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INVESTIGATION OF THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ORIENTATIONS OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

INVESTIGACIÓN DE LAS ORIENTACIONES TEÓRICO PRÁCTICAS DE LOS PROFESORES DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores English as a Foreign Language teachers' theoretical orientations/practices towards reading instruction in terms of their self-efficacy. Participants were 120 English as a Foreign Language teachers in Iran. Teachers' Orientation to Reading Instruction (TORI) questionnaire was employed to measure teachers' beliefs about reading instruction. In addition, teachers' self-efficacy questionnaire was administered to examine teachers' self-efficacy in teaching reading. A series of Kruskal Wallis and Chi-Square tests were run to analyze the data. Data revealed that English as a Foreign Language teachers' beliefs towards teaching reading imposed a significant effect on teaching reading and this effect was negative. Also, results demonstrated that teachers' self-efficacy toward teaching reading comprehension made a negative significant effect on teaching process by teachers. In addition, with respect to teachers' practices, this study confirmed that teachers' beliefs about reading instruction and their instructional practices are inconsistent.

Keywords:

English as a Foreign Language, self-efficacy, beliefs, practices.

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora las orientaciones / teórico prácticas de los profesores de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera hacia la instrucción de lectura en términos de su autoeficacia. Los participantes fueron 120 maestros de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en Irán. Se utilizó el cuestionario de Orientación de los maestros para la instrucción de lectura (TORI) para medir las creencias de los maestros sobre la instrucción de lectura. Además, se administró el cuestionario de autoeficacia de los docentes para examinar la autoeficacia de los docentes en la enseñanza de la lectura. Se realizó una serie de pruebas de Kruskal Wallis y Chi-Square para analizar los datos. Los datos revelaron que las creencias de los maestros Inglés como Lengua Extranjera hacia la enseñanza de la lectura impusieron un efecto significativo en la enseñanza de la lectura y este efecto fue negativo. Además, los resultados demostraron que la autoeficacia de los profesores de inglés para enseñar la comprensión de lectura tuvo un efecto negativo significativo en el proceso de enseñanza de los maestros. Además, con respecto a las prácticas de los maestros, este estudio confirmó que las creencias de los maestros de sobre la instrucción de lectura y sus prácticas de instrucción son inconsistentes.

Palabras clave:

Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, autoeficacia, creencias, prácticas.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' self-efficacy and their instructional practices took researchers' attention in the field of language teaching and learning nowadays. Available literature suggests that teachers' performance in classroom originates from their mental acts which are rooted in their experience as students and teachers and are manifested in teachers' attitudes, knowledge and beliefs.

Moreover, teaching is a complicated activity in which *"teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs"* (Borg, 2003, p. 81). Zheng & Borg (2014), believed that teachers' beliefs and their practice can be two significant factors in providing a successful teaching environment.

This study tries to find if there is any relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their instructional practices/beliefs. Chacón (2005), suggested that self-efficacy is an important part of teachers' performance. Self-efficacy and teachers' belief concern with goal-directed behaviors and fulfillment by various activities and rewards, respectively.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there have not been enough attempts in studying English as a Foreign Language teachers' instructional practices/beliefs and their self-efficacy. Thus, this research is a small step in clarifying the teachers' cognition and beliefs about reading comprehension and an attempt in investigating the impact of teachers' self-efficacy, as a personal factor, on their cognition and beliefs about reading.

The domain of language teacher cognition has been for a long time the main focus of a lot of research studies and reached its peak in early 2000s (Ölmezler-Öztürk, 2016). Recently, teachers' thoughts and behaviors absorbed researchers' attention due to the importance of these sets of data in designing teacher education program. One of the most important reasons for interest in this area was the misalignment between teachers' beliefs and practices (Sepehri & Sheikhalizadeh, 2019).

A wealth of research evidence showed that teachers' cognition and their classroom practices have a mutual relationship; it means that stated beliefs and actual practices are consistent/ inconsistent and both of them may affect each other simultaneously.

In spite of the insights offered in teacher cognition, there is little progress in answering the non-correspondence between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices. Moreover, Borg (2009), believed although a substantial number of studies focused on English as a Foreign

Language teachers' cognition, little attention has been paid to English as a Foreign Language teachers' beliefs and practices.

In addition, in the Iranian English as a Foreign Language contexts; especially high schools, policy makers recruit English teachers without considering teachers' factors and characteristics affecting teachers' performance and specifying teachers' salaries without considering teachers' self-efficacy. Moreover, no study has still investigated the dual-face of EFL teachers' beliefs and practices with respect to teachers' self-efficacy aspects in Iran.

