

## Teachers' Beliefs on Foreign Language Teaching Practices in Early Phases of Primary Education: A case study

Mustafa Caner

Anadolu University, Turkey  
[mcaner.phd@gmail.com](mailto:mcaner.phd@gmail.com)

Gonca Subaşı

Anadolu University, Turkey  
[goncas@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:goncas@anadolu.edu.tr)

Selma Kara

Anadolu University, Turkey  
[syilmaz@anadolu.edu.tr](mailto:syilmaz@anadolu.edu.tr)

### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine whether teacher beliefs would play a role in their actual practices while teaching target language in early phases of primary education, principally, in kindergarten and first grades in a state school. As it is a very broad research area, the researchers exclusively analyzed teaching practices and teaching activities of two teachers and their beliefs about teaching English to young children within the frame of early childhood education principles. One of the data gathering instruments in this case study was a questionnaire that inquires the participants beliefs related to the classroom practices and how these beliefs influence their classroom practices in early childhood education. In addition to the questionnaire, semi structured interviews with participants were held to examine their beliefs in detail. Finally, in order to see whether participants' beliefs matched with their actual practices in their classrooms or not, the sample courses of the participants were observed and video-recorded for triangulation for the data. The classroom observations of the courses as well as video recordings of those courses were also examined by the researchers, and the findings were verified by another co-rater in order to increase the trustworthiness of the data. The analysis of responses of participants to the questionnaire, video-recorded classroom observations and interviews were presented qualitatively in the findings section.

The results showed that both of the teachers took into account how their students could learn best with regards to their age, level and interest through using different activities and materials suitable for teaching English to young learners. It was also observed that teachers placed room for repetition, role-play, singing songs, picture drawings and coloring in their classes with young learners.

**Keywords:** *Teaching English to young learners; early foreign language education; teacher's beliefs, illustrative case study; young learners.*

## Introduction

Throughout the last several decades, a general concern has risen among early childhood educators concerning the policies and content of kindergarten and early primary education programs. This new concern is highly related to the capabilities of young learners in primary school education areas. Previously, educators were more interested in what children cannot do and less interested in what they are able to do in learning. Nowadays, this concern has been revolutionized through the innovations in primary education. That is, the emphasis in the early phases of primary school education has changed a lot throughout the years because the question "Can we work in the elementary school?" has been altered to "How can we work more effectively with elementary school age children?" (Hoose, Pietrofesa & Carlson, 1973). Consequently, it would be a waste not to use a child's natural ability to learn during his/her most vital years, when learning a foreign language is as easy as learning mother tongue. It is confirmed by the various theorists and researchers that almost 50 percent of the ability to learn is developed in the first years of life and another 30 percent by age eight. Therefore, it is suggested that early childhood development programs should have the opportunity to encourage early learning and development (Vos, 2004). Considering the research on child's language development and foreign language education, Muro and Kottman (1995) point out that, primary school children have the high ability to learn a foreign language.

It is a global fact that learning and knowing a foreign language fulfill a person's occupational needs, bring new insights into his/her world view, and make the person open-minded and tolerant. Considering the fact about the benefits of learning a foreign language, the implementation of foreign language classes into early phases of primary education began to take place in most of the European countries and in the USA in the early 1960s (Stone & Bradley, 1994). The shift towards the early foreign language education in European countries and USA has affected the education policy of young children in Turkey as well. Moreover, community and individual needs, which derive from relations with economically, politically, and socially developed countries resulted in the need for restructuring in the national education system in the country. As the consequence of the reformation attempts in education system in Turkey, the most important innovation was the expansion of the duration of compulsory primary education to eight-year continuous education. Within the framework of eight-year compulsory primary education, in 1997/1998 school year, foreign language courses have started in the fourth and fifth grades, which previously started in the sixth grade in the secondary schools (Tebliğler Dergisi, 1997:2481). Later, in the year 2000, the Ministry of National Education of Turkey published an official document, which declared that foreign language education in primary school might start in the earlier grades in formal education such as kindergartens, the first, the second and the third grades of the primary schools (Tebliğler Dergisi, 2000; 2511). However, the decision of offering foreign language courses in these levels was left to administrators of the primary schools. When the official records on the foreign language courses in the early phases of primary schools were examined, it was found out that most of the state primary schools do not offer such courses prior to the fourth grades. However, there were some limited cases in private primary schools in Turkish context. For instance, in Eskisehir there was only one state primary school that offers foreign language courses in those early years of primary education.

