

Exploration of Iranian Arabic teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and Learning Second Language in Iranian high schools

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Abstract

In second language teaching teachers decide how to teach, or he/she brings method of teaching in the classroom, and even in some cases it is the teacher who should select material and content for teaching. Eichler and Erens (2015) believe that the teachers have their individual reasoning for their selection of content, method, evaluation system. The reasoning of teachers is reflected in the work of other scholars, such as, “exploring teachers’ beliefs and their development are important topics in themselves” Lerman (2015). Or ‘Factors related to pedagogical beliefs of teachers and technology integration’ Liu (2011). The field of teachers’ belief is a new area in Iran, and the investigation of beliefs of teachers might be a searching of software of teachers as the main factors of process of teaching and learning. Study the teachers’ belief is helpful to investigate and discover the process of conceptualization and decision making by teachers. There are some works on English teachers’ belief, but the study about Arabic teachers’ belief was not found. This study wants to explore Arabic teachers’ belief as second language teachers in Iran. In addition to exploring the teachers’ belief, the source of beliefs was questioned. The researchers argue that inspecting of teachers’ belief should be in context, and the culture of the society in one hand, and government as authorized factor on other hand should be in spotlight of work of researchers, educators and all experts in the field. These factors at least are messy factors in all of the works in the field of teachers’ belief in Iran. Thus, by identifying and changing the beliefs many of the problems can be eliminated or improved. Sixty Arabic teachers participated in the research, and the instrument was interview.

Keywords: teachers’ beliefs, interview, second language teaching, power- dependent factor

1. Introduction

The shifting of teachers’ behavior to teachers’ cognition has been occurred from last four decades, and as a part of this shift, teachers’ belief is coming into consideration (Renzaglia,

Hutchins, & Lee, 1997; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000, and Borg, 2015). Johnson (1994) claimed “teachers’ beliefs [would] ultimately become one of the most valuable psychological constructs for teaching and teacher education” (p. 439). Borg (2001) believes that general literature has considered the role of critical impact of teachers’ belief on teaching of teachers in the classroom and in interaction between teachers and learners.

In relation to teachers’ beliefs Renzaglia et al. (1997) reported that teachers’ beliefs “not only reflected in teachers’ decisions and actions, there is evidence that teachers’ beliefs (and attitudes) drive important decisions and classroom practice” (p. 361). According to Hollingworth (1989) declaration that the selection of new method or program by teachers are based on the degree of congruence of their beliefs to the new method. On the other hand, there are a general idea among some scholars that for determining teachers’ practice, the indicator component is teachers’ beliefs (Ball, 1990a; Beswick, 2007; Cross, 2009; Haser and Star, 2004; Thompson, 1992). Mason & Scrivani(2004) emphasized the direct relationship between teachers’ belief and students’ achievement.

In a study Xu (2012) in his article emphasized on importance of teachers’ beliefs and its impact on teaching and learning.

Richardson(1996) stated, “Teacher attitudes and beliefs, therefore, are important considerations in understanding classroom practices and conducting teacher education designed to help prospective and in-service teachers develop their thinking and practices”(102-119). In her work, she tested two roles of beliefs in training teachers, a) affective aspect of individuality of pre service and in service teachers, b) as an influential factor in changing teacher education.

Teachers’ belief as a topic has been in consideration by Iranian researchers (Rashidi and Moghadam, 2014; Amiryousefi, 2015; Rajabi at al. 2011; Navidinia; Mousavi and Shiazizadeh, 2009) and it shed light on the importance of investigation on teachers’ belief. But studies conducted on teachers’ beliefs are not many. Of course, there have been some studies on the problems of teaching/learning English as a foreign language in different parts of Iran regarding beliefs of teachers and students (Farahian, 2011; Emamian and Ghafournia, 2015).

Maybe the most important aspect of investigation on teachers’ belief is its relation with action.

Richardson (1996) argued about the interaction between belief and action as, “Beliefs are thought to drive actions; however, experiences and reflection on action may lead to changes in and/or additions to beliefs. Examples of these complex interrelationships may be found in research dating from the 1970's” (102-119).