Thus, this research is a small step in clarifying English as a Foreign Language teachers' cognition and beliefs with respect to reading comprehension and an attempt in investigating whether there is any relationship between teachers' beliefs and their self-efficacy, as a personal factor.

The relevance of teachers' self-efficacy and their actual practices are very important to all of educational systems all over the world. This study focuses on the importance of teachers' self-efficacy in compare with their actual practice in the classroom. The result can help policy-makers to make a good decision in considering teachers' traits and examining the influence of their constructs on teaching profession. It is believed that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy imagine they are strong teachers and capable of helping weak students and make them successful. It is what that teacher with low self-efficacy cannot observe in himself-herself.

According to Eslami & Fatahi (2008), it is time to call for a fair balance between employees' input including hard work, skill levels, tolerance, and enthusiasm and their output consisting of; salary, benefits, and intangibles such as recognition. It is the best time to consider teachers' characteristics such as self-efficacy and the probable effect it can impose on teachers' performances. According to this theory, a fair balance ensures a good relationship between teachers and policy-makers and provides a motivated situation for both teachers and students, and finally a productive teaching and learning process.

Over the last decades, teacher cognition or mental life has received a significant attention for the purpose of uncovering the hidden side of mind and understanding an underlying complicated relationship between teachers' cognition and their behavior in the classroom. The most significant justification in dealing with teacher cognition is around clarifying the complicated relationship between belief and practice that provide practical implications for teachers and teaching context.

Walberg (1977), coined the term “teachers’ mental lives” to refer to the dimension of the mind that is hidden and abstract. Research on this mental construct began in the mid-1990s in a comprehensive way, and after 1996 in language teaching specifically with a focus on different elements of teachers’ knowledge and belief including grammar instruction, writing instruction, lesson planning and teachers’ orientations to reading instruction.

Borg (2003), defined teacher cognition as “*the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think*” (p. 83). More specifically, Borg (2006), defines second language teacher cognition (SLTC) as “*an often tacit, personally-held practical system of mental constructs held by teachers and which are dynamic – i.e. defined and refined on the basis of educational and professional experiences throughout teachers’ lives*” (p. 35). There is a common assumption that teachers’ conceptions of teaching and learning are under the effect of unobservable dimension of human mind, emerging from their past experiences and personal histories, and these effects are sometimes justifications for instructional practices and decisions.

Teaching profession itself is composed of two domains; teacher action and teacher thinking. Teacher’s action has tangible consequences that are subjected to empirical research and measurable such as students’ behavior and their achievement but thinking processes in the teacher’s head are not observable and measurable. Before 1980s, most attentions have been paid to teachers’ action and its’ impact on students’ learning. It was that process-product type in teacher education area. This process aimed at investigating teachers’ questioning, wait time, complexity of teachers’ questions and other actions in classroom context.

There was no room for teacher thinking and mental processes in such a powerful behavioristic environment that assumed teacher’s internal mental world is a sophisticated entity. Indeed, teachers’ mental lives were not taken into account in that period. The starting point for dealing with the hidden side of the mind dates back to 1970s. This period indicated a significant shift in the “plate tectonics of educational research” and a different view to teachers (Freeman, 2002). The decades of 1980s to 1990s are the decades of change in which the concept of teacher has been under the effect of reconceptualization process.

Teacher cognition as a multidimensional concept embraced several notions including knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, ideologies and attitudes that make a profound impact on teachers while implementing instructional practices. There are some other terminologies for describing

teacher cognition such as; experiential knowledge, teachers’ knowledge base as “*accumulated knowledge about the act of teaching, including the goals, procedures, and strategies that form the basis for what teachers do in the classroom*” (Mullock, 2006, p. 48), pedagogic content knowledge, local knowledge and pedagogical knowledge base. Furthermore, some researchers used the term personal practical knowledge which means the total history of teachers’ professional, personal, and experiential life.

Along similar lines, Richards (1996), defined beliefs as “*psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true*” (p.120). Richards (1996), also used the term “maxims” to refer to teachers’ pedagogical belief systems. Maxims are a set of “*rational principles which serve as a source of how teachers interpret their responsibilities and implement their plans and which motivate teachers’ interactive decisions during a lesson*” (p. 286). Maxims have an important role in decisions teachers made in classroom. These maxims include the maxims of involvement, planning, order, accuracy, efficiency, conformity, and empowerment.

