

## **Language Teaching Beliefs, Problems and Solutions: Reflecting and Growing Together**

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*Taking the principles of reflective practice and teacher cognition as a starting point, this paper will present the findings related to the beliefs, perceived problems and suggested solutions emerging from an action research study involving three university English Language Teaching (ELT) instructors seeking ways to improve their practice using peer observation and reflective journals.*

*The data are the Language Teachers' Beliefs Systems (LTBSs) adapted from Richards and Lockhart (1996), the audio-recorded post-observation conferences and the electronic personal reflective journals following video-recorded lessons for each participant. During the data collection process, the participants took on the different roles of observer and observed teacher and focused on collaboratively predetermined problems with the aim of bringing about change in each others' practice. The emerging problems and solutions were commented on in the light of the data collected from the LTBSs.*

*The findings show that the participants' beliefs about language, learning and teaching were reflected both in their own practice, and in how they viewed their own and others' practice. They tended to look to themselves rather than secondary sources, suggesting that observation by more than one colleague and the inclusion of a theoretical aspect in the process might offer a wider perspective.*

### **Introduction**

This paper aims to present and discuss the incidental findings related to the language learning and teaching beliefs and the perceived problems in the practice of three university English Language Teaching (ELT) instructors that emerged from an action research study (Yeşilbursa, 2008) aimed at providing a structured framework for the participants to reflect collaboratively and privately on their teaching with the aim of improvement. The concepts of reflective teaching, that the starting point for development should be the teacher him/herself; and teacher cognition, that what teachers think, believe and know about teaching are affected by the interrelation of previous educational experiences of the teachers, their professional education, the contextual factors of their teaching and their classroom experiences (Borg, 2003, p. 82), are central to the theoretical framework of the current study.

Staff development programmes in Turkish state universities are not widespread, and those that exist take place exclusively in the universities of larger cities. Considering also that a vast majority of the professional conferences and workshops take place in these cities, instructors working in provincial universities have little chance to become involved in organised professional development activities and are often left to their own devices. Thus, involvement in reflective practice can be a vital opportunity for professional development for such instructors, and colleagues can contribute an alternative perspective to each others' practice. The current study addresses the following question:

1. Are the language learning beliefs of three university EFL instructors reflected in the way these instructors perceive their own practice and that of others?

The paper will start by defining and describing the implementation of peer observation both in the fields of mainstream education and ELT, and introduce the concept of teacher cognition. This will be followed by an outline of the research design and a presentation and discussion of the findings; and finally the implications and suggestions for practice and further research will be discussed.

## **Review of literature**

### **Peer observation**

The word ‘observation’ unfortunately conjures up the image of observers, usually superiors, writing copious notes during class and focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher’s performance and what could have gone better, often with the aim of evaluation. Such a ‘Supervisory Approach’ to observation (Freeman 1982, pp. 22-23) assumes that a language class should be conducted in a specific way; and thus has very clear standards and aims at the improvement of particular teaching skills. The implied power relationship can often be a source of friction and be counterproductive. Furthermore, while such an approach may be useful for pre-service teachers during their initial training, when they are concerned about ‘what’ techniques and strategies to use when they teach (Freeman, 1982, pp. 26-27), it is not as fruitful for in-service teachers who are more concerned with ‘how’ and ‘why’ they teach the way they do (Richards, 1997, p. 1). Rather than being a much dreaded experience heavy with the baggage of evaluation, observation should be seen as a learning tool which provides access to a whole range of experiences and processes which can lead toward the professional development of both the observer and the observed (Wajnryb, 1992, p. 1).

The practice of peer observation, that is, observation by a colleague rather than a superior, has been suggested by many researchers in the field of ELT (e.g. Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Richards, 1997; Farrell, 1998, 1999; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Richards & Farrell, 2005) as well as in mainstream education (e.g. Brookfield, 1995; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) as a more appropriate way to understand with more depth the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of teaching mentioned by Richards (1997, p. 1). To use Richards and Farrell’s (2005, p. 85) definition, peer observation “refers to a teacher or other observer closely watching and monitoring a language lesson or part of a lesson in order to gain an understanding of some aspect of teaching, learning, or classroom interaction”. That is to say, the aim of peer observation should be the professional development of the teacher rather than a judgement on their performance. That is, it should be descriptive rather than evaluative.