By reviewing the condition of teaching second language in Iran, and the problems of language learners in learning and using the second language (Bakhshi, 1995; Doudman, 2006; Moradi, 1996; Saadat, 1995), it reveals that the condition of second language teaching is not satisfaction. Most researchers in the field of teaching/learning second language complain of improper material curriculum, method, instruments and weak outcome of educational system.

This made the researcher to work on the second language learning and teaching in Iran, but from the point of view of teachers’ cognition. This project worked on the teachers’ beliefs of high schools, Arabic teachers.

Rashidi and Moghadam (2014), who worked on the relationship between teachers' beliefs about their methods and their sense of self-efficacy, reported small positive correlation between teachers' sense of efficacy and students' satisfaction. On the other hand, Navidinia et al. (2009) with the topic of, relationship between English language teachers' efficacy beliefs and their students' achievement, reached to significant positive correlation was found between variables. so it showed that teachers' beliefs are important and influential in achievement of their students. There are some investigations on exploring the beliefs of second language teachers such as Shahvand and Rezvani (2016) who utilized a closed-ended questionnaire for describing the beliefs of second language teachers.

But studies conducted on teachers' beliefs in Iran limited to one second language and exclusively English. The other problem is that the works were not comprehensive works, most of them were at the level of an article. Therefore, for modifying the previous researchers and erected their limitations, this project was conducted.

1.1. Research questions

This study worked on the Iranian Arabic teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning a second language. The results of this study provided information to address important questions regarding the beliefs of Iranian teachers in the area of Arabic education.

1. What beliefs do Iranian Arabic teachers hold about teaching and learning?
2. What is the Iranian Arabic teachers' beliefs' map about the importance of teaching knowledge?
 - a. How do Iranian Arabic teachers' beliefs regard pedagogy, students, curriculum, content, management and organization?
3. What is the Iranian Arabic teachers' beliefs' map about the nature of teaching ability?
 - a. How do Iranian Arabic teacher think about themselves as language teachers?
 - b. How do Iranian Arabic teacher consider the talent of teaching?
4. what are the sources of teachers' beliefs?

2. Literature review

Teacher cognition research is a way for understanding "what teachers think, know and believe" (Borg, 2009). The growing interest of researchers in studying cognitive structure of teachers reflects fundamental changes in considering teaching from physical facets to mental ones. One of the most important part of cognition of teachers is teachers' beliefs. This change has emerged new dimension in teaching, the cognitive paradigm. This paradigm includes: memory, value system, attitudes, motivation and beliefs of teachers. Here, an elaboration on the definition of teachers' belief is presented.

2.1 Definition of Belief

Belief is determined as a messy construct (Pajares, 2008). Various definitions have been suggested by researchers on 'belief'. Pajares (1992) labeled it as a messy construct which was missed by the researchers of education. He states that "all teachers hold beliefs, however defined and labeled, about their work, their students, their subject matter, and their roles and responsibilities" (p. 314). Teachers' beliefs have the role of sieving on the teachers' decision, conception and practice (Pajares, 1992; Hollingworth, 1989; Fives and Beuhl, 2012). Getting definition to the term of teachers' belief is difficult. There has been no consensus on the construct of 'belief'. Pajares (1992) reviewed more than 20 works of researchers on the teachers' belief, but not suggested a fix definition of teachers' belief. He acknowledges that the problem in investigating about teachers' belief is related to "poor conceptualizations, and of differing understandings beliefs and belief structures" (p. 307). But Fives and Beuhl (2012) claimed that definition of the construct is not difficult. They offered some features for prevalent in definitions of teachers' beliefs include their "(a) implicit and explicit nature, (b) stability over time, (c) situated or generalized nature (d) relation to knowledge, and (e) existence as individual propositions or larger systems" (p.473).