As it is case for new implementations in any field, the outcomes of functionalizing foreign language courses in the early phases of primary education should be examined for further implications. In this respect, this examination can be held through analysis of the foreign language education environments as well as scrutinizing the opinions and beliefs of the teachers who teach young learners in these classes. When the related literature was reviewed, it was observed that there has been scarce number of research studies dealing with the beliefs of the foreign language teachers who spend great efforts to teach foreign language in the early phases of primary education. However, this factual detail

was also valid for the other contexts which was stressed by several researchers such as Maxwell, McWilliam, Hemmeter, Ault, and Schuster (2001); Chiang (2003) and Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes and Karoly (2008). In the same way, when the available literature was reviewed, it was observed that there was not sufficient number of empirical studies on this subject in Turkey as well. Therefore, the researchers of the present study intended to examine the only case in their close environment in terms of its weak and strong points in foreign language teaching in early phases of primary education in the case of a sample state school in Eskişehir. What is more, the researchers were especially interested in illustrating whether teacher beliefs would play a role in their actual practices while teaching the target language to the young learners in their classrooms. The main reason behind the researchers' specific focus on teacher beliefs was the fact that previous research has demonstrated a relationship between teacher beliefs and their practices in the early elementary grades (Hsieh, 2006). Within this framework, the present study aims at examining the foreign language teaching practices in early phases of primary education, specifically, in kindergarten and first grade in a state school in Eskişehir. As it is a very broad research area, the researchers analyzed teaching practices and teaching activities of two teachers and their beliefs about teaching English to young children within the frame of early childhood education principles. Thus, the practices of two teachers in a state school in Eskişehir; the congruence between self-reported beliefs and self-reported practices were illustrated in detail in an illustrative case study design.

### **Literature review**

The literature supporting the present study falls into three categories: underlying philosophies of early primary education specifically in the kindergarten and first grade, the developmental features of young children according to their ages and former research studies conducted on the teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching English to young learners.

#### **Underlying Theories of Early Primary School Education**

The name, kindergarten (children's garden) suggested a place where children would be carefully nurtured much like growing plants. This name was given by Friedrich Froebel, who established the first kindergarten in Germany in 1840. The Froebelian philosophy formed the nucleus of the philosophy of kindergartens and preschool education in the world for over a century, at least through the 1950s (Hamilton, 1995). Throughout Froebel's period, the early childhood education faced with various philosophies of education, however, four philosophies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely, psychoanalysis, maturationism, behaviorism, and interactionism have played a major role in early childhood education (Stone & Bradley, 1994). Nevertheless, as Cameron (2001) stressed early childhood programs were shaped primarily by two views as; behaviorism and cognitive constructivism.

Practical applications of behaviorism involve a wide range from child rising and education to therapy. In terms of teaching language skills to young learners through behaviorist view, Skinner suggested that knowledge could be broken into small and simple pieces and presented to the learner gradually and logically. That is, the language learner is introduced to information in logically ordered small steps and is expected to respond at each step. Learners then receive immediate feedback about how accurate their answers and thereby their learning is started at that point. Constant success and reward at each small step typically strengthen the learning bond (Chastain, 1988). This sequential behaviorist perspective about learning formed the curriculum and the teaching methods used in early childhood education (Hamilton, 1995).

According to Piaget and other psychologists and educators who support constructivist-learning theory, knowledge is not an external package that is constructed by an intrinsically motivated cognitive being

through interaction with the environment (Stone & Bradley, 1994; Holmgren, 1996). While Piaget focused on the interaction between the child and the environment, Vygotsky emphasized another element in constructivism, which is the interaction of the child with the social environment (Cameron, 2001). Despite the differences between them, Piaget and Vygotsky agreed that a strictly behaviorist theory of learning is inadequate to explain how young learners learn. Rather than merely reinforcement of learning connections, experience provides many opportunities for learners of all ages to assimilate and accommodate being the important components of learning (Cuthill, Reid & Hill, 1996). What is more, the educational implications derived from Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories clearly have features in common, such as the opportunities for active participation, inquiry oriented experiences, and the acceptance of individual differences (Cameron, 2001; Tzuo 2007). However, these philosophies also have varied applications in different classroom settings. For instance, since Piaget's theory provokes discovery learning, sensitivity to a child's readiness to learn and acceptance of individual differences, self-initiated discovery is fostered in a Piagetian classroom. Young learners are provided a variety of activities, which are designed to promote exploration, and they are free to choose any of them. Thus, the child becomes busy and self-motivated explorer, who forms hypotheses and tests them against the world on his/her own. If children are not ready for learning or do not show any interest, teachers should not force the child to learn new skills. Knowledge should be acquired by an innate drive supported by a rich, stimulating environment (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2001; Tzuo 2007). On the other hand, the Vygotskian classroom promotes assisted discovery. Teachers guide the learning process of children with explanations, demonstrations, and verbal prompts, by carefully tailoring their efforts to each child's zone of proximal development. That is to say, assisted discovery is promoted by peer collaboration. In Vygotskian classrooms, learners who differ from each other in terms of their ability and age might work in groups and groups should be structured in such a way that cooperative learning occurs.

The young learner educators, who have tried to design social interactionist approaches, emphasized the value of various activities such as games, concrete experiences, and problem solving activities. In this approach teacher assists the child through modeling and natural language, rather than didactic lessons. The social interactionist classroom is more child-centered with adult support and stimulation when it is compared to previously mentioned approaches. The natural impulse for learning is nurtured by the choice of young learners through activities that might be organized around themes or other ways of connecting ideas. The language teacher plans activities with reference to age and individual appropriateness of the learners. In the social interactionist view, game is viewed as a learning procedure, which involves not only materials and equipment, but also words and ideas that promote literacy and develop thinking skills (Ellis, 1985).

### **Characteristics of Young Learners**

Characteristics of young children at various ages are based on general categories of behavior derived from extensive observation. Notably, these characteristics are model for children in any given grade level and they represent a broad range of attributes. These broad behavioral trends are condensed to provide key issues in foreign language teaching in early years of primary education.