Being involved in peer observation is not particularly easy, and several researchers have pointed out the necessity for teachers to tolerate a certain lowering of self-esteem as they come to realise that there might be a gap between what they think they do and what they actually do when they are teaching (Norrish, 1996; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; De Sonnevile, 2007). Thus, the manner in which peer observation is carried out is of vital importance. The overall pre-observation – observation - post-observation structure described by Richards and Farrell (2005, pp. 93-94) is reminiscent of clinical supervision, which Stoller (1996, p. 3) emphasises as being a supportive and interactive process aimed at diagnosing and solving teaching problems.

At the pre-observation stage, the observer and observee meet to agree on a focus for the observed lesson; at the observation stage, the observer collects data on the objectives agreed in the previous stage in a systematic and non-judgemental way; at the post-observation conference, which should happen as soon as possible after the observed lesson, the observer and the observee analyse the data from the teacher’s point of view with the aim of diagnosing and solving instructional problems (Stoller, 1996, p. 3; Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 93). The post-observation conference is of particular importance, and as Bailey (2006, p. 92) stresses, this stage should be a dialogue rather than a monologue. Bailey (*ibid*) continues to say that the teacher’s practice is likely to be affected by factors such as previous experience, thinking, models and feedback; that the observer’s and teacher’s interpretations of the teaching event are likely to differ; and that the purpose of the post-observation conference is to interpret the events of the observed lesson as seen through these two different lenses with the aim of producing new ideas about teaching and observation, and coming up with a new focus for future observations. Bailey’s comment that teaching is affected by the

teacher's previous experience and thinking constitutes a convenient transition to the next section of this literature review: teacher cognition.

## **Teacher cognition**

Teacher cognition can be defined as “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 81); and while Freeman (2002, p. 2) gives the 1970s as the beginning of the shift toward the importance of teacher knowledge and thought processes in general educational research, this change was not reflected in ELT research until the mid-1990s (Borg, 2003, p. 82). One of the important factors leading to the increase of the research in both mainstream education and ELT, which parallels the impetus behind the surge of studies on reflective practice, is the acknowledgement of the fact that teachers are “active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” (Borg, 2003, p. 81).

The most recent, comprehensive review of the literature on language teacher cognition is that by Borg (2006). Summarising the studies carried out on in-service teacher cognitions, he comments on the diversity of the work and how it is based on different conceptual frameworks, using different labels to talk about teacher cognition (2006, p. 90). Although no neat conclusions have been reached, Borg (2006, pp. 106-107) states that the studies suggest that the cognitions of practicing teachers can be conceptualised, these cognitions may be influenced by internal and external factors, there is a relationship between teachers' cognitions and practice, and that cognitions and practice develop over time.

All the studies mentioned on teacher cognitions and reported practices, and teacher cognitions and actual practices in the in-service context (Borg, 2006, pp. 81-101) are exclusively related to teachers reflecting on their own beliefs and practice. The current study, however, investigates how the language teaching beliefs systems of teachers may be reflected in the way they observe the practice of others in a collaborative context and thus offer an alternative perspective on their practice to further their professional development. Given that teachers are influenced by their pre-service training, the importance for instructors employed in teacher training institutions to be more aware of their own beliefs and practices is undeniable.

## **Method**

### **Overview of the research design**

The study was designed as action research because it set out to see how a small group of English Language instructors collaborated in their real working environment with the aim of understanding and improving their teaching, while allowing the researcher to take on multiple roles: as an instructor; a participant in the action research; an observer of one of her colleagues; and finally a researcher, responsible for the design of the research and the collection and analysis of the data. The data collection procedure took place over an eight-week period during the autumn term of the 2007-2008 academic year. However, seven observations for each participant were possible due to mid-term examinations and public holidays. The nature of the reliability and validity of qualitative studies is different to that of quantitative studies, and the researcher took into account the criteria put forward by LeCompte and Goetz (1982, pp. 37-53) in order to reduce threats to the internal and external reliability and validity of the current study (Yeşilbursa, 2008, pp. 48-51).