Goodenough (1963) referred to the term of belief as "accepted as guides for assessing the future, are cited in support of decisions, or are referred to in passing judgment on the behavior of others" (p. 151). "I believe that. . ." was the phrase that Rokeach (1968) considered as heuristic proposition for belief. He viewed belief as a fixed psychological construct which preserves against any change. The philosophical study of belief was related to Green (1971) who described the beliefs as different clusters related to each other in a value system. In this belief system cross fertilization rarely occurred and incomplete beliefs were taken in different clusters. Sigel (1985) used a technical definition for belief as "mental constructions of experience—often condensed and integrated into schemata or concepts" (p. 351)

In this project the definition of Green and pajares was the base of the study.

2.2. Theories about teachers' beliefs

There are two clear and distinct philosophical schemes that can be tagged to the beliefs on teaching. Literature reveals that these are traditional transmission approach and contemporary constructivist approach. According to Uzuntiryaki et al. (2010), in the traditional transmission approach, the students are expected to absorb the information and then reproduce it based on prescribed rules by the teacher. On the other hand, the contemporary constructive approach means that the students develop their own knowledge by interacting with the teachers and environment.

Under the traditional beliefs of teaching, teachers are considered as the transmitters of knowledge and use the rules and procedures in order to get right answers. Teachers take the control of teaching and learning process and students have a passive role. Chai (2010) stated that the teachers with traditional beliefs follow traditional practices which mean they are more concerned about the speed and good grades of the students. They focus lesser on understanding

and learning. Also, these teachers give very little autonomy to the students and maintain the social context in which mistakes are to be avoided.

Those educators who want their students to be actively engaged in the activities prefer inquiry oriented teaching that is adopted by the contemporary constructivist approach. In this approach, the students are expected to construct the concepts, use the skills of reasoning and creativity and discovering and communicate and share ideas.

2.3 Relationship between teachers' beliefs and practice

According to Larenas, Hernández and Navarrete (2015), multiple conceptions of language are held by the second language teachers. It was found that teachers conceived language either as natural communication or as the building blocks. However, these conflicting conceptions can lead to stress for the learners as the teachers make frequent shifts during the communicative tasks to a focus on language forms. Example includes the communication of discrete vocabulary items and explanations of the meanings. This results in the interactional patterns within the classroom that remain the focus of the teacher despite the fact that there is also emphasis on the communicative methodologies.

3. Methodology

Methodology of a research is a set of roles, instruments and reliable and systemic approaches to investigate about facts and discover new solutions for problems of human societies (Khaki.2008). On the other hand, aims and nature of any research determine the design and instruments. In the research method, the researcher tries to find the best design and instruments that helps him/her to achieve responses to the questions of the project sooner and better. If the aim of a study is to solve a problem or to ameliorate the workplace, and use the results of the study in the society then, it is an applied research (Danayfard, Alvani and Azar, 2004).

3.1 participants

For this research, 60 Arabic teachers were selected but randomly to interview with. Since in khozestan there are native speakers of Arabic, the researcher selected the nonnative speakers for the study. It means that the Arabic teachers were selected through a process of referring to high schools and with an opening dialogue the researcher ask the teachers about their first language, if the first language was Arabic then the researcher finished the case by an apologizing, but if the Arabic teacher was nonnative speaker of Arabic, it could be a case for interview with.

In performing a research, sample size may be characterized by number and selection of participants. Size of the sample is a serious problem for many researchers. It is important to consider that a large sample size is better reflect the features of target population which restricts the influence of researchers' mind and value system (Creswell, 2012; Morse, 2000). A sufficiently large sample size would be an essential feature for produce results among variables of a research which are different significantly (Creswell, 2012; Morse, 2000)

Griffin and Hauser (1993) stated that “20-30 in-depth interviews are necessary to uncover 90-95% of all customer needs for the product categories studied, therefore, the number of participants should be 30. This recommendation can be seen in the declaration of Saiful(2012) asserted , “sample size larger than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research,” adding that sub-samples also require at least 30 observations when applicable.