Although maturity may vary from ages three to seven, the kindergarteners are typically six years old children in the Turkish education system. The major activity for six-year-olds is games, but they also like art, including color, cut, draw and paste activities (Holmgren, 1996). Children at this age generally try only those tasks that they can complete successfully. For instance, show-and-tell is one of the important activities because it enables them to be at the center stage and helps them gain the teacher's approval (Muro & Kottman, 1994). The foreign language teaching activities in the kindergartens might be brief sessions with limited verbal interaction, which are more effective since children's verbal skills at this age are limited and their attention span is short.

The first-graders begin their primary school education when they are seven-year-old in Turkey. Frequently, when given a task, the first graders should be warned, reminded, and then checked on to see whether they have completed the assignment or not (Holmgren, 1996). Children at this age want to become a member of a group and do not like to be pulled out for criticism or praise in front of others (Worzbyt, O'Rourke & Dandeneau, 2003). Therefore, the teaching foreign language in early phases of primary education should consider the developmental phases of seven years old in general. In this respect, while teaching English the teachers should frequently employ group works and include game-like activities, which make them learn new issues more enthusiastically.

### **The studies on foreign language teaching in the early phases of primary education in Turkish context**

When the literature on the foreign language education in the early phases of primary education in the Turkish context was reviewed, it was found that there were two outstanding studies, which were conducted as doctoral dissertations. In one of those studies, Koydemir (2001) analyzed foreign language teaching of young learners in terms of quality, covering teachers' behaviors, classroom management and methodology. Koydemir (2001) studied fourth and fifth grade students and she concluded that it is beneficial to start foreign language education at early ages when proper teaching conditions are achieved.

The next study in this field was another doctoral study conducted by Peçenek (2002) in Turkey. Peçenek (2002) studied foreign language teaching and learning process of four-six age groups. Her purpose was to form a descriptive investigation model for language learning and teaching. In order to achieve this purpose, Peçenek (2002) described the perceptions related to foreign language teaching and learning, environment and experiments with teaching and learning. She specifically analyzed family and educational environment, teachers' education, and cultural features of the students. She also investigated the perceptions about foreign language teaching and learning of administrators, teachers and families of the children. Describing the present situation for four-six age group and getting perceptions, Peçenek (2002) also concludes that it is beneficial to start teaching foreign languages early ages, yet it is as well important to provide the necessary conditions for successful language learning to this age group like materials and proper teaching methods.

Regarding the fact that there have been limited amount of research studies in teaching foreign languages to young learners in Turkish context, this study attempted to contribute to the field through examining the beliefs and practices of two teachers who teach in the field of early childhood education.

### **Methodology**

In the present study, the teaching beliefs and practices of the two Turkish state primary school EFL teachers in Eskişehir were examined in detail in order to shed light on teaching English to young children in early primary school education. In order to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences, the present study was designed as an "illustrative case study" (Quirk & Davies, 2008).

The illustrative case study is an intensive study of a single group and empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context, which is believed that it might reveal more information in the situation studied. In illustrative case studies, researchers do not focus on the discovery of a universal, generalizable truth, nor do they typically look for cause-effect relationships;

instead, the emphasis is placed on exploration and description. Illustrative case studies serve primarily to make the unfamiliar familiar and to give readers a common language about the topic in question (Quirk & Davies, 2008).

### **Sample Description**

The population of this illustrative case study consists of two EFL teachers currently working in a state primary school in Eskişehir. One of the teachers, (Teacher A), is 29 year old female who graduated from English language teacher training department of a four-year state university in Turkey. She has been teaching English for 6 years in a state primary school and has been specifically teaching the kindergarten, 1, 2, and 3 grades for the last two years. During her university education in English language teacher training program, she also took an elective course on teaching young learners, namely, "Teaching English to Young Children".

The other teacher, (Teacher B), is 33-year-old female who graduated from English language teacher training department of another state university in Turkey. She has been teaching English for 12 years and has been specifically teaching the kindergarten and 1, 2, and 3 grades for the last two years in the same state primary school. She stated that she did not take any specific training or course related to teaching English to young learners during her undergraduate university education.

With the approval of the director of the school, these two teachers accepted to participate in the present study voluntarily. Additionally, the written consent forms of the teachers were taken prior to the study.

The state primary school, which was chosen as the setting of the study, was the one and the only state school, which offers English courses to the kindergarten, 1, 2, and 3 grades in Eskişehir. The school is situated in the city center of Eskişehir where social and economical backgrounds of the students were almost homogeneous. The foreign language classes in the school were not very crowded, for instance, there were 15 students in kindergarten and 24 students in the first grade. The foreign language teachers use the students' regular classes to teach English but the classes were equipped with authentic and visual materials such as colorful charts and flashcards on the walls.

