

**The Correct and Incorrect in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning
in Turkey from the Eye of the Learners**

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Abstract: English language education has been an important constituent of Turkish educational system since the worldwide popularization of English as a foreign language, especially after the second half of 20th century. Nevertheless, researches indicate problems, which still continue in the Turkish language education system. In this study, it is aimed to reveal the correct and incorrect things in the language learning and teaching. The study seeks to reveal the students' opinions, their evaluations about the courses and the problems that they witness. The study was conducted at Uludag University in 2016 by applying qualitative interview sessions to 20 university students where three questions were administered. The data was analysed in percentages, standard deviation values were determined through descriptive statistics. Participant responses and variables of age, gender and grade were shown in this study. The results have shown that the students think that English courses have lots of deficiencies in terms of FLL and FLT. The students want more communicative activities to promote practical language use during the lessons. The results have also indicated that students' age and gender do not affect their viewpoints significantly while their grade has an essential association with their responses to many items. The study indicates that university students believe that the foreign language should be actualized for better language teaching and learning and the teachers should use more contemporary methods.

Keywords: Foreign language teaching, foreign language learning, students' beliefs, English language course.

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character- that is the goal of true education.

Martin Luther King Jr.

Introduction

According to educators, most of the students experience both correct and incorrect things in foreign language teaching (FLT) and learning (FLL). In many circumstances, language learners needed and were provided with instruction mostly in how to read and write (productive skills), but not in how to listen and speak (receptive skills). Actually, all the skills are needed during foreign language teaching and learning, because all of these skills are linked to one another.

According to (Erdel and Akalın, 2015) and the personal observations of the researchers, students feel stressed, anxious, even sad and less motivated because of their mistakes. It is reasonable to believe that listening is not used in classroom activities and in daily life, especially in Turkey where English is studied as a foreign language (EFL). However, language learners need to practice also the receptive skills as much as they need to practice the productive skills to learn the language better. This can consolidate the learned vocabulary and structures and help learners see the patterns in the foreign language. Erdel and Akalın (op. cit.) pointed that this situation may result not only in deficiency in listening but in lack of learners' curiosity which will affect their success in their language studies as well. Furthermore, fear is such an important factor that some students are too much afraid of bungling the grammar or mispronouncing a word in a way that would embarrass them. Therefore, the more learners speak, the quicker they may improve just as it is in environments where English is a second language (ESL).

We postulate that these problems are overwhelmingly present in foreign language teaching and learning (FLT/L), and that there are correct and incorrect things, but the incorrect seem to be much more compared to the correct. So, we preferred to focus especially on the incorrect in FLT/L. First, we examined the FLT approaches which develop stages in learning and teaching, such as natural, cooperative, communicative, etc., and tried to investigate if these created any connections with the correct and incorrect in foreign language education (FLE). The present study aimed to reveal the opinions of the participants related to the right and wrong practices in EFL, and how the process and practices could be improved according to the students' beliefs in Turkey.

Literature Review

Foreign language (FL) methods and applications which have been used around since Ottoman Empire consist of language teaching in FLE. However, studies indicate that problems related to language education in Turkey still remain unresolved (Çelebi, 2006; Güler, 2005; Işık, 2008; Karahan, 2007). Actually, we have lots of problems about foreign language (hereafter L2) learning learning. Yet, the most important of these are two issues which we experience in Turkish foreign language education. Foreign language teacher training system and in language planning causes some methodological mistakes; for instance, teachers show insistence on traditional teaching methods like grammar-translation or suggestopedia. In contrary to the traditional method, current methods promote wide, understandable input, besides they are more communicative for language teaching and learning. Additionally, Çetintaş (2010) asserts that language education starting at primary school does not proceed with the principle of continuity at secondary school, where courses restart from the beginner level,

argues that this discontinuity between successive levels of education impairs the reforms such as starting language education at early ages.

Another important reason for the deficiency of language teaching and learning is inadequate language trainings' continuity at the educational level, because students or learners are not exposed to enough language input. According to Krashen, language learning is a natural period and this period continues equally for everyone. In addition to these, Krashen (2008) believes that learner or students must be exposed to language that will be learned. Moreover, this exposure must be communicative. As a matter of fact, learners and teachers have opinions about these problems.