There are some major arguments that can be advanced to support the notion that the relationship between beliefs and practices is mutual, complex and interactive in nature. Teacher beliefs took Philip’s and Jackson’s attention for the first time in 1968. They wrote about teachers mental’ lives and considered implicit and explicit beliefs together. Pajares (1992), found “*a strong relationship between teachers’ educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices*.” (p. 326)

On the contrary, some researchers try to investigate teachers’ explicit beliefs and actual classroom practices because findings showed there is not any congruity between teachers’ beliefs and their actual practices. Therefore, it has been claimed that not only the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices is complex and change in both of them occurs simultaneously; but also beliefs are the focal point of change in teaching practices.

Pajares (1992), showed that sometimes beliefs can have a more significant role in determining teachers’ instructional behavior and organizing tasks rather than teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge. In addition, Williams & Burden (1997), suggested that teachers sometimes are more influenced by their beliefs than suggested methodology by policy makers. It could be argued that teachers’ beliefs and their conception of instruction can constrain them from adopting practices that are in line with teaching and textbooks beliefs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design of the study depicts the type of design used in answering research questions, affirming or rejecting research premises, the type of instruments employed and the procedure of data analysis. The design applied in answering the questions of the current study is statistics method because data were collected through quantitative techniques.

Participants of The Study

Participants taking part in this study will be 120 female English as a Foreign Language teachers from Tehran province in Iran. All the participants will be selected from high schools and their age range will be between 30 to 45 years old. The procedure of sampling is purposive for some reasons. The first reason is about controlling participants' gender and the probable effect it can impose on the result and analyzing them. The second is about participants' willingness and their availability for taking part in the study. The third is about the value of efficacy for conducting observation sessions.

Instruments

TORIQ

For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire adopted and administered among participants, namely teachers' orientation to reading instruction (TORI) questionnaire designed by Lau (2007). This questionnaire was principally based on the instruments in Western studies on teachers' conceptions of reading instruction. TORI questionnaire assessed two different orientations to reading instruction including "text-based orientations" and "competence-based orientation". The teachers indicate whether they agree with each statement in the questionnaire on a 4-point Likert scales ranging from 1 'totally disagree' to 4 'totally agree'. Lau (2007), reported that the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the whole instrument was .83.

Self-efficacy questionnaire

- I. The other employed instrument in this study is a questionnaire to measure the teachers' sense of efficacy towards teaching reading comprehension. For the aim of examining this construct 12-item short version of the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) by Woolfolk & Hoy (2001), was adapted. The TSES items were Likert scale from one to nine. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires on a voluntary basis and assured in the case of participating in the research their data will be kept confidential.

Classroom observation

Since the second objective of the study was to examine the alignment and misalignment of teachers' beliefs and their actual practice in the classroom, the researcher selected 30 teachers with high and low self-efficacy based on the questionnaire and observed their actual practice in reading comprehension instruction. This observation checklist was designed based on the TORI questionnaire and divided into two types of text-based orientations and competence-based orientations, respectively. Each type of orientation consisted of some sub-categories corresponded to the items on TORI

Data Analysis Procedure

Data collected from TORI, self-efficacy questionnaires, and observation sessions will be fed into Sciences Statistical Package for the Social (SPSS) and were analyzed quantitatively. That is, descriptive statistical procedures were utilized to find out whether there is any relationship between English as a Foreign Language teachers' cognition/beliefs about teaching reading comprehension and their self-efficacy. At first, the researcher did a normality test; Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, to assess the status of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Normal Distribution of Data

In order to examine the normal distribution of the data, the researcher has run Kolmogorov Smirnov Test and defined two hypotheses as below. Null hypothesis (H_0) suggests that variable distribution is normal and the first hypothesis (H_1) suggests that variable distribution is not normal. The table 1 is the output of this test.

H_0 : variable distribution is normal.

H_1 : variable distribution is not normal.

Table 1. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test.

		Self-efficacy	Beliefs1
N		120	120
Normal Parametersa	Mean	2.8317	2.2309
	Std. Deviation	.33256	.28174
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.117	.114
	Positive	.090	.076
	Negative	-.117	-.114
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.280	1.247
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.075	.089

According to table 2, the value of Sig. is more than 5 per cent. Therefore, our hypothesis is confirmed. This means that there is a significant relationship between data distribution and normal distribution of the data.

Descriptive Statistics

The aim of this section is introducing the nature of research variables and describing them for a better understanding of qualitative statistics. It is evident that statistics analysis is preceded by statistics descriptive. In this section, some indices such as standard deviation, mean, and Sig. are defined with respect to research questions. According to table 1 demonstrates some indices for two variables.