### **Data Collection**

As this is an illustrative case study, various data collection procedures were utilized by the researchers in order to achieve triangulation, which is highly recommended while carrying out this type of research (Nunan, 1994). One of the data gathering instruments in the present study was a questionnaire that inquired the participants' beliefs related to the classroom practices and how these beliefs influenced their classroom practices in early childhood education. The original form of the Teachers' Questionnaire was developed by Charlesworth et al. (1993) and utilized by several researchers such as Burts et al. (1993, 1995), Syrrakou (1997), Kim (2005), Wang, et al. (2008) and Hegde & Cassidy (2009). This questionnaire was adapted by the researchers so as to cover foreign language instruction and utilized in the present study after getting the opinions of the experts in the field of instrument development. This questionnaire consists of 3 sections and begins with a few demographic questions. The major portion of the questionnaire consists of two scales: The Teacher Beliefs Scale (TBS) and The Instructional Activities Scale (IAS).

The TBS consists of 37 items regarding teachers' beliefs on several areas of primary school foreign language instruction. Each item is a statement (e.g. It is ..... for children to work silently and alone on seat work) which is rated by the teachers on a five-point Likert scale from "Not important at all" (1) to "Extremely Important" (5). The second part of the questionnaire, namely, IAS consists of 34

items; each describes a classroom activity. The respondents rate the frequency of availability of each activity in their classroom on a five-point Likert scale from "Almost Never" (1) to "Very Often"(5).

In addition to the questionnaire, randomly selected lessons of the participants in the target classes were observed and video recorded in order to examine whether the stated behaviors were actually displayed in the practices of the teachers. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers in order to elicit their opinions with regard to teaching English to young learners and their practices in classes. The interviews were also video-recorded and the transcriptions of the interviews were examined thematically by the researchers independently. The researchers were senior PhD students in English Language Teaching and the data gathering process of the present study was supervised by their professors at the university. What is more, in order to overcome the subjectivity of the researchers, another co-rater, who was an experienced researcher in EFL context, was asked to examine the gathered data for the confirmation of the findings of the researchers.

### **Data Analysis**

The responses of the teachers given to the questionnaire were analyzed and presented qualitatively in the findings section. The video recordings of the courses of participants were examined by the researchers individually in order to check whether the given responses of the teachers to the two scales matched or not. While examining the video-recorded lessons, researchers took some notes and wrote their specific comments on the teaching styles of the participant teachers by referring to their responses of the questionnaire, of the interview and the activities used in the classroom. The specific notes and the transcripts of the interviews served for the clearer descriptions of the teaching practices of the participants in detail. Finally, in the light of these descriptions, the researchers tried to figure out the current case thoroughly.

The collected data were analyzed to reflect the beliefs of the participants on their foreign language teaching practices in early childhood education settings. The participants' views on this issue were examined and discussed separately in order to depict the analysis in detail in the following section.

## **Findings and Interpretations**

### **Teacher A's teaching practices in the focused classes**

It is observed that children in all of the focused classes were indeed very happy to see their teacher who obviously encouraged her students to establish positive and constructive relationships toward learning English. She developed children's self-confidence and positive feelings toward English. For instance, she expressed that "*I am sure that children are very happy in my classes because, as far as I see, they eager to learn English*". This was also observed in children's attitudes towards teacher that was observed by the researchers during the field observations. She took into account the interest, ability and level of the students. As she stated, "*My children like to see real objects in the class, therefore I usually bring real objects such as toys and dolls*". For instance, she brought baby doll (Barbie) to the kindergarten and a picture, which illustrate the scene of sea to the first grade. She taught various songs to them and let them sing both in English and in Turkish. Therefore, she provided opportunities to accomplish interesting activities in which children could be successful at learning English. In addition, she believed in the use of various activities like listening to records, CDs, and tapes, playing games and puzzles, singing and listening to music, participating in creative movement, counting by rote and she used them very often as she reflected in her responses of item 4, 6, 8, 9 and 16 respectively in IAS. In the interview, she also acknowledged that, "*the activities such as games, songs, and coloring pictures directly draw the attention of children*". As she stated, she

does not prohibit the use of Turkish in teaching English, which was also observed in field observations. In her classes, she explained the content of the lesson and gave the instructions in Turkish since this enhanced the success of the students due to low anxiety. She maintained a safe, healthy, and positive learning environment and careful supervision in English language so that students focused on the activity. She planned a variety of English learning experiences with materials; she brought various sheets to be painted to the classes because she used coloring or cutting pre-drawn forms very often (item 12 in the IAS). She encouraged children's development of English and communication skills by talking to them and having them talk to each other. To illustrate, she made her students present dialogs in pairs and ask questions to the students individually since she found children's learning through interaction with other children very important (item 13 in the TBS). In this respect, she avowed, *"I try to create opportunities for children to speak the target language while they are working cooperatively. By this way they started to learn to negotiate in the target language"*. She was really patient since the classroom environment was a bit noisy. She uttered praise words to encourage her students. This behavior does not corroborate with the answer given to the item 17 in the TBS, which suggests using rewards such as stickers or stars to encourage students. Most of the time, she used verbal encouragement in her class. She was knowledgeable about children's continuum of development in learning English because she showed her individual interest to the students; for instance, she walked around the class to see each student's work in order to give feedback. In the interview, she claimed that she had to spend great effort to correct errors related to pronunciation because it would be more difficult to correct them in the later stages. She implemented English curriculum to help children achieve important learning goals. She taught the names of the colors in the kindergarten and in the first grade which were in the content of the national curriculum. She did not cover writing skill in these classes because it was not expected from the kindergarten and first grade students. As she stated, *"In these early phases I only try to make my students be familiar with English, therefore I only teach them very basic issues in the target language such as colors, names of colors or some rhymes and child songs. Although I paid special attention to the pronunciation of the new vocabulary items, I did not focus on to improve writing skills of the students. Since, we will deal with the writing skills in later classes."*