Learner Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching

Beliefs are formed in time and they usually result from learning experiences. Despite the fact that some studies of learner beliefs about language learning and teaching have been controlled in a number of different settings, there is still no general view about how to classify learner beliefs about language training. These beliefs change according to educational and cultural language environment, learning environment, and education background. In addition to these, learners' beliefs about L2 learning and teaching have an effect on their performance. For instance, if a learner believes that s/he doesn't have very good language learning ability s/he cannot put much effort and motivation to learn the language. What's more, as this will influence the language learning strategies, learner beliefs can have negative impact on overall motivation and anxiety.

Teacher Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching

Beliefs of teachers have an effect on the learners' beliefs as the teachers are one of the first sources of educational experience for the students. For example, if

learners have some negative beliefs that impede the learning process, teacher's beliefs may change them; but the situation might be the opposite, that is, teachers may be the cause of some negative beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, teachers should be very careful about their manners and speech towards the students. According to the teachers' beliefs, language is described in a number of different ways in Çetintaş (2014) such as;

- a conscious process of learning a set of grammatical structures which is controlled by the learner
- listening, practicing and remembering the language which can be useful for L1 user
- practicing the language examples of natural speakers and making up new sentences based on those language examples
- mastering the target language through lots of drills and practice with the language examples of L1 users
- a need to comprehend the grammatical rules of English in order to be fluent in the language
- a subconscious process that takes place in non-academic, social situations
- students' understanding of what they are saying

So, these beliefs of the teachers, in a way, show the philosophical stance of the teachers, and are clear indicators for how or in what way the students will be affected. One might easily notice that all of the stated beliefs are mostly grammar-oriented and behaviouristic in nature, which usually teach students to repeat, memorise, and conform to the instructions and rules rather than encourage them to be critical and creative or to learn how to learn better in an individual style.

Cause of Errors

We have lots of reasons of errors about language learning and teaching. Still, according to researches, there are 4 significant reasons. Researchers think that one of these is *simplification* through which learners often choose simple forms and constructions instead of more complex ones. An example of simplification might involve the use of simple present instead of the present perfect continuous. The other reason is *overgeneralization* which is the use of one form or construction in one context and extending its application to other contexts where it should not apply. It should be noted that simplification and overgeneralization are used by learners to reduce their linguistic burden. Another reason is *fossilization*. Some errors, especially errors in pronunciation persist for long periods and become quite difficult to get rid of. Another one is *avoidance*. Some syntactic structures are difficult to produce by some learners. Consequently, these learners avoid these structures and use simpler structures instead.

Notwithstanding research on learner mistakes/errors, it would be naïve to claim that all teachers are quite aware of these, and that they consciously try to improve these in their classes or that they deliberately provide feedback to their students whenever they notice the factors stated above.

The Purpose of the Study

In this study, it was aimed to investigate the students' opinions about the correct and incorrect in FLT/L. Furthermore, it was intended to determine learners' propositions related to an ideal education. With this motivation, the answers of the following questions were researched:

1. What do first and last year learners/teacher trainees think about the incorrect in FLT/L?
2. What do first and last year learners/teacher trainees think about the correct in FLT/L?
3. What can be done to improve FLT/L during the courses according to language learners?

Method

The present study focused on language learners' viewpoints of language teaching and learning at Uludag University and FL courses in Turkey. The current study adopted qualitative approach that was carried out with the help of interviews. This study is fundamentally bottom-up in nature in the sense that it asks students to state their opinions rather than conferring the teachers about language training.

Participants

The participants of the present study were 20 university students (14 female and 6 male) from both freshman and senior years in the ELT department at the Faculty of Education of a university in Turkey. The students' ages ranged between 18 and 24. The freshman group consisted of 10 students (5 male and 5 female), and the senior group was made up of 10 students (8 female 2 male). All participants' mother tongue was the same- Turkish. In addition to this, they had been learning English as a foreign language. Besides, some of them had been learning other languages such as German, and French. The participants were randomly selected from among the volunteers who were reached by posting a Google Form in the social media channels, and also a wall post.