Table 2. Total descriptive statistics of belief and self-efficacy.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Beliefs1	120	2.23	.281	1.62	2.71
Self-efficacy	120	2.83	.333	1.52	3.43
Valid N (listwise)	120				

According to the results depicted in Table 1, variables' distributions on the most important central index (mean) and the most important dispersion index (standard deviation) are indicated. This table sheds light on the total score of mean for English as a Foreign Language teachers' beliefs towards teaching reading that is 2.23 and it is less than theoretical mean=3.00. The value of Standard deviation (SD) for this variable is 0.281. It is indicated that learners selected the options of 2 (agree) and 3 (neither agree nor disagree) more than the other options. In addition, the total minimum and maximum scores for teachers' beliefs is 1.62 and 2.71, respectively.

As results depicted in Table 1, the mean index of English as a Foreign Language teachers' self-efficacy towards reading teaching is 2.83, while this index is lower than

theoretical mean that is 3.00. Therefore, with respect to this variable it is observed that teachers selected the options of 2(Rarely) and 3 (Sometimes) in the self-efficacy questionnaire. The value of SD for self-efficacy variable equals 0.333. In addition, the total minimum and maximum scores for teachers' beliefs is 1.52 and 3.43, respectively.

The first research question which was addressed in this study was:

1. Is there any significant difference between teachers' self-efficacy and their beliefs in reading?

In order to examining both variables' role separately and totally, our first research question was defined with respect to questions (A), (B) and (C) in analysis process.

A: Do English as a Foreign Language teachers' beliefs play a significant role in teaching reading comprehension?

In order to examine this research question, the researcher has run One-sample test in belief. The table3 indicates the results of this test.

Table 3. One-sample test in belief.

	Test Value = 3					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Beliefs	-29.905	119	0.000	-0.76912	-0.8200	-0.7182

According to table 3, it is observed that the value of Sig. equals 0.00 and this index indicates that English as a Foreign Language teachers' belief has significant effect on teaching reading comprehension. On the other hand, as mentioned above the value of mean equals 2.23 and it is less than 3.00. Therefore, it indicates that teachers' beliefs have a negative effect on their instruction.

B: Does English as a Foreign Language teachers' self-efficacy have a significant effect on reading teaching?

In order to examine this research question, the researcher has run One-sample test on motivation. The table 4 indicates the results of this test.

Table 4. One-sample test on self-efficacy.

	Test Value = 3					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Self-efficacy	-5.542	119	0.000	-0.16825	-0.2284	-0.1081

According to the results depicted on Table 4, it is observed that the value of Sig. equals 0.00 and this index indicates that English as a Foreign Language teachers' self-efficacy

has significant effect on teaching English. On the other hand, as mentioned above the value of mean equals 2.83 and it is less than 3.00. Therefore, it indicates that English as a Foreign Language teachers' self-efficacy has a negative effect on teaching reading comprehension.

Finally, the researcher examined the effect of both variables including belief and self-efficacy and their role towards reading instruction in the classroom.

(C) Between English as a Foreign Language teachers' beliefs and their self-efficacy, which one has a significant role towards reading instruction?

In order to examine the above research question, the researcher has run independent sample test. The table 5 demonstrates the results of this test.

Table 5. Independent Samples Test.

F		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
variable	Equal variances assumed	0.272	0.603	15.102	238	0.00	0.601	0.040	0.522	0.679
	Equal variances not assumed			15.102	231.74	0.00	0.601	0.040	0.522	0.679

Results of The Second Research Question

The second research question in this study was;

2. To what extent English as a Foreign Language teachers' stated beliefs about reading comprehension are in line with their actual classroom practice?

As mentioned above, participants in this section are 30 English as a Foreign Language teachers' with high and low self-efficacy (15 teachers with low self-efficacy and 15 teachers with high self-efficacy).

The table 6 indicates practice frequencies by English as a Foreign Language teachers in text-based and competence-based sub-categories. The following table demonstrates the results of Chi-square test for two groups separately.

Table 6. Frequencies of English as a Foreign Language teachers in Practicing Two Variables.

Variable	Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
High efficacy teachers	5.67	1	0.01
Low efficacy teaches	2.00	1	0.15

As is illustrated in Table 6, the p-value for English as a Foreign Language teachers with high self-efficacy (0.01) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the movement frequency of these teachers based on the two orientations (text-based and competence-based sub-categories). More to the point, the p-values for teachers with low self-efficacy is 0.15. The comparison of p-value of this group revealed that there was no significant difference between frequency of text-based and competence-based sub-categories.

The table 7 indicates practice frequencies by both groups in text-based and competence-based sub-categories.