### **Participants**

The main participants in this study were the three instructors teaching the basic language skills courses in the first semester of the new ELT (English Language Teaching) programme (YÖK, 2007,

p. 215) at Abant İzzet Baysal University, Bolu, Turkey. They chose pseudonyms to protect their identities. Table 1 summarises the biographical details of the participants. Biker, a 56 year-old Turkish male with over 20 years of teaching experience in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, was responsible for the Contextual Grammar I and Listening and Pronunciation I courses; Bookworm, a 35 year-old Turkish female, took the Advanced Reading and Writing I course and had over 10 years of experience teaching at high schools and universities in Turkey; The Brit, a 40 year-old British female, was responsible for the Oral Communication Skills I course and had nearly 20 years of teaching experience in Taiwan, the United Kingdom and Turkey. The other participants included the first-year students attending the courses given by these instructors, 31 in the regular section and 31 in the evening section.

Teacher	Gender	Nationality	Age	Qualifications	Teaching Experience	Course
Biker	Male	Turkish	56	BA English Language and Literature	20+ years	Contextual Grammar I Listening and Pronunciation I
Bookworm	Female	Turkish	35	MA English Language Teaching	10+years	Advanced Reading and Writing I
The Brit	Female	British	40	DTEFLA, MA English Language Teaching	20 years	Oral Communication Skills I

**Table 1.** Biographical details of the participants

*Note.* BA = Bachelor of Arts, MA = Master of Arts, DTEFLA = Diploma in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults

### Data sources

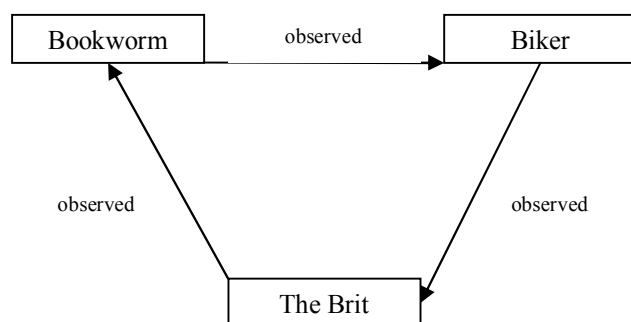
The framework of the study was the action research cycle suggested by Elliott (1991, pp. 86-87). The structure of this framework assisted the instructors in their reflection and was self-perpetual in that each step of action led to the next one. There were various sources of data involved at each stage of the procedure, including the LTBSs of each participant, the transcriptions of the initial and final conferences, the weekly video-recorded lessons, the transcriptions of the audio-recorded weekly post-observation conferences between the instructors, the weekly entries in the reflective journals kept by the instructors, and student feedback in the form of open-ended questions collected after each lesson. The data relevant to the current paper are the LTBSs and the transcriptions of the post-observation conferences.

### Data collection

At the beginning of the study, the participants were asked to complete the Language Teachers Beliefs System (LTBS), 20 open-ended questions adapted from Richards and Lockhart (1996, pp. 32-37). In this way it was possible to collect rich data about the participants' beliefs about learning, the role of the student and the role of the teacher. This form was sent by the research to the participants via electronic mail. The participants completed the form and returned it to the researcher again via electronic mail. In addition to this, the participants were asked to make a list of the aspects of their teaching they were pleased with and those they perceived as problematic areas, which served as input for the first conference of the action research process.

