

Teacher Learning during Transition from Pre-service to Novice EFL Teacher: A Longitudinal Case Study

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Abstract: In language teacher education literature, attention is predominantly centered on the content of teacher learning and cognition. The process of teacher learning and cognitive change over time remains relatively underexplored. For instance, despite its importance in career trajectory, there is limited empirical evidence on the transition process from English language teacher education programmes to the early years of teaching. Existing studies suggest that novice teachers experience a lack of preparedness to teach after completion of the teacher education programmes and encounter many challenges in implementing what they were taught at teacher education programmes. This article presents the preliminary findings on five case studies exploring teacher learning through participation in school communities in the context of teaching English as a foreign language. The student teachers were interviewed before and during the practicum which was a part of their pre-service teacher education programme, and they were followed up with further interviews in the initial years of teaching. The findings showed that in a context where the school practices conflicted with the teacher's educational ideals, student teacher participation in the school community fostered adaptation towards conventional language teaching practices at schools. The study has implications for research and practice in language teacher education.

Anahtar sözcükler

Öğretmen öğrenimi,
öğretmenlik
uygulaması,
uygulama
toplulukları, dil
öğretmeni bilişi,
bilişsel uyumsuzluk.

Hizmet Öncesinden Acemi Öğretmenliğe Geçiş Sürecinde Öğretmen Öğrenimi: Boylamsal Bir Vaka Çalışması

Öz: Dil öğretmenliği eğitiminde, dikkat ağırlıklı olarak öğretmen öğrenimi ve bilişinin içeriği üzerine odaklanmıştır. Öğretmen öğrenimi ve bilişsel değişimi süreçleri nispeten daha az keşfedilmiş haldedir. Örneğin, kariyer yörüngesindeki önemine rağmen, İngilizce öğretmen eğitimi programları ile öğretimin ilk yılları arasındaki geçiş süreciyle ilgili sınırlı ampirik kanıt bulunmaktadır. Mevcut çalışmalar, acemi öğretmenlerin öğretmen eğitimi programlarının tamamlanmasından sonra öğretmek için hazırlıksız olduklarını ve öğretmen eğitim programlarında öğrendiklerinin uygulanmasında birçok zorlukla karşılaştıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu makale, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretimi bağlamında okul topluluklarına katılım yoluyla öğretmen öğrenmesini araştıran beş vaka çalışmasının ön bulgularını sunmaktadır. Öğretmen adayları ile hizmet öncesi öğretmen eğitimi programının bir parçası olan öğretmenlik uygulaması öncesinde ve sırasında görüşmeler yapılmış ve aynı katılımcılar öğretmenliklerinin ilk yıllarında da görüşmelerle takip edilmiştir. Bulgular, okul uygulamalarının öğretmen eğitimi idealleriyle çeliştiği bir bağlamda, öğretmen adaylarının okul topluluğuna katılımı, okullarda süregiden konvansiyonel dil öğretim uygulamalarına uyum sağlamayı teşvik ettiğini gösterdi. Çalışma, dil öğretmenliği eğitiminde araştırma ve uygulama için çıkarımlar içermektedir.

1. Introduction

There is little published research exploring the transition process from English language teacher education programmes to the early years of teaching. The limited empirical evidence shows that teachers going through this process, also called novice teachers (Farrell, 2012), report a lack of preparedness to teach after completion of the teacher education programmes (Baecher, 2012; Faez & Valeo, 2012). These teachers encounter many challenges in implementing what they were taught at teacher education programmes when in real language classrooms, and often appropriate the conventional teaching practices at schools even when they disagree with them (Farrell, 2012, 2016; Shin, 2012). Considering the substantial investment in the language teacher education enterprise, these findings are quite striking, and further empirical research is needed. In this article, the preliminary findings of an ongoing research project exploring EFL teacher learning through participation in the school communities are shared. While doing so, it is also aimed to assemble an empirically applicable conceptual framework to explore the process of transition and change that English language teachers go through in their early years of teaching. Thus, how teacher knowing, learning and changing have been researched in language teacher education literature is briefly reviewed.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Theoretical Framework

In the last decade, research on language teacher cognition (Borg, 2006), and sociocultural learning processes of language teachers (Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011) established that teachers' knowledge of linguistics, second language acquisition and pedagogy does not directly translate into effective language teaching, and that language teacher learning is a phenomenon which involves complex cognitive and social processes (Burns, Freeman, & Edwards, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). The main contributions of both strands of research to language teacher education literature are briefly outlined.

