An Ethnographic Study on Beliefs and Attitudes of Some Larkana Teachers of English

Syed Sada Hussain Bukhari[*]   Ajab Ali Lashari[†]   Syed Abid Ali Shah Jilani[‡]

Corresponding Author: Ajab Ali Lashari (Lecturer, Education, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan. Email: ajab.lashari84@gmail.com)

Abstract: *Many specialists agree that beliefs have a powerful impact on teachers' practices. However, it should be taken into account that their attitudes affect their practices as well. This paper is about English language teachers´ attitudes and beliefs. The objective was to share some data from ethnographic research developed with a group of high school English teachers from Larkana. The research data endorsed our hypothesis of the existence of a relationship between belief and attitude, which, to us, until then, was a gap in the studies of Applied Linguistics. Although initially, we had in mind the idea that attitudes could generate beliefs, we verified that attitudes are part of beliefs as well as they are personal, contextual, and incidental, which we explain in this paper. The data were collected through an interview and a questionnaire, which made it possible, based on the teachers' statements, to figure out how beliefs and attitudes operate and converge. That is why a study such as this is relevant since it can contribute to the field so that teachers can understand even better their pedagogical settings.*

Key Words: Beliefs, Attitudes, English, Teachers

Introduction

In the educational setting, various components, which are fundamentally linked with it, are treated unnoticed. Components for example feelings, attitudes and beliefs are not considered from time to time by teachers. An understanding of the components can provide a more appropriate view of the method. In this connection, research on beliefs and attitudes has been conducted around the world (Gabillon, 2012; Barcelos; Kalaja, 2013, Gao, 2014; Connors; Halligan, 2015; Utami, 2016; Anjos, 2018). Several researchers have focused on understanding teachers' practice in the classroom and how they judge their actions in the educational context. This paper presents an ethnographic research with six English teachers from Larkana which highlights the relationship between belief and attitude. Thus, the main purpose of the study was to discover teachers' beliefs and attitudes and how they meet at a point and to what extent they are connected.

To comprehend the relationship, it was important to find both components in the data which participants provided us. In this way, we have a very vivid idea of how they are

---

[*] Assistant Professor of Education, Shaheed Muhtarma Benazir Bhutto Government College of Education, Larkana, Sindh, Pakistan.

[†] Lecturer, Education, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, Pakistan.

[‡] Director (HR), Directorate General of HR & Training, Schools Education & Literacy Department, Government of Sindh, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan.

connected. A study like this one can be beneficial in the sense that it provides basic information regarding how teachers understand their practices and instructional setting where they perform their duties; how they judge and comprehend the setup they are a part of.

For that reason, to understand beliefs and attitudes it is significant to comprehend they are linked, which, basically, may create conceptual confusion we agree with Barcelos (2006) about the fact that beliefs are not separate from knowledge, because it is difficult to differentiate them from other aspects such as knowledge, enthusiasm and so on.

It is significant to state that this study created the possibility to understand how complex the teaching and learning process is where several factors such as beliefs and attitudes work through invisible to those who are the fragments of this setting. The next section briefly deals with some conceptions of beliefs and attitudes in order to understand both.

Literature Review

This study has focused to reflect on English teachers' beliefs and attitudes. This section briefly covers some ideas and viewpoints of both. For a proper understanding, first, I shed light on beliefs and later on attitudes.

In this connection, beliefs have been studied by various experts (Barcelos, 2001; Xu, 2012; Housseni & Purmandnia, 2013) who have attempted to comprehend the complexity of the learning and teaching processes. These experts have shown agreement with the fact that beliefs have a powerful role in the way teachers executed their practices. Therefore, they have researched beliefs so that they can figure them out and aim at getting better results in the classroom.

First, they have created the notions of belief as a starting point. In this context, we will do the same. Barcelos (2006) argues that beliefs are the patterns of thinking, and patterns of understanding reality, which have an influential impact on the teachers' practices.

She considers beliefs as opinions that teachers have about the teaching/learning process. Barcelos (2001) opines that beliefs are personal, circumstantial and incidental. To her, the origin of beliefs is rooted in our experience, in our culture and in public heritage and they are changeable and contradictory.

Borg (2003) observes beliefs from the cognitive viewpoint and applies the term 'teacher cognition' to generate a link to cognitive dimensions about what teachers know believe and ponder which affect professional lives.

In this viewpoint, comprehending the beliefs teachers possess is not constantly an easy job, due to their intricacy. For that reason, investigating teachers' beliefs regarding learning and teaching learning has been a demanding task (Barcelos, Kalaja, 2013). A possible way to understand them is to identify their origins. Xu (2012) states that beliefs are strictly linked with teachers' values and world viewpoints and understanding they have their importance and positions in the world. But how beliefs can articulate themselves in the English Language teaching and learning setting. This understanding represents a fundamental point in the teaching English language (Housseni & Purmandnia, 2013).

Kumaravadivelu (2012) states that beliefs extremely influence the way teachers teach. To him, beliefs operate as a kind of controller so that teachers describe, choose and arrange information in a systemic way that will be transmitted to the students. However, he argues that there are traces that beliefs are influential to stimulate teachers to take a specific attitude in their regular teaching practices, at the very same time as they know it is not the best way.

Utami (2016) indicates that for teaching the English language, beliefs on how the language should be learned and taught is an important factor which makes teachers engage in different material, strategies and assessment and evaluation. For Xu (2012) teachers hold solid beliefs about the role of education, individuals' academic performance and about what is fair and unfair in the classroom. In this

way, when teachers enter the classroom, don not only act on the basis of knowledge they possess about the subjects. In other words, they do not only teach their students on the basis of the contents; their beliefs enter the scene, even before they come into the classroom. The formation of teaching and learning beliefs goes with teachers even before they are rooted in practical issues.