At the initial conference, the participants met to discuss their perceived problems and chose ones that could feasibly be observed and attempted to be changed within the limitations of the study. It must be emphasised that this initial choice was not unchangeable, and as the study was underway, new problems from different sources were identified. The dynamic nature of the action research allowed the participants to make choices about focus problems as they went along. Due to the time

constraints imposed by the workload, it was decided that each participant be responsible for the observation of one participant and in turn be observed by the other. Thus, Biker observed The Brit, who observed Bookworm, who in turn observed Biker. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of the observation responsibilities.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of the observation responsibilities

The next stage was the action research spiral in which the participants had one hour of their lessons a week video-recorded using a digital camera in order to be observed by their partner for a pre-decided problematic area of their practice. They met for a weekly post-observation conference to discuss the lesson in terms of the problem, come up with an action plan, and also discuss possible future focuses for the ensuing cycle. In this way the post-observation conference also acted as a pre-observation conference. These post-observation conferences were recorded using a digital voice recorder in order for the researcher to transcribe them onto Word documents for analysis. At the end of each observed hour, open-ended questions were directed to the students in order to gather their opinions about the particular problematic area decided on by their instructor. This helped the participants to see how the students viewed their practice and often guided them in deciding on new focus problems. The research finished with a final conference in which the participants gathered to discuss how they felt they had changed and to share the insights they had gained as a result of the study. Both the initial and the final conferences were audio-recorded and transcribed into Word documents.

## **Data analysis**

The analysis of the post-observation conferences and the reflective journals carried out by the researcher to the overall aim of the action research process (Yeşilbursa, 2008) involved a bottom-up coding process which is beyond the scope of the current study. For the purpose of the current study, the comments made by the participants in their LTBSs will be isolated and presented in a table along with the problems they identified in their own practice and that of others and the solutions they suggested to their partners problems during the action research itself. In this way, it is possible to see if certain themes arise.

## **Findings and discussion**

As stated in the review of literature section of the current paper, what teachers think, believe and know, is affected by the interrelation of the previous educational experiences of the teachers, their professional education, the contextual factors of their teaching and classroom experiences, and these cognitions can shape classroom events (Borg, 2003; 2006). On observing the problems the participants perceived in their own practice and that of others and the solutions they arrived at in the light of the comments in each of their LTBSs, as summarised in Table 2, it is possible to see that certain themes emerged.

Variables		Biker	Bookworm	The Brit
Beliefs	Learning	"obtaining knowledge through self-study or class-study, with an emphasis on putting that knowledge into use";	"the development of knowledge using reasoning and applying and connecting it to new settings";	"an individual and social process which brings about permanent changes in behaviour
	Role of students	"explorers of the language";	"critical thinkers who can develop and support arguments, evaluate statements, ask questions: attentive listeners who have good note-taking strategies";	"active, autonomous learners";
	Role of teachers	"provide knowledge, use appropriate techniques and monitor learning"	"providing clear, easy to understand lectures; providing models of effective learning strategies".	"providing exposure to language, drawing attention to useful language and giving opportunities to learn".
Problems	Self	Over emphasis of pronunciation	Teacher-centred approach	Focus on fluency at expense of accuracy
		Neglect of L1 as an explanatory tool	Excessive teacher talk time	Inequality of attention to students
		Too much attention to accuracy	Neglect of student interaction	Disorganised group-work formation
		Unnecessary elaboration of unrelated language points	Overemphasis of what students learned at the expense of how they learned	Neglect of feedback sessions
		Lack of awareness of students' previous knowledge	More time spent preparing materials rather than activities	
			Avoided group work	Emphasis on individual learning
Problems	Others	Neglect of pronunciation errors	Overemphasis of accuracy resulting in students anxiety	Teacher-controlled
		Repetition of words and phrases rather than paraphrasing		Teacher does not move away from the front of the class
Solutions	Others	Elaboration on language to provide more input	Use of more communicative activities	Using group work activity for reading
		Give more attention to the feedback session	Use of Turkish as an explanatory tool Use of choral repetition techniques in Pronunciation course	Providing enough wait time for students to respond to the questions