Table 7. Frequencies of two groups in Practicing Two Variables.

Variable	High efficacy	Low efficacy
Text-based	28	21
Competence-based	12	16

The value of frequencies in text-based sub-categories for high and low efficacy teachers are 28 and 21, respectively. Moreover, these frequencies, for practicing competence-based variable in high efficacy and low efficacy teachers are 12 and 16, respectively.

Table 8 presents the results of Chi-Square test for identifying the probable significant difference between two groups' frequencies in performing text-based and competence-based sub-categories.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of Chi-Square Test for Text-based and Competence-based Practices' Frequencies.

Variable	Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
Text-based	4.43	2	0.10
Competence-based	10.35	2	0.00

As indicated in Table 8, the *p*-value (0.10) is more than 0.05; thus, the null hypothesis is maintained. This reveals the lack of significant difference between two groups' movements with respect to applying text-based sub-categories. Nevertheless, these findings indicated that the *p*-value (0.00) is less than 0.05, which points to the fact that there is a significant difference between two groups' performance according to competence-based sub-categories.

As discussed previously, the aim of this study was examining English as a Foreign Language teachers' beliefs and self-efficacy on teaching reading comprehension. This study attempts to find the probable effects of teachers' characteristics such as beliefs and their self-efficacy on English language teaching. The other aim of this research is informing teacher educators about the role of teachers' theories and whether their self-efficacy has any effect on their process of teaching.

With respect to the first research question, the obtained results indicated that English as a Foreign Language teachers' beliefs have a significant effect on English language teaching. Results suggested that the value of Sig. is less than 0.05 percent. Therefore, it confirms that beliefs can impose a noticeable effect on teaching reading. On the other hand, it is necessary to clarify whether this effect is positive or negative. According to the statistics depicted on the tables related to the first research question, it was observed that beliefs have a significant negative effect on

the process of teaching reading. This means that English as a Foreign Language teachers believed that their beliefs towards language are not productive in the process of teaching reading. It means that beliefs teachers hold while entering class can impose a negative effect on their teaching process. It is what most of the participants stated by their choices in the questionnaire.

Similarly, English as a Foreign Language teachers' self-efficacy showed similar results like the other variable, separately. Teachers' self-efficacy has a significant effect on English teaching specially reading comprehension. Teachers believed that their self-efficacy in teaching language cannot lead them to a proficient process of instructing. Findings of this study revealed that teachers with low self-efficacy did not show preference towards teaching process. In addition, data showed that its' significant effect is not positive. It means teachers believed that teachers' self-efficacy cannot have an efficient role in teaching language. Therefore, according to the results of both questionnaires separately, it was evident that the noticeable negative effect of learners' beliefs/self-efficacy on English language teaching was observed.

CONCLUSIONS

For the best understanding and answering the first research question, the researcher analyzed beliefs and self-efficacy totally. Findings suggested that both variables have a significant effect on English language teaching. Results confirmed that this effect is negative. Data demonstrated that English as a Foreign Language teachers' beliefs have a more significant negative effect on English language teaching rather than self-efficacy. In analyzing the two groups' practices in total, it was made evident that there was a similarity in their performance in terms of text-based sub-categories, but a significant difference was observed in their performance in terms of competence-based categories. Therefore, the findings demonstrated a significant inconsistency between teachers' stated beliefs about reading and their actual instructional practices. What these teachers stated as their orientations to reading instruction was in contrast to their actual practices in observation sessions. To put it differently, firstly there was a correspondent status in all teachers' beliefs to reading instruction. Next, a substantial congruity was observed in all teachers' practices with respect to text-based categories. Third, a significant inconsistency was in all teachers' practices in terms of competence-based sub-categories.

Accordingly, the findings of this study seem to build in particular on the work of some of the researchers reviewed in above. Many of these studies reported the English as a Foreign Language teachers' beliefs imposed a significant

effect on reading instruction. This study is in line with Karimi & Nazari's (2017), and other studies. These authors mentioned a number of reasons leading to misalignment of beliefs/practices in their studies. Contended that sometimes personal variables like self-efficacy were among the most important factors that lead to the effect of belief on the process of reading in the classroom. The teachers with high self-efficacy showed a consistent relationship between their stated beliefs/ actual practices rather than teachers with low self-efficacy. In addition, there were some contextual factors impeding the teachers to act based on their beliefs. Consequently, there was a significant difference between teachers' beliefs and their self-efficacy towards the process of teaching. The observed difference was significant was negative. It means that teachers' belief has a negative effect on teaching reading.

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