In qualitative researches that the focus is to “reduce the chances of discovery failure,” (De Paulo, 2011). For qualitative part of this study, the researchers used 30 participants for interviews.

3.2 Instrument

The official language in Iran is Persian; therefore, different parts of the instruments were translated into the Persian language. A certified and licensed translator completed the translation process and then the professors and experts of Chamran University confirmed them.

3.2.1 Interview

The sets of data gathered from interview sessions enables the researcher to check that to what extent the participants' responses are compatible with the interviewee's answers. The interview in this study is semi-structured, based on Robson (1993), the semi-structured interview presented the purposes and provides enough flexibility in the conversation to elicit most appropriate information from interviewee. In semi-structured interview, the participant can clarify, complete and modify the answers.

In semi-structured interviews, interview guide questions was prepared based on the interview questions developed in Borg (1998) and Fives and Buehl's (2012) project. The guide questions will be checked by experts in order to ratify the ambiguous or repeated items. The number of items will be 12. They are about following themes: (1 and 2) belief about teaching, (3 and 20) schooling, (4, 6) knowledge of teaching and its changing, (10 and 17) philosophy and goals of teaching, (11) student, (5) talent of teaching, (7, 9, 15, 19 and 22) educational system, (12 and 18) self. belief and belief making (13, 15 and 16), psychology of teaching (21).

Adler and Adler (1998) believe that the number of interview for graduate students could be between 12 and 60, with 30 being the mean; Ragin and Becker (1992) propose the number of 20 for an M.A. thesis and 50 for a Ph.D. dissertation. In this project, 60 participants will take part in the interviews, and each of them will be rewarded. Each interview will last almost one hour.

To help ensure that all participants could express their ideas and feelings as fully as possible, interviews were conducted in Persian, the first language shared by the researcher and the participants. All the interviews were audio-recorded with Olympus WS 110 Digital Voice Recorder. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim as soon as possible following each interview.

4. Results

The responses of teacher participants were rich and articulate, and recurrent themes were identified. The recurrent themes were subsumed under four categories, which were aligned with the question of this study. The guiding questions of interview were adapted from Borg (1998) and Fives and Buehl (2014). By analyzing the data the following categories and themes were founded.

The categories were found in the transferred interviews were: teaching and learning, importance of knowledge, nature of teaching and source of beliefs. The themes and subthemes are illustrated in the following table. In frequency column number of related and concordant themes among all teacher participants are written.

Table 1: Categories and themes identified in the interview data

	categories	themes	subthemes	Frequency
1	Teaching and learning	Teaching and learning Arabic is for understanding religious text	-----	51
		Ability to communicate in spoken Arabic	-----	33
		An obligation,	-----	24
2	Importance of knowledge	Pedagogy	Teaching is for growing up ideal citizens based on religious rules	49
			The real goal of Arabic teaching is united Islamic nation composed of all Islamic countries	32
		Student	Not interested in learning second language	51
			They are not real students except one or two in each class	27
			The teacher has duty to supervise students	60
			Not accept responsibility/ not motivated	44
			Only learner/follower/ imitator	23
			curriculum	Old and needs to change
			Not bad not good	19
		Content	Weak	53
			Old materials	31
			Not good not bad	22
		management	Students should be silent	38
			Arrange the materials for teaching	22
			Teacher is the center of class	32
		method	Method of teaching is reading focus.	49
			Grammar/Translation	47
			Practical method	11
		Evaluation	Translation / grammar base	58
Old methods of assessment	26			
3	Nature of	Beliefs about self	We are not ideal Arabic teachers	34

	teaching		We are not ideal Muslims	21
			Exclusively performer of the text books	44
			Most teachers haven't enough knowledge	44
		Talent of teaching	Genetics and Learned	48
			Genetics	12
		Definition of teaching/	Art	33
			Job	50
			Love	12
			Engineering and human making	43
		philosophy of teaching	Preparing ideal peoples	58
4	Source of beliefs about teaching	Religious	60	
		Government	49	
		Family	27	
		Society and family	51	