### **Teacher B's teaching practices in the focused classes**

Like Teacher A, Teacher B helped children establish constructive and encouraging relationships towards learning English. As she indicated in the interview, they screamed cheerfully at the beginning of every foreign language lesson. She stated in the interviews that *"As you see, when I go to their class, there usually be their regular classroom teacher, however, they always shout happily and applause when I entered into their class. Such a welcome makes me happy as well, because I see their eager to learn English from the very first moment."* She developed children's self-confidence and positive feelings toward learning English by providing opportunities to accomplish interesting activities in which children could succeed in learning English. To illustrate, she taught counting numbers through flashcards and used various activities for practice in the kindergarten; and she practiced the names of the colors by making them color the related parts in the picture. She taught different songs to the students and believed that such activities are extremely important (items 4 and 8 in IAS) According to her, the features of activities such as playing with Lego blocks, and puzzles; coloring, and/or cutting pre-drawn forms; working in assigned ability-level groups; circling, underlining, and/or marking items on worksheets; and using flashcards with alphabet or numbers were very important for the implementation of teaching English (items 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 in IAS). As she stated, *"I try to teach the issues in English through games and activity cards. At first, they thought that they were playing a game. For instance, while I am teaching the names of colors in English, I usually bring some pre-drawn forms in the classroom and ask them to color those forms as they wish, and then I ask them to name the colors in English. This is my way to teach them the colors in English"*. Generally, the

activities in her classes were designed on the basis of children's individual abilities, levels and interest in English. In the interview, she specifically emphasized that she considered the interests, likes, dislikes, and preferences of her students while planning her lessons. As she said, *"Although I am an experienced teacher, I usually ask their classroom teachers about their interests, and prepare my materials according to their preferences. For instances, the kindergarteners like singing songs, so, I teach some issues through songs. Because they like it in this way"*. According to her responses in the instructional activities scale (items 2, 8, 12 and 16), she claimed that she uses participating in dramatic play, singing or listening to music, coloring pre-drawn forms, and counting by rote type of activities very often. Moreover, in the interview, she stated that the most common activities, which she uses in teaching English in kindergarten level, were songs, dramatization, and coloring the pictures. As she acknowledged in the interview, *"Kindergarteners and the first graders are in their very early phases of schooling, what is more, their attention spans is very short. Therefore I try to teach them through acting out or using realia. For instance, I open my hands to both sides and walk in the classroom while teaching the word fly."* She did not avoid using children's mother tongue, Turkish, in her lessons to make them feel comfortable and less inhibited in using the target language. She valued working and playing collaboratively and let children work in small groups when teaching English owing to the fact that she enabled the students present dialogs in pairs and counting up numbers in small groups. In addition, they shared their colorful pencils with each other. Thus, she provided opportunities for children to speak English in working collaboratively and developing social skills such as cooperating, helping, negotiating, and talking with other students to encode message. The rationale behind the scene of this thought was seen in the answer given to items 28, and 31 in IAS; as she found cooperative working extremely important. As she confirmed, *"Cooperative work is very important, as they learn while interacting each other."* She also drew on children's curiosity and desire to make sense of their world to motivate them to become involved in interesting English learning activities since she used the children's toys, realia, flashcards and pictures to be painted. In the interview, she pointed out that she did not force the students to participate in the lesson; rather she tried to appeal their attention by using toys, real objects, and pictures. She said that at the end the students raised their fingers to give an answer. *"I usually bring a toy or puppet to the kindergarteners' class and we start to play with it in English. I did not force my students to participate in the play but after a while especially when they started to enjoy playing with toys they participate in the game and they started to learn new things in English."* Teacher B used verbal encouragement in English class rather than rewards. However, this behavior mismatches the answer given in the item 17 of the TBS, where she stated that it is very important for teachers to use their authority through treats, stickers, and stars to encourage appropriate behavior. It is observed in her classes that, she tended to use verbal encouragement instead of rewards in the classroom environment. She addressed the curriculum goals of English language with regard to the given curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education. She taught numbers up to ten in the kindergarten and the names of the colors in the first grade, which were within the content of the national curriculum. In the interview, she indicated that the syllabus of the kindergarten and first grade was kept the same and they could easily follow the topics given in the national curriculum. She did not force the students to write the words in their notebooks and did not teach grammatical rules as suggested by the curriculum. She acknowledged in the interview, *"We have a suggested curriculum for early language learners and I try to follow it in my classes. I do not want to bother my students with grammar or writing in these stages and I just want them to be familiar with some basic vocabulary. Our aim is just to make them ready for the next classes."*

