

Original Paper

An Investigation into EFL In-Service Teachers' Beliefs toward Teaching Methodologies

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Abstract

The present study was an attempt to investigate the EFL in-service teachers' beliefs toward teaching methodologies and its possible relationship with age and gender. To achieve this aim, a questionnaire consisting of individual background and beliefs toward English teaching methodologies (the Audiolingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching) designed by Chen (2005) was employed. It was given to 252 in-service English teachers (136 female, 116 male) working as English teachers in the educational department and institutes. The findings showed that the EFL in-service teachers considerably preferred CLT to the Audiolingual Method. Moreover, the results showed that the male and female teachers had equal methodology and the level of methodology is not different in different age groups. The information provided in the present research can be helpful for teachers, policy holders of institutes and material developers. This study has also some implications for the researchers interested in teacher's education studies.

Keywords

language learning strategies, methodology, in-service course, EFL learners

1. Introduction

Teaching English as a second and foreign language has been developed in all over the world for many decades. It was at the end of the Second World War in 1945 that people wanted to learn English, not for the pleasure or prestige of knowing a foreign language, but because English was the key to the international technology and commerce. As English became the accepted international language of technology and commerce, it created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning a language. For example, the business persons who wanted to sell their products, the mechanics that had to read instruction manuals, the doctors who needed to keep up with developments in their fields (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Therefore, by increasing demands on learning English, the ESL and EFL classes have been emerged in

the universities and language institutes in all over the world. By increasing EFL and ESL classes the need to instructing English teachers has also increased. Richards (1998) argued that ESL/EFL teacher education needs not only to engage ESL/EFL teachers in teaching skills but also to assist them to explore their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and thinking and to develop their own teaching theories and practices.

Richards (1998) proposed that anyone who was involved in the pre-service ESL/EFL teacher education should study issues such as theories, research, and practice in the field of second language teacher education, appropriate knowledge base for pre-service and in-service teachers, the influences of language teachers' beliefs and principles on teaching practices, experiences in language teachers' professional development, the relationship between the teacher education program and teaching practices of its graduates, and so on.

In this study issues concerning current language teacher education research are discussed from the perspectives of the relationships between in-service teachers' learning practices and teaching beliefs, non-native English teachers' needs toward English learning, and teachers' beliefs toward English language teaching methodologies are discussed.

One of the biggest problems in the ESL/EFL field is that the ideas, beliefs, and methodologies of the English teachers have been neglected. The methodologies and beliefs in teaching English have been imposed to English teachers and these teachers are rarely entitled to utilize their own beliefs and methods in their teaching. Richards and Nunan (1990) indicated that the ESL/EFL field has been mainly focusing on how to deliver language teaching and learning methodologies to the in-service teachers rather than how to assist them to develop their own theories and to understand their individual learning-to-teaching processes.

On the other hand, while ESL/EFL education is highly emphasized all over the world, ESL/EFL teacher education has been discussed or studied very little (Freeman & Johnson, 1998) and the articles discussing teacher education are very scarce.

The task of methodology is to enhance the process of teaching English by empowering and facilitating teachers to work proficiently. Teaching involves a continuous analysis of one's own work, the experiences of other teachers and the search for new means to improve teaching. When teaching a foreign language a teacher must think about the specific qualities offered to students of a certain mother tongue. That means that the methodology of teaching English has to take into account the problems posed by the English language for the students who will learn it.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between EFL in-service teachers' language learning strategies and their own beliefs toward teaching methodologies. In other words, this study intends to determine: (1) What nonnative EFL teachers' teaching beliefs are toward English language teaching methodologies; (2) Whether it is possible that some factors such as gender and age influence their adoptions of language learning strategies, their teaching beliefs toward English language teaching methodologies, and relations between language learning and teaching beliefs?

2. Research Questions

This study was aimed to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1: What kinds of beliefs toward teaching methodologies do Iranian in-service teachers hold?

Research Question 2: Is there any relationship between the English teachers' beliefs toward teaching methodology and their gender?

Research Question 3: Is there any relationship between the English teachers' beliefs toward teaching methodology and their age?

3. Background

Studies about the relationship between EFL in-service teachers' language learning strategies and beliefs toward teaching methodologies are very scarce. Some studies have been done to inspect the relationship between pre-service teachers' learning and teaching beliefs. By analyzing seven teacher-learners' autobiography assignments and journal entries, Bailey et al. (1996) concluded that pre-service teachers' teaching beliefs had been shaped by their language learning experiences from their previous teachers and from the learning process in teacher education programs.

In Moran's study (1996), through understanding a female Spanish teacher's internship experience via analyzing five papers, three classroom observations, and six hour-long interviews based on the grounded theory, he found that there were interactive relationships among three variables – learning Spanish, teaching Spanish, and learning to teach Spanish. In other words, each variable affected each other variable reciprocally.

The training of the female Spanish teacher within her teacher education program influenced her own teaching. Also, her teaching experience pushed her to pursue different Spanish language learning strategies. Numrich (1996) conducted her study to investigate student teachers' beliefs by reflecting their second language learning. After analyzing the language learning history, diary entries, and diary analysis of 23 female and three male English native speaking student teachers during a ten-week period, it was found that their feelings toward previous language learning experiences impacted their teaching practice in positive or negative ways.