Language teacher cognition research acknowledges that teachers' teaching practice is not only informed by their knowledge, but also by their beliefs, theories, attitudes, assumptions, conceptions, principles, thinking and decision-making on every relevant aspect of their work, all of which merge under the umbrella concept of 'language teacher cognition' (Borg, 2006). These cognitions start being formed as early as when teachers go through schooling as learners themselves. The impact of schooling on teachers' cognitions and practices is often defined as "apprenticeship of observation", a term coined by Lortie (1975). This concept suggests that student teachers who spend thousands of hours in schools as learners prior to their teacher education courses bring along preconceptions on teaching and learning based on their observations as learners. These preconceptions, according to Lortie, could be so powerful that they could predominate the impact of teacher education. Along the same line, Borg (2006) notes that how language teachers receive teacher education may be influenced by these preconceptions. Borg further points out that teachers' cognitions and practices mutually inform each other which suggests teachers continue learning and changing throughout their professional career. Language teacher cognition research often examines the content of the cognitions such as teachers' beliefs on speaking skills (i.e. Dinçer & Yeşilyurt, 2013), or perceptions of preparedness for teaching (i.e. Faez & Valeo, 2012). However, the change of cognitions over time is relatively unexplored (Kubanyiova, 2012; Yuan & Lee, 2014).

Earlier research studies on teacher cognition are critiqued for taking an individualist and decontextualized view of teacher cognition (Burns et al., 2015; Cross, 2010). Some researchers turned towards Vygotskian sociocultural theories of learning to understand how

teachers co-construct meanings in situated social practices (i.e. Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Kanno & Stuart, 2011). These studies recognise that teachers learn teaching in practice by teaching, participating, and acting in socially, culturally, historically and politically constructed contexts. In doing so, teachers become parts of these contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Research studies adopting a sociocultural perspective have the potential to feature, as Kubanyiova and Feryok (2015, p. 438) point out, “teachers’ situated, dynamic, and embodied knowing in action and, accordingly, place the study of teacher cognition in settings in which it finds expression: the contexts of participation in practice”. Some of these studies also specifically contribute to the wider understanding of language teacher identity development, and the social and contextual factors influencing it (i.e. Clarke, 2008; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Liu & Fisher, 2006).

Research into language teacher cognition and research into language teacher learning from a sociocultural perspective are often presented as opposites due to the ontologies they draw on, and the latter is recently advocated as being more advanced and sophisticated (Burns et al., 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). However, they are actually mutually complementary in contributing to the language teacher education literature in understanding how language teachers learn and know, and the reasons behind their teaching practices. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the author attempts to combine them by conceptualising teacher learning on two levels: first at the cognitive level, and second at the social level. By this conceptual separation, the author does not mean social and cognitive levels are two different planes acting independently. Instead, it is presumed that they are interrelated, and even embedded. The reason behind the conceptual separation is merely the lack of a single conceptual framework in the field of language teacher education to examine teacher learning by embracing cognition and social participation equally and comprehensively.

At the cognitive level, the author defines teacher learning as changes in teachers’ self-stated cognitions and practices. The main assumption here is that cognitions are not static, but fluid and context-sensitive. In order to explore the changes in self-stated cognitions and practices over the course of time, the author adopts the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) as a theoretical lens. In the simplest terms, according to Festinger, when people have inconsistent cognitions about the same notion, or conflicts between their cognitions and practices, they experience a state of dissonance, and to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of dissonance and to sustain self-integrity, they either change their cognitions/behaviours involved in the dissonance, or acquire new information to strengthen the more powerful cognition, or decrease the value of the conflicting cognition. This theory, despite not being widely used in teacher education literature, has the potential to explain the reasons behind change, as a catalyst for learning.