All in all, Teacher B was a very enthusiastic teacher, who believed in the significance of teaching English to young children. In the interview, she stressed for the fact that young children were very eager to learn English; they could pick up the target language easily and quickly. She especially emphasized the danger of fossilization; the students might mispronounce the words because of

misperception. She expressed that *"In terms of English, the children in these classes are like empty cassettes, they learn whatever we record them. Therefore, I pay special attention to the pronunciation of the words, since if they record a word in a wrong pronunciation it might be fossilized and s/he always pronounces it as s/he learnt it at first."* However, it was observed that her classes were slightly crowded, thus, children sometimes could not produce the right pronunciation and the teacher might not always devote specific time to an individual error correction. She also complained about not being able to find out appropriate classroom activities and materials for young learners. Therefore, she had to produce her own materials or asked her colleagues. *"I used to teach upper grades therefore, I had some minor problems in finding ready-made materials that are appropriate for these classes, I usually prepare my own materials or sometimes I use Teacher A's materials."* She also mentioned that teaching to young children was very tiring and she had some adaptation problems while teaching to upper classes. Therefore, she suggested that either a new classroom schedule should be arranged or an English teacher should solely teach the young learners through the support of suitable materials. As she said, *"I believe that teaching young learners is a professional work which requires more time and endeavors. I have different classes in this school and each class has different goals. Therefore, it would be much better if there were a task sharing among the teachers. It would be easier if one of us teach only the young learners which make us professionalized in this area of teaching."*

### Conclusion

To summarize, it is observed that both of the participants are ideal teachers, who try to do their best for their students in the focused classes. As they indicated in the interviews, both of them took into account how their students could learn best with regards to their age, level and interest. Therefore, they wanted to use different activities and materials to teach English to young learners. It is observed that both of the teachers place room for repetition, role-playing, singing songs, picture drawing and coloring in their classes.

The participating teachers complained about the crowdedness of the classes, inadequate and inappropriate materials that were available for young learners in their school. For instance, although she was not against the idea of teaching English to young learners, Teacher A pointed out that finding appropriate ready-made language teaching materials for young learners would take time since most of the teaching materials were prepared concerning the upper graders. As she pointed out, *"teaching English to young learners was really enjoyable, but tiring at the same time"*.

Both of the teachers stated that a specific training program is necessary for teaching English to young learners because they faced some difficulties while teaching foreign language in the early grades of primary education. Thus, although they were experienced in teaching English in primary schools, they lived through some adaptation problems in teaching English to the earlier grades. They highlighted that this is a self-sacrificing job and administrators should take some precautions such as making manageable lesson programs or appointing only one teacher responsible for the early grades in the primary school education.

This current study has been designed in order to provide insights into teaching English to young learners within the frame of two teachers working in a state primary school, in Eskisehir. The outcomes of the study yielded that teaching English in early classes in primary schools is very fruitful due to observed classroom practices and enthusiasm of the learners. These positive findings corroborated with the previous empirical studies (Syrrakou, 1997; Koydemir, 2001; Pecenek, 2002; Breslin, Morton & Rudisill, 2008).

Brewster et al. (2001, 3) pointed out that there is a need for creating the optimal conditions for teaching languages. They referred to six important conditions such as; "having appropriately trained teachers, proper timetabling with sufficient timing, appropriate methodology, continuity and liaison with secondary schools, provision of suitable resources and integrated monitoring and evaluation". Similarly, Coltrane (2003) indicated the significance of creating suitable learning conditions, which support young English language learners. Mainly, he highlighted the realization of the following aspects; ensuring teacher quality, providing several opportunities for planning, designing developmentally appropriate instruction and using funds of language. All of the stated aspects of teaching English to young children were also mentioned by the two participant teachers of the present study. If these aspects are to be provided adequately, the teaching English to young children will be refined in early childhood education settings.

Since young English language learners enroll in preschool and primary school programs in great amounts, teachers, administrators, parents and the related department of the National Education Ministry should continually endeavor to provide effective, nurturing environments and developmentally and linguistically appropriate instructions for all children. This instruction should take into account the characteristics of young English language learners and their cognitive and language development, the learning conditions that are most effective for these learners and the types of instruction that best meet their needs.

### **Suggestions for further Studies**

The purpose of the present study was to illustrate the case of foreign language teaching in the early years of primary education in detail. Therefore, instead of posing research questions or hypothesis, the present study attempted to illustrate the case thoroughly. Further studies might base the present case study and focus on a specific issue on foreign language teaching in early years of primary education. Additionally, since there were limited number of cases where the practices of foreign language teaching in early years of primary education is seen, further studies might be conducted with preservice teachers who get teaching English to young learners courses in their undergraduate education.

### **References**

- Burts, D. C., Hart, C. H., Charlesworth, R., DeWoif, D. M., Ray, J., Manuel, K., & Fleege, P. O. (1993). Developmental appropriateness of kindergarten programs and academic outcomes in first grade. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 3*(1), 23-31.
- Burts, D. C., Buchanan, T., Charlesworth, R., Fleege, P., & Madison, S. (1995). *Teacher beliefs and practices survey*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University.
- Breslin, C. M., Morton, J. R., & Rudisill, M. E. (2008). Implementing a physical activity curriculum into the school day: Helping early childhood teachers meet the challenge, *Early Childhood Education Journal, 39*(5), 429-437.
- Brewster, J., Ellis, G., & Girard, D. (2001). *The primary English teachers guide*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Chiang, H.L. (2003). EFL teachers' beliefs and practices at an exemplary Taiwanese elementary school. *Unpublished PhD Thesis*. Retrieved from Proquest database ID number: AAT 3116283.