In Wang's (2002) case study, which was based on a program that adopted David Hunt's inside-out approach and C-R-E-A-T-E cycle, it was found that nine high school Taiwanese in-service teachers' first-hand learning experiences have helped them to build up their own teaching knowledge. In addition, their previous experiences also affected their implied theories toward their professions.

Based on the in-depth interview of four Japanese EFL teachers who accepted training from an American TESOL graduate program, Sugiyama (2003) found that these Japanese EFL teachers were affected by their learning process in the program and transformed their beliefs from teacher-centered teaching to learner-centered teaching.

Chen's (2005) study which contained 293 participants was conducted to examine the relationship

between pre-service teachers' language learning strategies and their teaching beliefs. This study showed that there were statistically significant correlations between language learning strategies and their teaching beliefs. The results showed positive relationships existed between learning strategies and teaching beliefs. In other words, like the results of other research, this study showed that learning practice would influence the teaching beliefs of teachers. However, this study further indicated that the influence may not be large.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The sample participating in this study consisted of 252 in-service teachers out of a total of 350 teachers (136 female and 116 male) in Golestan. They were working as English teachers in educational system and institutes. The subjects were all chosen through stratified random sampling. The stratified random sampling is a kind of sampling in which the researcher subdivides the population into groups, or strata. This kind of sampling is a combination of randomization and categorization. Based on its characteristics, stratified random sampling was utilized, because in this study there were groups of in-service teachers in different area of Golestan.

4.2 Instrumentation

4.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire in the study consists of two measures: (1) The Individual Background and (2) Beliefs toward English Teaching Methodologies (the Audiolingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching) which was designed by Chen (2005).

Section I: The Individual Background

The first section of the questionnaire was to obtain the participant's background information. Ten items were included in this section to deal with the participants' age, gender, marital status, education level, major, studying or staying experiences in English-speaking countries, TOFEL scores, confidence of English ability, English teaching experiences, and familiarity to EFL teaching methodologies. The ten items are independent variables and were used to analyze how these variables influence participants' use of language learning strategies, beliefs toward EFL teaching methodologies, and the relationships between the use of language learning strategies and beliefs toward English teaching methodologies. Among the ten items, items 2, 3, 4, 5 are nominal variables. The participants needed to choose the answer best describing their status of gender, marital status, education level for Items 2, 3, and 4. For Item 5, the participants needed to fill in their academic majors under the highest education level. In addition, their majors were further recoded based on English/ Non-English Major or other classifications for the purpose of analysis. Items 1, 6, 7, 8 are interval variables.

Section II: Beliefs toward EFL Teaching Methodologies (BETM)

This section was to investigate participants' beliefs toward two EFL teaching methodologies: the Audiolingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching. The questionnaire items in this section

were created by Chih-Sheng Chen (2005). There are two parts in this section. One is teaching beliefs toward language and language learning theories; the other is teaching beliefs toward curriculum design. Each part had 13 items, including six statement items describing the Audiolingual Method, six statement items describing Communicative Language Learning, and an open-ended question. For statement items, participants needed to rate the statements on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

4.3 Reliability of the Questionnaire

For the reliability of the BETM, examining Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, it was found that the Cronbach's alpha of the measure ($\alpha=.80$) was acceptable in social science research.

4.4 Procedure

The data were collected in January, 2014. The researcher contacted school authorities via an email or a letter, on the phone, or in person. The school authorities were informed of purposes of the questionnaire and the wishes of investigating the in-service teachers in their programs. After obtaining the approval of the school authorities, the researcher administered the survey in person in most classes. During the survey administration, the researcher complied with the following procedures:

- 1) Inform the participants in Persian that the survey is research-used only.
- 2) Tell the participants the purposes of the survey are to understand how they learn English and how they think of teaching English.
- 3) Introduce the content of the questionnaire. Tell them that there are three sections of the questionnaire.
- 4) Interpret the procedures of finishing the questionnaire.
- 5) After participants finish and hand in the questionnaire, briefly review the questionnaire. If some items are left blank, the researcher informs the participant who has some items left blank.

After the data were collected, all data were keyed into computer. Statement items were keyed into the database of SPSS.

4.5 Data Analysis

For the sake of the quantitative analysis of the present study, two procedures were used:

- 1) Descriptive analysis: Mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentage of each item, except the open-ended question, were analyzed by using the SPSS 10.0 for Windows.
- 2) Inferential analysis: Multiple regression, ANOVAs, and t-tests were used to investigate the relationships between language learning strategies/ teaching beliefs toward EFL methodologies and factors of individual background.

5. Results

5.1 Individual Background Information

After examining 252 cases collected in the study and based on the factors of gender, and age, it was found that one hundred fourteen cases out of 252 (45.2%) were between 20 to 30 years old, (35/7%) were between

31 to 40 years old and (19.0%) were between 41 to 50 years old. One hundred thirty six cases (53.9%) were female.

