher's belief. In this regard, as noted by the course tutor, some factors such as society, institution and curriculum may influence the applicability and transferability of teachers' beliefs to the classroom settings, supporting the findings of Tsui (1996). The points that we have discussed here are a brief representation of whole huge data and five main conclusions can be identified as follows:

1. PTs have mostly positive beliefs about L2 oral communication.
2. Evaluative results show that PTs are successful in terms of L2 oral communication.
3. PTs regard formal instruction context as a useful platform for improving their communication skills.
4. There are some promoting and impeding factors affecting PTs' beliefs and accordingly their willingness to communicate.
5. What PTs reported here actually overlap with what the course tutor reflected upon.

5.1. Implications

In line with the results discussed above, the following recommendations can be made for creating better beliefs about L2 oral communication:

1. As beliefs are personal constructs in a person's life (Barcelos, 2003), instead of changing or reforming them, teacher educators should discover newer ways of evaluating and shaping their existent beliefs. Likewise, Phipps' studies (2007, 2010) also suggest that teachers should become more aware of their beliefs rather than changing them.
2. In doing so, teachers should include reflective writing to allow PTs to think about their beliefs and shape them during the courses. Promoting teacher reflection is of utmost importance even in assessed contexts to foster awareness and productivity (Gunn, 2010; Hobbs, 2007).
3. As to unwillingness to participate in class discussions, content-based instruction may provide a solution. Accordingly, the professors in Ferris and Tagg's study (1996) proposed content-based instruction to teach communication skills more effectively.
4. Also, teachers should view PTs as not only language learners but also future teachers and launch a concern to contribute to their role as teachers as well (Breen et al., 2001).
5. Expanding this role, teacher education programs should incorporate into their curricula adequate amounts of field experience in the related skills.

6. These findings further suggest that teacher education programs should devote substantial time to the improvement of PTs' practical content knowledge related to L2 oral communication, especially in smaller groups.

5.2. Limitations and future directions

Despite intensive consideration of all factors in the research design, certain limitations may be unavoidable. First, studying on the change in PTs' beliefs may not be possible after one semester of instruction as related research yields rather controversial findings (Raths, 2001). Thus, a longitudinal study may provide more accurate insights about PTs' beliefs as conducted in some longitudinal studies (Freeman, 1994; Pajares, 1992; Tom, 1997). Second, if a pre- and post-test scheme was employed, it would be possible to explore the so-called belief change after the course more clearly. Last, data was collected from only 95 PTs from the same institution. Considering that the number of similar departments is more than 80 all over Turkey, the generalization of the results to other regions of the country may not seem to be feasible. Future studies, therefore, can explore PTs' beliefs about L2 oral communication by adopting a longitudinal research design conducted with larger participant groups enrolled in different universities located in different regions of country. Yet, these prospective studies should try to shed light on the cases in various language areas rather than investigating prospective teachers' general language beliefs as conducted several times within the local setting.

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