In order to examine how this change unfolds through teachers’ participation in the social practice, at the social level of my definition of learning, the author draws on the concept of learning as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This concept sets out to explain the process of transition of a newcomer in a community of practice through active participation. Therefore, it has the potential to explain teacher learning in the process of transition through gradual involvement in the professional workplace from being a learner of teaching in the university course room, practising school, etc. as in “peripheral participation” to becoming a teacher as in “full participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 37). Drawing on the cognitive and social aspects of learning, in this article the author aims to explain teacher learning in the transition process.

2.2. Research on Teacher Learning During the Transition from Student Teacher to Novice EFL Teacher

As stated above, research into the transition process between English language teacher education programmes and the early years of teaching is limited. Limited empirical evidence shows that novice teachers report a lack of preparedness to teach after completion of the teacher education programmes (Baecher, 2012; Faez & Valeo, 2012). The studies also found that novice teachers face many challenges in implementing the content taught at teacher education programmes, and they often adjust to the conventional teaching practices at schools even when they disagree with them (Farrell, 2012, 2016; Shin, 2012). These studies often employed questionnaires, surveys and interviews to collect data on student teachers' perspectives on teacher education programme or experiences in language teaching. The cross-sectional nature of the data in these studies did not allow for the analysis of teacher learning and cognitive change over time.

Likewise, research on language teacher learning during the transition from student teacher to novice EFL teacher is scarce in Turkey, which is the context of the present paper. Some studies evaluated the curricula of teacher education programmes and identified some weaknesses in the preparation of language teachers (Karakas, 2012; Uzun, 2016). Researchers often drew on cross-sectional data. Karakas (2012), for instance, reviewed the programme in light of literature reviews, relevant theories and models. Uzun (2016), on the other hand, employed open-ended interviews and a questionnaire based on the inventory of programme modules.

The present study aims to fill the identified gap in the literature in understanding teacher learning and cognitive change taking place during the transition from a student teacher to novice language teacher.

3. Method

The overarching research question addressed in this article is: How does participation in the communities of practice in schools shape EFL teachers' learning to teach? The author was particularly interested in the student teachers' transition from peripheral participation to full membership in the school communities; in other words, their learning process starting from the teacher education programme to the early years of teaching.

A longitudinal and qualitative case study was conducted with five student teachers. Merriam (2009, p. x) defines a case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit." The present study explores the process of learning to teach across time during transition from pre-service to novice EFL teacher.

3.1. Participants and Setting

This study took place in a single pre-service English language teacher education programme attached to a state university in Turkey between 2014 and 2017. Like its counterparts in the country, this programme accepts candidates who are often non-native speakers of English to prepare them to teach English as a foreign language to students with various proficiency levels in primary, secondary, and tertiary contexts. This four-year programme consists of various taught modules that are predominantly theoretical, and two practical modules that are placed in the fourth year along with the taught modules: school observation in the first semester and the practicum in the second semester. The practicum is a fourteen week module where student teachers are placed in local schools to practise English language teaching in

real classrooms under supervision of a university-based supervisor and a school-based co-operating teacher.

As part of a larger research study examining EFL student teacher learning during the practicum (Anonymous, 2016), five student teacher participants (four female, one male) who were supervised by different teacher educators at the teacher education programme and mentored by different co-operating teachers in practice schools during the practicum were recruited. In doing so, my sampling strategy was to reach maximum variation across the cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Patton, 2002). Further information about the participants and their previous teaching experiences is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

The participants

Pseudonym	Teaching experience prior to the practicum	Workplace during the initial years of teaching
Ceren	None	State school
Defne	Voluntary teaching for a semester (once a week for two hours in a kindergarten), Part time teaching (in a private language school)	Private school
Erdem	Voluntary teaching for a year (once a week for two hours in a kindergarten)	State school
Oylum	Part time teaching (in a private language school)	State school
Zeynep	None	State school

When this research study started, the participants were fourth-year student teachers in this programme, and they were approached at the beginning of the second semester, just before their practicum. They were all native speakers of Turkish who learnt English as a foreign language. Within the three-year timeline of this research study, they graduated, and all of them were assigned to different schools across Turkey as full-time English language teachers.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

Prior to data generation, the research study was reviewed and approved by three research ethics committees: at the researcher's university, at the participants' university, and at the Turkish Ministry of National Education. In order to address some key ethical concerns in social sciences (Denscombe, 2010), the data were kept confidential, and the names of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

The author interviewed the student teachers before the practicum and conducted multiple stimulated recall interviews and semi-structured interviews during the practicum (See appendix for sample interview questions). The student teachers' teaching practices were video-recorded, and those records were used as stimulus during the stimulated recall interviews to elicit their cognition. All of these interviews were done by the author in person. Then, after two years from the completion of the first phase of the project, the author contacted these teachers who started teaching at different schools in various locations across Turkey and conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant over the telephone.