**Table 2.** Summary of the findings on beliefs, problems and solutions for each participant

This section will present a case-by-case description for Biker, Bookworm and The Brit, in which a description of the findings will be given, followed by a discussion of the emerging theme. It must be pointed out that although there were seven cycles in the action research spiral of the current

study, this does not entail seven problems and seven solutions for each participant as some problems were the focus of more than one cycle, and others did not appear to be real problems on observation

### **Biker's profile**

For Biker, learning was defined as obtaining knowledge through self-study or class-study, with an emphasis on putting that knowledge into use. He believed that learning grammar is best done by doing subject-matter related tasks once the basics have been dealt with. The role he saw for his students was as explorers of the language, and his role as a teacher was to provide knowledge, use appropriate techniques and monitor learning. He acknowledged that he needed to be aware of what the students know and do not know already, that he sometimes elaborated unnecessarily on unrelated language points during a lesson, that he overemphasised accuracy and pronunciation which results in anxiety and the discouragement of the students, and that he could have made use of the students' first language as an explanatory tool on occasions.

During the action research, Biker had his lessons observed for unnecessary elaboration on language, the length of the revision section of the lesson, the way he conducted practice exercises, a general view of the Listening and Pronunciation course, his use of English only in the Contextual Grammar course, the use of Turkish for clarification purposes in the Contextual Grammar course, and the use of choral repetition as a technique in the Listening and Pronunciation course. These focuses are a mixture of the problems he identified before the data collection, perceived problems that became apparent as a result of the observation and some suggestions on the part of Bookworm.

Biker's approach to teaching appeared to be language-focused rather than learning-focused. His perceived problems were entirely language related, and the focuses of his action plan were all but one language related. Indeed, one of his strong points as a language teacher is his command of the English language in all aspects. During the study he made no references to previous learning experiences or his professional education. However, in an informal conversation with the researcher after the study, he mentioned that he had learned English according to the Audiolingual Method, with a heavy emphasis on accuracy of form and pronunciation, which could account for his accuracy-orientation in teaching.

As an observer, he tended to pick up on aspects of The Brit's classroom language. In the lesson of the first cycle he noticed how she repeated certain words rather than paraphrasing, and one of his suggestions was that she elaborated on language points during the feedback sessions to provide extra language input for the students. Interestingly, one of his suggestions was one of his own perceived problems. When The Brit stated that she could not elaborate on language during error correction because she believed this stage had to be focused, Biker admitted he could see her point, a sign that he was reflecting on his own teaching while in the role of observer. He also noticed students' pronunciation errors that had escaped The Brit, reflecting the importance he gave to this aspect of the language.

### **Bookworm's profile**

In her LTBS, Bookworm defined learning as the development knowledge using reasoning and applying and connecting it to new settings; and she saw her role in the classroom as providing clear, easy to understand lectures, in addition to facilitating the students' learning by providing models of effective learning strategies. For her, the students' role was to be attentive listeners, to think critically and to develop and support arguments. She acknowledged that her approach was teacher-centred and that she did not encourage student interaction. She also admitted that she neglected the matter of how the students learned at the expense of what they were learning. Thus, she spent most

of her timing preparing materials rather than designing appropriate learning activities, and avoided doing group work.

For Bookworm, her own learning style, her experiences as a university student and the contextual factor of her teaching at tertiary level appeared to influence her classroom practice. She admitted in a number of post-observation conferences that she was an individual learner, “I’m an individual student. I don’t like group work, I mean. I like individual style of studying things, taking notes” and that she regarded reading as an individual process “I think that’s because I consider reading as an individual process, and I become a kind of learner, I try to find out what it is. Read between the lines. How can I express. Maybe I just do not consider it as an active process. As a passive process maybe, they’re receiving knowledge. Maybe this is the reason, in fact”. Another recurring explanation in the post-observation conferences was her previous learning experiences and her beliefs about teaching at university level.