5. Discussion

By inspecting the results, it reveals that teaching and learning is one of the main categories in transferred interviews. And preliminary theme is the learning Arabic for religious contexts. Most of the works on teachers' belief in the world focus on the teacher as an individual with unique beliefs then the factors like contexts, religious power are missed. In spite of the matter that the Arabic teachers are the second language teachers, but they themselves confirm and believe in teaching a language as a tool in the service of religion. This may be a little far from the core goal of teaching and learning a language. And only a few participants believe in using Arabic simultaneously use for communication. The obligation is labeled to some explanations which were be a type of objection to teaching Arabic, because they believe that they teach it only for Konnor, entrance examination of universities in Iran, not for communication because no technical books or textbooks are in Arabic. And they said that all scientific conferences are in English. Then the only application of Arabic will be exchanging of theological information.

Importance of knowledge is a category which expanded to process of teaching in a classroom from method to evaluation. The teachers believe that education is in the service of religion. Making ideal persons base on Islamic principles is the theme of responses of interviewees. Student in their belief map is an inert and passive factor. Because of these beliefs the teachers are not innovative in their jobs.

Friedman (1980) took managing anxiety and shyness of learners as a part of classroom management. But none of teacher participants pointed to controlling or managing the anxiety of students which indicates that they lack the knowledge of classroom management and its different aspects. The Arabic teachers only considered taciturnity of students and arrangement of materials of textbooks as the components of management. This should affect teacher-student relationships and the consequences might be appeared in motivating the students toward Arabic.

The method of teaching in today's second language classes are differ from past. In one hundred years ago the grammar translation method was hay day, but today the teachers are aware of various methods of teaching such as: cooperative language learning, task based and other socio-

psycho methods of teaching. The participants used GTM and they believe in it, of course most of them didn't know anything about methods of teaching. Along with accepting and using GTM, the evaluation system in high schools was mostly translation and working on Grammar, the teachers believe in the method of assessment and testing, they believe that the testing system is effective. But if it is effective why should the graduated of high schools suffer from lacking of listening and speaking competence in Arabic.

By asking questions about the personality and professional skills of teacher participants in the study; they confessed that they are not ideal teachers and they feel that they should be better educators. They maintained that they can't obey the Islam rules completely, so they could not be real Muslims and teachers. More than half of participants believe in imitating the textbooks rules and drills. Some of them believe that the authors of Arabic textbooks are the end of knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and educational psychology, and the duty of teachers is to perform the books drills and teach textbooks completely.

The interview with teachers lead to asking questions related to nature of teaching which all of them believe in innateness factor or at least innate and practice. None of think of teaching as a learned skill. The consequence of the beliefs might be low amount of creativity of teachers. The definition of teaching for them was some cliché words like art and love, but in reality and in comparison with their answers to other questions, it seems that they don't accepted teaching as art or love. .simultaneously, some of the participants believe in teaching as engineering of human mind and behavior.

The interviewer asked some questions to understand the beliefs of teachers about the sources of teachers' beliefs in high schools. Because the researcher believes that the teachers themselves can better introduce the sources. With having an eye to the point that the teachers are involve in the process of teaching and they can trace the factors that make them to judge, or make decision in atmosphere of the classroom. All the participants believe in the religion as the main source of belief making for teachers and the second source was the government which determines any activity, textbook, content, and even selecting teachers for teaching. Meanwhile some of them believe in family and society as the sources of belief making. Teacher participants emphasized on the role of power in shaping the beliefs and changing of them.

6. Conclusion

Since the above belief map of the Arabic teachers is reflected in the output of high schools graduated, we see that the graduated students cannot speak Arabic and even they can't understand the religious materials easily. According to Motaghizadeh, Parvini, Nikobakht and Rekati(20101) the result of teaching Arabic was a type of wondering of student rather than being speakers of Arabic or at least good readers of Arabic texts. it is recommended to ameliorate the condition of teaching Arabic in Iran, the beliefs of teachers should be changed or modified. So special courses for working on the mind of teachers will be useful.

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