- Charlesworth, R., Hart, C. H., Burts, D. C., Thomasson, R. H., Mosley, J., & Fleege, P. O. (1993). Measuring the developmental appropriateness of kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 8*, 255-276.
- Chastain, K. (1988). *Developing second language skills: Theory and practice* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: HBJ Publishers.
- Coltrane, B. (2003). Working with young English language learners: Some considerations. *ERIC Digest*. Retrieved 13 June, 2009, from, [http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/digest\\_pdfs/0301coltrane.pdf](http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/digest_pdfs/0301coltrane.pdf).
- Cooper, P.M. (2007). Teaching young children self-regulation through children's books. *Early childhood education Journal, 34* (5), 315-322.
- Cuthill, M., Reid, J.A., & Hill, S. (1996). Why we do the things we do. Retrieved 13 June, 2009, from [http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/cls/clearinghouse/1998\\_100children/100\\_v2\\_4.pdf](http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/cls/clearinghouse/1998_100children/100_v2_4.pdf).
- Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford: OUP.
- Hadley, A. O. (2003). *Teaching language in context*. Boston: H&H.
- Hamilton, D.H. (1995). Montana kindergarten teacher's beliefs and practices. *Unpublished PhD. Thesis*. Montana State University. Dissertation Abstracts International. A55/08.2272.
- Hegde, A. V., & Cassidy, D. J. (2009). Kindergarten teachers' perspectives on developmentally appropriate practices (DAP): A study conducted in Mumbai (India). *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 23*(3), 367-381.
- Hsieh, M. F. (2006). My mom makes me to learn English: Power system instruction and quality of early childhood English language education in Taiwan. *Unpublished PhD Thesis*. Proquest database ID number; AAT 3232577.
- Holmgren, V. S. (1996). *Elementary school counseling: An expanding role*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hoose, W H V., Pietrofesa, J.J., & Carlson, J. (1973). *Elementary school guidance and counseling: A composite view*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Kim, Kyung-Ran (2005). Teacher beliefs and practices survey: Operationalizing the 1997 NAEYC guidelines. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*, Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Baton Rouge. Retrieved 15 May, 2009, from [http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-07072005-001118/unrestricted/Kim\\_dis.pdf](http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-07072005-001118/unrestricted/Kim_dis.pdf).
- Koydemir, F. (2001). Erken yaşta yabancı dil öğretiminin bazı değişkenler açısından değerlendirilmesi. *Unpublished PhD. Thesis*. İzmir: DEÜ Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü.
- Lara-Cinisomo, S., Fuligni, A.S., Ritchie, S., Howes, C., & Karoly, L. (2008). Getting ready for the school: An examination of early childhood educators' belief systems. *Early childhood education Journal, 35*(4). 343-349.
- Maxwell, K. L., McWilliam, R. A., Hemmeter, M. L., Ault, M. J., & Schuster, J. W. (2001). Predictors of developmentally appropriate classroom practices in kindergarten through third grade. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 16*, 431-452.
- Muro, J.J., & Kottman, T. (1995). *Guidance and counseling in the elementary and middle schools*. Iowa: Brown and Benchmark.
- Nunan, D. (1994). *Research methods in language learning*. CUP.
- Peçenek, D. (2002). 4 – 6 Yaş grubu Türk çocuklarının İngilizce öğrenme süreçleri üzerine bir durum çalışması. *Unpublished PhD. Thesis*. Ankara: AU Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü.

- Quirk, R., & Davies, C. (2008). *The guide to researching audiences: Illustrative case Study*. Retrieved 24 January, 2010, from [http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca\\_audiences\\_illustrative\\_v1-03.pdf](http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/07/sca_audiences_illustrative_v1-03.pdf).
- Stone, L.A., & Bradley, F.O. (1994). *Foundations of elementary and middle school counseling*. New York: Longman.
- Syrakou, I. (1997). The relationship of developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices of Greek kindergarten teachers. *Unpublished M.A. Thesis*.
- Tebliğler Dergisi. (1997). *İlköğretim birinci kademe 4. ve 5. Sınıflar İngilizce Dersi Programı*. Ekim 1997, 2481. Ankara: MEB Yayınlar Dairesi Başkanlığı.
- Tebliğler Dergisi. (2000). *Okul öncesi eğitim kurumları 5 ve 6 yaş grupları, ilköğretim okullarının 1 inci, 2 nci ve 3 üncü sınıfları yabancı dil öğretim etkinlikleri programı*. Nisan 2000, 2511. Ankara: MEB Yayınlar Dairesi Başkanlığı.
- Tzuo, P.W. (2007). The tension between teacher control and children's freedom in a child centered classroom: resolving the practical dilemma through a closer look at the related theories. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(1). 33-39.
- Vos, J. (2004). Can preschool children be taught a second language. *Earlychildhood News*. Retrieved 24 October, 2009, from [http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article\\_view.aspx?ArticleId=60](http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleId=60).
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2008). Play and its role in the mental development of the child. Retrieved 12 October, 2009, from <http://marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/1933/play.htm> (Originally published in 1933).
- Wang, J., Elicker, J., McMullen, M., & Mao, S. (2008). Chinese and American preschool teachers' beliefs about early childhood curriculum. *Early Child Development and Care*, 178(3), 227–249.
- Worzbyl, J. C., O'Rourke, K., & Dandeneau, C. J. (2003). *Elementary school counseling: A commitment to caring and community building* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). New York: Taylor & Francis Books, Inc.