As an observer, she had remarked that she had learned a lot from working with Biker, so Cosh’s (1999) criteria that it should not only be the observee teacher but also the observer who learns from the process of peer observation has also been met in Bookworm’s case. She suggested Biker used Turkish to explain complex language points, and choral repetition in his pronunciation classes. She used Turkish in her own classes to create a supportive atmosphere and choral repetition, she told the researcher in an informal conversation, was a technique she had seen during her own university education.

### **The Brit’s profile**

In her LTBS, The Brit stated that she believed learning was an individual and social process which brought about permanent changes in behaviour. In her opinion, learning how to speak can only be done by speaking, and she added that students should be given opportunities to speak in different situations. Her students were expected to be active, autonomous learners. Rather than being an imparter of knowledge, she saw her role as providing exposure to language, drawing attention to useful language and giving students opportunities to learn.

The focuses that were chosen for observation by The Brit during the study were the setting up of group work, the feedback session, elaboration of language points to create more language input, teacher talk speed, whether or not she tended to ignore one part of the class, the accuracy stage of the speaking lesson. These focuses are a mixture of the problems that The Brit had identified at the beginning of the study, comments that appeared in student feedback, problems that became apparent during the observations, and a suggestion by Biker.

The Brit was very student-conscious. She stated her rapport with them, her being able to remember their names and her giving importance to their ideas as strong points; but she also admitted that she often listened to them too much, and gave too much importance to their facial expressions that it caused her to overcompensate. Unlike Bookworm, The Brit saw group work as a standard procedure in her classes. Rather than deciding whether or not to use it as a technique, her concerns were more related to how to set it up effectively and whether the students knew what they were supposed to be doing. This reflects her idea that she believed learning was a social process. In the final meeting, she stated that her post-graduate education and the emphasis it gave on the learning aspect seemed to have formulated her approach. She acknowledged that she had probably come to neglect the language aspect, saying that she was more concerned about how the students were learning than what they were learning. This had obviously reflected in her teaching, as Biker had picked up on several points in her lessons where she could have spent more time dealing with the language.



To summarise the findings above, it can be seen that each participant had an individual orientation to their teaching and this orientation was reflected in the way they saw their own practice and that of others. Biker was language-oriented, with all the problems he perceived in his own and The Brit's teaching, and the solutions he suggested to The Brit being language related in some way. Bookworm had a clear orientation toward cognitive, individual learning. She saw her role as lecturer and that of the students as attentive listeners, she also admitted that she admired Biker's organised teaching style and that she found it difficult to come up with problematic areas. She suggested Biker used Turkish as an explanatory tool, something she did herself; and the choral repetition technique, something she had experienced during her training. Of all the participants, Bookworm made the most references to herself as a language learner and her professional training, stating on several occasions that the reasons behind her classroom practices lay in her experiences as a learner at university. The Brit was interaction-orientated, and on observation of Bookworm's lessons, she noticed that Bookworm never moved away from the front of the class; and hence she suggested a more interactive approach to the reading class.

Interestingly, it appears that these orientations are the source of each participant's perceived strong-points and problems. This phenomenon coincides with Schön's (1991, p. 60) description of professional practice as involving a certain amount of repetition. Over time, having come into contact with a variety of situations with common characteristics, the practitioner builds "a repertoire of expectations, images and techniques". Knowing what to look for and how to respond in a given situation, the practitioner becomes less surprised by what s/he comes across and his/her "knowing-in-practice tends to become increasingly tacit, spontaneous, and automatic", which leads to specialisation (ibid). There are, however, undesirable effects of this specialisation. Practice can become repetitive and routine, and the increasing spontaneity of knowing-in-practice may deprive the practitioner of valuable opportunities to think about what s/he is doing. A practitioner can get stuck in a rut, some of his/her practices being ineffective. Leaving incidents that do not match his/her experiential knowledge unexplored can lead to boredom and burn-out, a phenomenon Schön (1991, p. 61) calls 'over-learning'. In a similar vein, Brookfield (1995, p. 71) points out that all teachers have blind spots in their work, practices and assumptions that are never investigated because they either seem to be so obviously right to us, or because we cannot see them clearly. He adds that "we also think, to a greater or lesser degree, within mental tramlines. We make habitual readings of the situations we encounter, and we respond to these in different ways that feel instinctive, natural, and somehow preordained".