The interviews took forty-five to sixty minutes. All the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim.

In order to identify and categorise the patterns across the cases, the qualitative data was analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was cyclical, in that each phase of data generation was followed by an analysis and informed the subsequent data generation. Data analysis was both deductive and inductive. In other words, the data were explored in the light of the analytical lenses (the theory of cognitive resonance and the theory of learning as legitimate peripheral participation), but the author was also open to explore the themes emerging from the data that were not acknowledged by the theoretical framework. Each case was first analysed individually. The analysis was then progressively focused on more concise themes appearing across the cases.

4. Findings

In order to project the transition from a student teacher to a teacher, in other words, from peripheral participation to full membership in the communities of practice in schools, the findings are presented in chronological order.

4.1. Before the practicum

During our first interviews, we talked about the student teachers' experiences of learning English as a foreign language, their teacher education programmes so far, and their beliefs and assumptions on language learning and teaching. My aim was to gather some background information on the participants. One of the major common background characteristics among the participating student teachers was that they all went through conventional English language teaching which they associated with explicit grammar teaching, extensive use of translation and repetition.

In the first semester of the fourth year in the pre-service English language teacher education programme, all student teachers went for classroom observations in schools as part of the School Observation module. During the initial interviews with the participating student teachers, one common theme was being critical of teaching practices in the practice schools.

I really didn't like my teacher. [...] She uses grammar translation method. Even when she wrote to the blackboard! For example purple, mor [*means purple in Turkish*]. Everything finished for me when I saw that. I was even getting bored in the class, and I cannot think the students. (Ceren)

As the excerpt suggests, Ceren was critical of the grammar translation method adopted by the teacher. Throughout the interviews with the participants, the author understood that the teacher education programme preached and promoted the communicative language teaching methodology throughout the taught modules. The student teachers, thus, experienced a dissonance between what they were taught at the university and what they saw in the classrooms. Failing to see these ideas in practice at the schools, Oylum was frustrated:

I don't know, I can't say... I just feel I was really ready [*for teaching*] last year, but this year I saw many things in the school, in the private school and the state school, and that's why I think that I can't make it because I just thought that I learnt lots of things in here [*at the university*]. [...] I learnt so many things and, but when I see a lesson in the state school, it was just a disaster for me. It was just a disappointment. (Oylum)

Considering that these student teachers were taught English as learners in quite similar ways, it can perhaps be concluded that the teacher education programme managed to raise awareness of innovative methodologies and created dissatisfaction with the conventional practices, which led to a cognitive dissonance. This dissonance resulted in a change in their cognitions about effective teaching. However the student teachers were not quite sure whether they would be able to reflect this cognitive change in their teaching practices because they thought that they were convinced by the theory, but not given the practical examples to apply it to teaching practice:

Sometimes I am getting angry with my teachers, ‘why didn’t you say us something like ...’ because it’s so easy, I just go YouTube, TPR and lots of things, lots of teaching methods and how they are... They [teachers at the university] just tell us ‘OK, TPR, that’s TPR’ for example, but not in practice. [...] For example for approaches and methods, I spent two years but in the theory maybe I know something, but just for my exam. After the exam I forget everything like all students. You know the psychology of a student. But in the practice I don’t know anything! (Ceren)

The student teachers, therefore, felt a lack of preparedness for teaching in the real classrooms before their practicum.