Instruments

We prepared and carried out an interview as the data collection tool of the study to collect the students' beliefs about language training. The interview setting was prepared and applied by the researchers. The interview consisted of 3 parts. The interview form included open-ended questions about the correct and incorrect in FLT/L, and asked the participants what could be done to improve it.

In the interview, the participants were asked to supply information about their opinions. By the means of the open-ended questionnaire, the beliefs of the participants related to the contribution of the language courses and deficiencies of language acquisition were recorded.

Procedure

The present research was conducted during a period of 6 weeks and in three phases. Two topics were covered in this research. The first one was about incorrect in FLT/L. The second one was about correct in FLT/L. The study was conducted in the spring term of 2015-2016 educational year.

How many people would participate, and when the questions would be asked were decided in the first phase of the study. In the second phase, the interviews were conducted. The interviews were administered in the classroom during students' free time in the end of the lessons. The participants were asked what they thought about the incorrect and correct in FLT/L, and how we could improve the FLT/L practices. Students were comfortable in expressing their true opinions. They answered the questions in English, but they were also permitted reply in Turkish if they wanted. The participants were given enough time to express their ideas and to answer the questions. The questions were forwarded to the volunteer students in three days. They were informed that their answers

would be used in a research. . They were all volunteers. While 4 students gave short answers, 16 gave long and detailed answers, which was a sign that they were seriously interested in the research. In addition to the face-to-face interviews, the three interview questions were shared in the social media in case some additional students would find it more convenient. 4 of the 20 students replied the questions online.

Results and Discussion

The study results are presented in three main parts. In the first part, the responses of participants were categorized according to the incorrect in FLT/L. In the second part, the responses of the participants were categorized according to the correct in FLT/L. In the last part, the responses were grouped after a content analysis that informed about how FLT/L practices could be improved. As shown in the tables, the responses of the participants were analysed and coded in short phrases or words. The responses that were mentioned more than 11 (more than half of the number of all participants) times were highlighted in each table.

Responses Given to Research Questions 1

Table 1 presents the wrong (incorrect) practices that the ELT students mentioned. There were fifteen points that were worthy to note, three of which were especially attention catching. It was noticed that 10 students in the first grade were not happy with the focus on grammar. Similarly, 8 students in the fourth grade complained from the same thing, who also criticised the overwhelming use of the GTM in the FL classes (N=11). Both the female and male participants stated this as a big incorrect in FLT/L. Additionally, 11 participants (3 first-year and 8 last-year students) complained that the speaking activities and opportunities were not enough.

The derived results in Table 1 will be most probably generalisable if the present study be replicated with a higher number of students both in high-school and university levels. However, the researchers feel almost sure that the highlighted three points could be absolutely generalised for almost all FLT/L environments in Turkey.

Table 1. The incorrects in FLT/L.

	Female	Male	First	Fourth
Deductive	2	1	0	3
Focusing on grammar	11	7	10	8
Using L1	4	2	3	3
Teacher's unconsciousness	1	1	1	1
Not learner-centred	1	2	2	1
Not taking student differences into consideration	1	1	2	0
Memorization	2	3	1	4
No speaking	7	4	3	8
Using GTM	7	4	0	11
Exam-oriented	0	2	1	1
No listening	1	1	1	1
Traditional techniques	2	5	1	6
No autonomy	3	2	0	5
Deficiency in practice	4	1	3	2
Monotonous	1	2	1	2

Responses Given to Research Question 2

Table 2 presents the right (correct) practices that the ELT students mentioned. There were eight points that were worthy to note, two of which were especially attention catching. It was noticed that the participants were happy with the way that L2 is presented, that is, in real contexts, and the materials that are used in the

FL classes. Both the female and male participants responded similarly to these three points.

Table 2. The correct in FLT/L.

	Female	Male	First grade	Fourth grade
Natural process	3	1	0	4
Grammar	4	4	6	2
Vocabulary	1	2	2	1
Materials	8	7	5	10
L2 in real context	7	5	6	6
Starting FL in early ages	2	2	2	2
Writing	3	1	2	2
Reading books	1	1	0	2

Responses Given to Research Question 3

When the students were exposed to the question related to their self-perception regarding the FL system that they have been through and how it could be improved, they indicated that the system has a lot of problems; however, it was pointed out that it was not only because of the teachers or the in-class problems but due to some insufficiencies related to the curriculum. The answers for this item were grouped under certain categories that are stated in Table 3.