**Appendix 1.** The Teacher Beliefs Scale (TBS)

2. As an evaluation technique in the kindergarten program, standardized group tests are \_\_\_\_.
3. As an evaluation technique in the kindergarten program, teacher observation is \_\_\_\_.
4. As an evaluation technique in the kindergarten program, performance on worksheets and workbooks is \_\_\_\_.
5. It is \_\_\_\_ for kindergarten activities to be responsive to individual differences in interest.
6. It is \_\_\_\_ for kindergarten activities to be responsive to individual differences in development
7. It is \_\_\_\_ that each curriculum area be taught as separate subjects at separate times
8. It is \_\_\_\_ for teacher-pupil interactions in kindergarten to help develop children's self-esteem and positive feelings toward learning.
9. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to be allowed to select many of their own activities from a variety of learning areas that the teacher has prepared.
10. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to be allowed to cut their own shapes, perform their own steps in an experiment, and plan their own creative drama, art, and writing or activities.
11. It is \_\_\_\_ for kindergartners to learn to work silently and alone on seatwork.
12. It is \_\_\_\_ for kindergartners to learn through active exploration
13. It is .....for kindergartners to learn through interaction with other children
14. Workbooks and/or ditto sheets are \_\_\_\_ to the kindergarten program
15. In terms of effectiveness, it is \_\_\_\_ for the teacher to talk to the whole group and make sure everyone participates in the same activity
16. In terms of effectiveness, it is \_\_\_\_ for the teacher to move among groups and individuals, offering suggestions, asking questions, and facilitating children's involvement with materials and activities.
17. It is \_\_\_\_ for teachers to use their authority through treats, stickers, and/or stars to encourage appropriate behavior
18. It is \_\_\_\_ for teachers to use their authority through punishments and/or reprimands to encourage appropriate behavior
19. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to be involved in establishing rules for the classroom
20. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to be instructed in recognizing the single letters of the alphabet, isolated from words
21. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to color within predefined lines
22. It is \_\_\_\_ for children in kindergarten to form letters correctly on a printed line
23. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to have stories read to them individually and/or on a group basis
24. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to dictate stories to the teacher
25. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to see and use functional print (telephone book, magazines, etc.) and environmental print (cereal boxes, potato chip bags, etc.) in the preschool/kindergarten classroom.
26. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to participate in dramatic play.
27. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to talk informally with adults
28. It is \_\_\_\_ for children to experiment with writing by inventing their own spelling
29. It is \_\_\_\_ to provide many opportunities to develop social skills with peers in the classroom
30. It is \_\_\_\_ for preschoolers/kindergartners to learn to read
31. In the preschool/kindergarten program, it is \_\_\_\_ that math be integrated with all other curriculum areas
32. In teaching health and safety, it is \_\_\_\_ to include a variety of activities throughout the school year.
33. In the classroom setting, it is \_\_\_\_ for the child to be exposed to multicultural and nonsexist activities.
34. It is \_\_\_\_ that outdoor time have planned activities
35. Input from parents is \_\_\_\_.

**Appendix 2.** The Instructional Activities Scale (IAS)

1. Building with blocks
2. Select from a variety of learning areas and projects (i.e., dramatic play, construction, art, music, science experiences, etc.)
3. Have their work displayed in the classroom
4. Listening to records and/or tapes/cds
5. Doing creative writing
6. Playing with games, puzzles, and construction materials
7. Exploring animals, plants and/or wheels and gears
8. Singing and/or listening to music
9. Creative movement
10. Cutting their own shapes from paper
11. Playing with manipulatives (e.g., pegboards, Legos, and Puzzles
12. Coloring, and/or cutting pre-drawn forms
13. Work in assigned ability-level groups,
14. Circling, underlining, and/or marking items on worksheets,
15. Using flashcards with abcs, sight words, and/or numbers
16. Participating in rote counting
17. Practicing handwriting on lines
18. Reciting the alphabet
19. Copying from the chalkboard
20. Sitting and listening for long periods of time
21. Waiting for longer than 5 minutes between the activities
22. Participating in whole-class, teacher-directed instruction
23. Children coordinating their own activities in centers
24. Tangible rewards for appropriate behavior and/or performance
25. Losing special privileges (trips, recess, free time, parties, etc.) For misbehavior
26. Receiving rewards as incentives to participate in classroom activities in which they are reluctant participants
27. Using isolation (standing in the corner or out side of the room) to obtain child compliance
28. Engaging in child-chosen, teacher-supported play activities
29. Specifically planned outdoor activities
30. Multicultural and nonsexist activities
31. Competitive activities to learn
32. Involve physical movement activities
33. Drawing, painting, working with playdough, and other art media
34. English incorporated with other subject are