4.2. During the practicum

As suggested by cognitive dissonance theory, the student teachers wanted to change their practice in accordance with their cognitions favouring communicative language teaching methodologies during the practicum. However, it was not straightforward because of two major reasons: firstly, the student teachers did not feel prepared to implement these methodologies as noted earlier, and secondly, these practices were not welcomed in the community of practice in the schools. The co-operating teachers who mentored them at the practice schools did not allow autonomy and space to put their cognitions into practice. The student teachers instead ‘performed’ teaching to do certain activities asked by the co-operating teachers. Oylum and Zeynep describe how their co-operating teachers were controlling their teaching practices:

At first I did not feel much, as if she wasn’t there, as if she was one of the students but when she said “write on the board”, and then I suppose she interfered again... well these interventions depleted my motivation. They were not only contrary to my lesson plan but also wasted my time. (Oylum)

As our teacher [the co-operating teacher] said you should stick to that [the course book] we couldn’t have done many activities. We could have only added activities at the beginning and at the end because they [the pupils] were responsible for those [exercises in the book] in the exam. Therefore we had to follow the paper. (Zeynep)

The co-operating teachers had their own agenda: they had a prescribed course book and a syllabus to cover, and they were held responsible for preparing their pupils for high stakes multiple choice item tests of English language proficiency which did not require proficiency in communicative skills. These factors influencing the co-operating teachers’ practices had direct effects on what they allowed the student teachers to do in their classrooms. The strict

control and prescription by the co-operating teachers restrained the student teachers to reproduce conventional practices instead of putting their cognitions into practice.

Apart from the co-operating teachers, the pupils also had an effect on what and how the student teachers taught during the practicum. Sometimes student teachers felt the urge to reproduce the co-operating teachers' practices as they thought their pupils would expect to be taught in the same way.

Pinar teacher did it this way. I mean, we... Actually the class didn't fully belong to us. I mean, we followed Pinar teacher's routine. And we didn't want to violate the pupils' rights since they were going to sit an exam including those texts. In order not to create an unusual order, we had to do in this way. If it was up to me... That's why I had difficulties during my first lesson. She [the co-operating teacher] said, "ask them to read, why didn't you do translations?" You must remember, too. She said like that to me. I mean, if it was up to me, I would not ask them to translate because when I asked, you must have noticed- they made it straight away. It was simple, they understand. However, as Pinar teacher said like that, we had to. (Zeynep)

As Zeynep describes in the excerpt above, there was a lot of tension in the classroom. She was questioning her ownership of and authority in the classroom, her power position in the mentee-mentor relationship, and the ethical concerns for giving the pupils what they need instead of what she thinks they need. Adopting the co-operating teachers' practices was a common practice among the student teachers. Their classroom practices were often not based on individual cognition, but rather driven by the many social, cultural, political, historical aspects of their presence in the classrooms. Thus, the cognitive dissonance created by the teacher education programme was not resolved during the practicum.

4.3. Initial Years as Teachers

All the participating student teachers graduated after their practicum and were assigned to different schools as fulltime English language teachers. The author interviewed them again after almost two years in order to follow up on the aftermath of the practicum and their continuing changes as their involvement in the community of practice proceeded to full membership. The accounts of their experiences of the first two years of teaching showed that they still held the cognitions promoted by the teacher education programme, but there was a difference between the teachers in the extent to which they put their cognitions into practice based on the types of schools they worked in.

For the four teachers who worked in state schools, the restraints and tensions in the community of practice remained after the practicum. However, they moved from the classroom level to the school level. As student teachers they were mainly influenced by the co-operating teachers who exerted power on their teaching practices during the practicum. Once they become teachers, the teachers who adopt conventional teaching practices were their colleagues and administrators, and they were still influential.

When I was first appointed to the job, I was very idealist, I am still idealist though. I was planning I am going to do this and that with the pupils. But I went –I will criticise the teachers actually, most of our teachers are very lazy, really lazy. Most of them are concerned with filling the forty minutes [of lesson time] – When you go and try to do something [innovative], they find it

awkward as they do not do these themselves. You feel as if you are doing something wrong. On top of it, if the administration does not provide support, you freeze at some point. I mean things do not go as we wish. (Erdem)

As Erdem describes, the community of practice had its own norms, rules and values. This community was also conservative in that it did not welcome variety and isolated the members who did not fit in its norms. Their teaching contexts were also restrictive above the immediate community. The prescribed curriculum and course books did not leave much space to do things differently. Furthermore, the teachers experienced struggles in adapting their practices when faced with different, or less motivated, or lower achieving student profiles in the classrooms.