Table 3. How to improve FLT/L.

	Female	Male	First grade	Fourth grade
Speaking	8	8	8	8
Watching films, series	7	4	8	3
Student-oriented	4	4	2	6
Reading customised books	2	1	3	0
Autonomy	2	2	0	4
Attractive materials	5	6	5	6

Using all skills	3	5	2	6
Going abroad	3	4	1	6
More practice	3	3	3	3
Using different methods	4	2	1	5
Content Language Teaching	2	0	0	2
Interaction	3	1	0	4
Student differences	2	1	2	1
Taking examples from other countries	1	1	0	2
Teachers' perspectives	3	3	3	3
Exemplification	1	1	0	2

There were sixteen points that were worthy to note, three of which were especially attention catching. As shown in the table, recommendations of the participants underline the importance of speaking, watching films/series, and using the most attractive materials to improve FLT/L. They believe that speaking is the best way of improving their FL. So, it might be implied that we should use more speaking activities instead of grammar exercises. According to the participants, with the current curriculum of the educational system, students cannot speak and they become inefficient language users. Therefore, more speaking lessons and environments such as speaking clubs should be formed in the formal curriculum. They also suggested that language courses or schools might integrate going to the cinema and watching films/series as an activity in the curriculum of FL instruction, as watching films in L2 is not only beneficial in improving the language skills but is also related to real life. Likewise, they notified that teaching and learning must be student-oriented since learners are very different from one another; for example, some of them make mistakes of pronunciation, some others lack in grammar; hence, individual differences be taken into consideration. Therefore, the most attractive and authentic should be provided for each individual, which will necessitate a lot of

customisation and modification in all phases of the process and practices. The students defended that the traditional approaches to FLT/L should be left altogether.

To review, the results of the present study have shown that students share the opinion that FLT/L shouldn't be based on just grammar, and that speaking in the target language should be given more importance. In addition, participants stated that teachers must contribute with positive effects and have contemporary information on their field.

Formerly conducted studies on FLT/L revealed similar results regarding the activities and teaching methods, and students' opinions that more communicative and practice-based activities would be more beneficial than teacher-centered and course-book-based activities. Güllü (2007), reported that students believed that the lessons should be more student-centered. Additionally, Yilmaz (2014) pointed to the lack of contemporary course materials and inadequate weekly hours allocated to English instruction at universities.

In addition, with regard to the variables (grade, gender, age) examined in the present study, it could be tacitly derived that the variable of gender didn't have essential effect on students' beliefs while grade and age might make significant changes in the students' opinions. Üstünel and Samur (2010) found that gender and department are not always a determining factor in students' beliefs about language learning, because of the fact that they learn the value of autonomy and different methods with their lessons. Nevertheless, as they proceed to their education through the steps of the levels, they become more knowledgeable which should naturally affect their beliefs in total.

Conclusion

The present findings are important for us. Although not generalisable due to the small number of the participants, we collected valuable opinions related to the correct and incorrect applications in FLT/L, and how the process and procedures could be improved. These data should be viewed as an initial demonstration of the right and wrong things in Turkey. While learning and teaching a foreign language, there is unavoidable need to consider the social development and personality of the people involved. FL students need to speak. The teachers should support them more in this point. Teachers can form speaking classes, groups, or clubs, which will have to be allowed by the authorities. Each student follows a series or likes watching films. So, teachers should do activities by taking advantage of these. Grammar shouldn't be the primary focus in FLT/L.

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Internet-Based References

<http://Journals.Cambridge.Org/Action/Displayjournal?Jid=LTA>

<http://Omniglot.Com/Language/Articles/Index.Htm>

Appendix

Age:

Gender:

1. What do you think about wrong/incorrect things in foreign language teaching and learning?

2. What do you think about right/correct things in foreign language teaching and learning?

3. What can we do to improve foreign language teaching and learning?