In the current study, involvement peer observation provided each of the participants with an alternative perspective on their practice, and hence provided them with an opportunity to think beyond their habitual tracks of thought when searching for solutions to their problems. The distribution of observation responsibilities was completely random, but a balance seems to have been achieved in that The Brit, who accepted she neglected the language aspect of teaching was observed by Biker, who was language-focused; and Bookworm, who adopted a teacher-centred approach was observed by The Brit, who favoured student-interaction. As observers, accuracy-focused Biker was able to observe The Brit's fluency-based activities and realised the drawbacks of over-elaboration on language points; and Bookworm, who perceived herself as unorganised, learned from observing the more organised Biker. Cosh (1999) states that peer observation should be carried out for the development of both observee and observer, and the current study appears to have set up a situation to make this possible.

When searching for solutions to their perceived problems, all the participants looked to their own beliefs or experiences. No references were made to methodological theories. However, Akbari (2007) stresses the importance of theory in teacher development, stating that propositional knowledge has a key role and should not be dismissed entirely. Leaving teachers alone to construct their own personal theories on teaching based on their own personal experiences will ultimately result in their isolation from the discourse community: "Teachers need to be familiar with the

metadiscourse of the field in order to challenge existing theories and construct their own personal view of practice” (2007, p. 203). Brookfield (1995, p. 36) comments that theory can provide more perspectives on familiar situations, saying that it helps to show teachers the general elements of what they think are idiosyncratic experiences.

One interesting incidental finding emerging from the current investigation is that The Brit, in her LTBS, stated that she saw her role as a teacher as “providing exposure to language, drawing attention to useful language and giving opportunities to learn” However, one of the aspects of her practice that Biker observed was that she did not utilise herself sufficiently as a source of language input. There appears to be tension between what The Brit believed her role to be and what she actually did in the classroom. However, Borg (2006, p. 107) points out that teachers’ cognitions may be expressed in different ways depending on whether they are elicited theoretically or in relation to practice.

## **Conclusion**

This paper set out to report the incidental findings related to the language teacher beliefs and perceived practical problems emerging from a larger action research study aimed at providing a framework for three university ELT instructors to reflect collaboratively and privately on their practice with the purpose of bringing about positive change. The findings have shown that each participant displayed an individual tendency in their beliefs which was reflected to a certain extent in the way they viewed their own practice and that of their observation partners. Involvement in peer observation offered them alternative views on their problems, and they made discoveries about their practice in the roles of both observee and observer. All the participants looked to themselves for solutions, none of them referred to the theoretical literature of the field.

There are a number of implications that can be gathered from the current study. First, it was limited because of the structure of the Foreign Languages Teaching Department involved to the three instructors responsible for the first year basic language skills courses. In order not to bring an extra burden to their workload, each participant was responsible for the observation of and was observed by one peer only. Replication of this procedure in a larger department with more instructors observing and being observed by more than one peer would both provide each instructor with a wider range of perspectives on their practice, and provide more data to be analysed. A limitation of the current study is that it has not been possible to perform any statistical analysis because of the size of the data. A larger amount of data could be subjected to statistical analysis to determine whether or not there is any correlation between the stated beliefs of teachers and how they perceive their own practice and that of others.

The action research procedure used in this study was easy to implement and adapt to the given context. Modern technology also made it easy to collect and share the data without being too intrusive. However, the shortness of time made the action research cycles very intense which did not give much time for the participants to look to sources other than themselves. Ur (1997), Korthagen and Russell (1999) and Akbari (2007) emphasise the importance of theory in reflective development, but it has not been possible in this study for the participants to spend time researching the literature. The action research process could be spread out over the two terms of an academic year to involve three or four observations per term to allow the participants some time researching the literature on their own perceived problems as well as those of their colleagues. This would also allow sufficient time for the participants to experiment with new techniques or approaches before being observed again.

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