All the methods we learnt, all the techniques that say you should do this and that when you go into the classroom are gone [forgotten]! I swear they are all gone! I cannot use a single one of them. When my students produce a sentence, let's say out of four words, two of the words are in Kurdish, along with the Turkish words. Plus, since it is a religious vocational high school, the students have vocational Arabic and Quran lessons. They don't really take English seriously. (Zeynep)

For instance, due to the constraints Zeynep states in the excerpt, she had to leave aside what she was taught at the teacher education programme to cover the course book and the curriculum with what she found to be a challenging group of students. Moreover, the state schools did not provide opportunities for in-service training to deal with these struggles. These teachers, who often worked in rural areas, did not have access to other professional development opportunities either. In the early years of teaching, the teachers who taught in state schools went through a very similar process in which they were impelled by the community to accommodate its social, cultural, political, and historical norms.

On the other hand, Defne, the only teacher who taught in a private school among the participants, found better opportunities to put her cognitions into practice. Her school and colleagues were open to and supportive of innovative teaching methodologies.

Of course there is a syllabus, if the topic is 'body parts', we need to teach the body parts, but it is up to us how to teach it. I mean, it is entirely up to the teacher whether to teach through arts and crafts, or videos, or visual materials. There is coursebook, but it is easy to cover. Therefore, they [school administration] are open to all sorts of innovation. And it is actually innovation what they expect from us. (Defne)

Therefore, Defne thought what she learnt at the teacher education programme was quite relevant to what she was doing in her school. She said she still regularly refers to the books that were used during the courses. In contrast to the other teachers, Defne also had access to both school-based in-service training and other professional activities such as attending local conferences and workshops which helped her develop professionally after the teacher education programme.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, language teacher learning through participation in school communities has been explored. Drawing on the theory of cognitive dissonance, the author observed that the student

teachers went through a cognitive change during the teacher education programme. The teacher education programme created a sense of dissatisfaction with the conventional teaching practices in schools by introducing innovative theories on effective language teaching. However, the new cognitions did not directly translate into changes in teaching practices. Confirming the earlier empirical studies mentioned in the literature review, the English language teachers who participated in this research study experienced a lack of preparedness to teach after completion of the teacher education programme, and struggled in their early years to implement what they were taught at the teacher education programme when in real language classrooms (Baecher, 2012; Faez & Valeo, 2012). In particular during the practicum, they had to accommodate conventional teaching practices even though they were critical of them (Farrell, 2012, 2016; Shin, 2012).

The phenomenon of teachers discarding the approaches and methods taught at the teacher education programme and reproducing the practices they observed as learners is often explained by referring to the impact of “apprenticeship of observation” (Borg, 2004; Lortie, 1975) which suggests teachers’ practices are imitative rather than analytic. This sounds reasonable, especially when the teaching practices at schools remain similar until student teachers start teaching. However, the teachers’ accounts in this study showed that their practices were not actually imitative. Instead they made informed decisions considering the needs of the environment surrounding them. Following this, an alternative explanation could be given drawing on Piaget’s concept of equilibrium. Piaget argued that human learning is a process of adjustment to the environment (Piaget, 2011). Similar to Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance, Piaget argues that when there is a dissonance between what they need and what is available, people either match the external reality (assimilation) or reorganise thoughts to suit the environment (accommodation) to reach a state of cognitive balance (equilibrium). Piaget’s concepts imply some degree of internalisation and a change not only in behaviour, but also in cognition. Despite holding their cognitions, the teachers in the study did not align their practices with these cognitions; instead, they purposefully adjusted their practices to the environment during the practicum and afterwards. This is a route of change more akin to the concept of assimilation.