5.2 Results of BETM

The information of Table 1 indicated that the overall mean of the 28 questionnaire statements for teaching beliefs was 3.90(SD=0.34). When the total average mean of the 14 items of the Audiolingual Method (M=3.52, SD=0.41) was compared to the total average mean of the 14 items of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (M=4.28, SD=0.38), using a two-way repeated-measures ANOVA, it was found that the difference was significant, Wilk's $\Lambda=0.20$, $F(1,251)=1142.44$, $p<.001$, multivariate $\eta^2=.80$. In other words, these EFL in-service teachers considerably preferred CLT to the Audiolingual Method.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Audiolingual Method and CLT

Methodologies	Items	n	M	SD
Audiolingual-		14	3.25	0.41
Language theories	T1-6	6	3.73	0.51
Curriculum Design	T13-19&27	8	3.37	0.48
Communicative-		14	4.28	0.38
Language theories	T7-12	6	4.42	0.44
Curriculum Design	T20-26&28	8	4.17	0.43
Overall Beliefs	T1-28	28	3.90	0.34

With regard to the first research question, “What kinds of Beliefs toward Teaching Methodologies do Iranian in service teachers hold?”, as the information of Table 1 indicated when the two methodologies, considering Audiolingual method and CLT, were analyzed in terms of language theories and curriculum design, the differences between the Audiolingual and CLT were significant, for language theories, Wilk's $\Lambda=0.36$, $F(1,251)=517.53$, $p<.001$, multivariate $\eta^2=.64$, and for curriculum design, Wilk's $\Lambda=0.30$, $F(1,251)=681.67$, $p<.001$, multivariate $\eta^2=.70$. In other words, from the perspectives of language theories and curriculum design, these Iranian in-service teachers would like CLT rather than the Audiolingual Method.

With regard to the second research question, “is there any relationship between the English teachers' beliefs towards methodology and their gender?”, independent t-test and ANOVA test were utilized. The Table 2 presents the results of independent t-test which was utilized to compare the Methodology in males and females. Considering that ($t= 1.41$) and ($df= 250$), there was no meaningful difference between male and female teachers ($p>0.05$). In other words, the results showed that the male and female teachers had equal Methodology and the observed difference in their Methodology mean score is random and due to sampling errors.

Table 2. The Independent t-test of Methodology in Male and Female Teachers

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Methodology	113.85	11.95	1.408	250	.160	2.00
	111.85	10.52				

With regard to the third research question, “is there any relationship between the English teachers’ beliefs towards methodology and their age?”, Table 3 shows the result of ANOVA test comparing the level of methodology in terms of age. Considering ($F=19$) and the presented degrees of freedom (df), it can be said that the level of methodology is not different in different age groups. In other words, the level of Methodology is equal in the subjects in different age groups.

Table 3. Comparing the Level of Methodology, Considering the Age Based on ANOVA Test

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age	Between Groups	49.35	2	24.67	.192	.825
	Within Groups	31985.50	249	128.45		
	Total	32034.85	251			

One of the biggest problems in the ESL/EFL field is that the ideas, beliefs, and methodologies of the English teachers have been neglected. The methodologies and beliefs in teaching English have been imposed to English teachers and these teachers are rarely entitled to utilize their own beliefs and methods in their teaching. Richards and Nunan (1990) indicated that the ESL/EFL field has been mainly focusing on how to deliver language teaching and learning methodologies to the in-service teachers rather than how to assist them to develop their own theories and to understand their individual learning-to-teaching processes.

On the other hand, while ESL/EFL education is highly emphasized all over the world, ESL/EFL teacher education has been discussed or studied very little (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnston & Irujo, 2001; Richards, 1998; Schulz, 2000; Vélez-Rendón, 2002) and the articles discussing about teacher education are very scarce.

6. Limitations of the Study

In this study, the limitations can be classified as follows:

1) Sampling limitation: The participants in this study were non-native in-service teachers in Iran. Therefore, people who are in different teacher education programs or are native-English-speaking

In-service teachers may show different outcomes.

2) Content limitation: The teaching methodologies in this study only included the Audiolingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching. Other methodologies (e.g., the Grammar-Translation Method (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2007), Total Physical Response (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2007) should be included in further studies. In addition, teaching beliefs that are not related to teaching methodologies were not explored in the study.

3) Practical limitation: In the study, only the use of language learning strategies and teaching beliefs were investigated. How In-service teachers practice language strategies or execute their teaching beliefs in actual life was not observed or studied.

7. Recommendations for Further Studies

The results of this study show that there is a meaningful relationship between language learning strategies and teacher's methodology. This area of study should be elaborated more to make language methodology more practical. For this aim different learning strategies should be included in compliance with different methodology contextually.

The replication of the study may be necessary to verify the current findings. Especially, research in different populations (e.g., ESL pre-service teachers, EFL full-time teachers) may facilitate our understanding toward all language teachers' language learning strategies and teaching beliefs.

However, if the study is replicated, more teaching beliefs regarding methodologies (e.g., the Grammar-Translation Method) should be added to have a broader picture of language teachers' beliefs toward EFL teaching methodologies.

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