Earlier research shows that there might be a lack of correspondence between teachers’ stated cognitions and teaching practices due to constraints and contextual factors (Basturkmen, 2012; Erkmen, 2014). If the language teacher education enterprise aims to create an impact on teaching practices, language teacher education literature needs to problematize the complex connection between language teacher cognitions and practices. In this respect, current interest in sociocultural theories of learning is promising. To explore the sociocultural nature of teacher learning, in this study, the author has applied the concept of learning as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to explore teacher learning. The author used this concept to explain the transition process from peripheral participation to full participation, and asserted that participation is a way of learning where the newcomer constructs a new identity by “both absorbing and being absorbed in the culture of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991:95). In this study, this perspective enabled me to interpret the ongoing identity development of the teachers: how they became reform-minded teachers during the teacher education programme, and how their idealism started to decline from the practicum especially for those who worked in state schools. The findings that are reached through this perspective in the context of the study could perhaps be interpreted as unfavourable learning from the perspective of the teacher education programme. The concept of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ has an underlying assumption that transition is straightforward and unproblematic. Whereas the findings of the current study

suggest that the student teachers faced many social, cultural, political and historical barriers during transition through unequal power dynamics, conflicts, lack of recognition and autonomy which triggered change in the form of assimilation into the conventional practices. For instance, the requests of the co-operating teachers and the perceived expectations of the pupils created sources of pressure on the student teachers to conform to the conventional teaching practices during the practicum. In the early years of teaching, for the teachers who taught at state schools, their colleagues and school administration continued generating similar pressures which limited the decision making and activity space of the teachers, whereas a private school afforded better opportunities for Defne to translate her cognitions into practices. These findings uncovered the pervasive influence of the surrounding community on teacher learning and practices.

The institutional pressures on language teachers, such as to cover a prescribed curriculum and to prepare pupils for high stakes exams, as Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 62) point out, preclude “individuality, flexibility, creativity”. It is also important to note that for similar reasons the language teaching profession, despite exceptions, remains resistant to change and innovation in many parts of the world (Wedell, 2009). The context of this study was a vivid example of that prevalent conservatism. In this study, being different from the community ran the risk of social isolation in the state schools, and disagreement with the community caused a discomfort larger than the one created by cognitive dissonance. Thus, I argue it was not the ‘apprenticeship of observation,’ but the impact of social factors which predominated the teachers’ cognition and triggered assimilation. Therefore, the author suggests ‘reverse assimilation’ as an alternative definition to the instances where novice teachers conform to the conventional teaching practices in schools even when they disagree. This definition refers to occasions where teachers, who become (through their teacher education experience) critical of the conventional teaching practices which they experienced as learners, end up adopting these practices because of contextual constraints. Due to the mismatch between their cognitions and their practices, these teachers experience a continuous cognitive dissonance.

Despite the limitations of a small number of participants and a single teacher education setting, the data provided a clear pattern of change among the student teachers in the transition process. The experiences of teachers who worked in state schools suggest that participation in the school communities during the transition process creates a vicious cycle of reproduction of conventional teaching practices, and seems to discredit the impact of the language teacher education. There is a need for further research with advanced theoretical frameworks which would afford explanations for multidirectional changes through participation in different communities.

6. Implications

This article has examined EFL teacher learning through participation in the school communities during the practicum and the initial years in the teaching career, and explicitly pointed out some social, cultural, political and historical factors influencing language teachers’ cognitions and practices in the early years of their professional career. The findings suggest that:

- In a context where school practices conflict with teacher’s educational ideals, student teacher participation in the school community may foster adaptation towards school practices.

- Teacher education programmes need to include support for student teachers to develop skills to overcome potential resistance to innovative practices in the local contexts they will teach.
- Teacher education programmes need to provide opportunities for student teachers to observe and practise the instructional practices enacted by the pedagogical and theoretical concepts that are introduced through coursework.
- There is a need for complementary conceptual tools to explain the complex connection between language teacher cognitions and practices in the language teacher education literature in relation to social, cultural, political and historical nature of the communities of English language teaching practices.

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Appendix: Plan of the first interview with student teachers

Could you please tell me why you decided to become an English language teacher?

Could you please tell me your own story of learning English? (Formal and informal settings)

How do you feel the teacher education programme has contributed to your development as a language teacher so far? (Specifically methods and microteaching activities)

Tell me about your imagination of a good English language classroom. (Setting, students, teacher, methods, interaction, classroom language)

Have you ever taught English as a foreign language to any one so far?

To what extent do you feel yourself ready to teach in a classroom (knowledge and confidence)?

What are your expectations about the practicum module in general?

Would you like to add any other issues about the practicum that I have not asked?