Utami (2016) what teachers perform in the classroom is governed by what they believe and these beliefs often operate as a filter through which teaching verdicts and decisions are constructed. To this researcher, these beliefs are framed on personal, social, cultural and past experiences.

Anjos (2018) defines "attitude" as an extremely suitable or unsuitable position towards somebody or something. This reasoning was extended and he arrives at the conclusion that 'attitudes' have a solid link with motivation and demotivation to learn any language. The first factors produce the second one which includes other contextual factors. Now, we can understand the idea that, besides these ideas, beliefs might affect our attitude and vice versa.

After clearing these points, we try to detect any kind of relationship between teachers' attitudes and beliefs. Although Borg (2001) defines that beliefs possess evaluative characteristics, no one can miss the idea that attitudes are evaluative in nature, so that no one can confuse the term. Cannors and Halligan (2015) also mention that beliefs are a 'propositional attitude'. This way they define beliefs as attitudes. So, did the researchers confuse the terms? However, in the development of their reflection, they clarify that beliefs can be differentiated from other cognitive processes such as memory, knowledge and attitude. They point out that beliefs do not require to possess evaluative factor which is an important characteristic of the attitude.

After reflection and understanding, we accept that beliefs might be attached to attitude, later an individual might trust in something on the basis of what he judges.

Regarding this statement in teaching learning English language context, this indicates that teachers might believe that appropriate learning can be made strong on the basis of their previous experience and evaluation. However, evaluative formation relating to a premise constitutes beliefs. In this way, beliefs are created socially and historically from an attitude. First, a person assesses something or somebody. Then, he chooses an action whether he takes his judgment as a truth which will control the actions of a person ahead, as a conduct code. As such, according to Connors and Halligan (2015), beliefs are ontological representations of the world that encompass the fundamental convictions that people use and take as true regarding events, causes, and objects.

According to this viewpoint, teachers may develop and maintain a variety of beliefs throughout their professional trajectories, including those about the language they teach, their students, and their teaching methods. We can also agree that teachers' beliefs affect their perceptions of and judgements of the context in which they act if we make the assumption that beliefs are concerned with our perceptions, our ways of seeing and realising the world and its phenomena (Barcelos, 2006), and attitudes, our ways of judging things. (2006) Dutra and Oliveira. In other words, at first glance, it appears that beliefs can also lead to new attitudes rather than just attitudes leading to beliefs.

From this point on, we began debating the factors that might be responsible for attitudes and beliefs because, if we assume that there is a cause-and-effect relationship on both sides, what, in reality, shapes teachers' beliefs and attitudes? This question has been bothering us ever since, and since we were interested in looking into it as well, we have been thinking about how to respond to it later using the information from this research. But first, we provide a brief overview of the study participants, methodology, and data collection tools.

Method

Instruments and Data Collection

The foundation of this research was the ethnographic theory. As a result, it considers the reality that studying culture is required in order to understand beliefs and attitudes. 'Cultural description,' to use the etymological word. In order to examine the data, analysis groups were developed. Since the analysis was constructed in relation to what was known from the current literature on the themes, it is pertinent to mention that this research was grounded in the qualitative paradigm.

Six English instructors from Larkana, Sindh, Pakistan, were subjected to a questionnaire and a free interview in order to collect the data. These educators come from various origins.

Results and Discussion

The following categories of analysis, based on Borg (2002), were developed to evaluate the research's data: A teacher's attitudes and beliefs, language attitudes and beliefs, and instructional attitudes and beliefs are listed in that order. We briefly discuss the connection between belief and attitude before presenting the statistics.

Based on the evidence we have so far, we hypothesize in this viewpoint that beliefs and attitudes may develop in concert and that the analysis of the research questions' responses will reveal the dividing line between them. For instance, if we say, "Learning English is challenging," we are expressing both a belief and an attitude. Because of this, it can frequently be challenging to pinpoint the boundary between the two. Since "difficult" expresses both an evaluative response (attitude) and is a component of a premiss in the previous sentence, it is possible to say on the one hand that attitude and belief can be expressed simultaneously (belief). On the other hand, we are aware that an attitude may, in some cases, come before a belief. For this reason, in part, we disagree with Gardner (1985), who makes a generalization by saying that "attitude" is an evaluative reaction that is developed based on any views a person may have. An attitude may even result from a conviction. This may not always occur, though, as the opposite may also occur. Additionally, we began to see attitude as a component that integrates beliefs, meaning that the former is in the latter.

The information will be disseminated in accordance with the categories stated and discussed at various points during data collection, i.e., from the various tools used: the interview, the questionnaire, and the teachers' diaries. Based on the qualitative supposition, the information that will be given in the following sections was developed. Start with the survey, please.

The Questionnaire Data

Next, we present some findings from this study's evaluation. Based on the previously stated categories, the data are displayed. First, the category "attitudes and ideas about the teacher".

Attitudes and Beliefs About the Teacher

How do you feel about teaching English? was one of the first inquiries we made in an effort to learn more about their views and beliefs. P1 admits that he feels content with his attitude as an English instructor. He claims that the motivation behind this self-evaluation is a desire to emulate his high school English teacher. When it comes to this, we concur with Barcelos (2006).

The researcher notes that beliefs are always rooted in something, like important individuals in our lives. Because of this response, it seems to me that P1's belief that his English teacher "knew everything in English" sparked his desire to become a teacher, and as a result, he feels good about his performance. This is what enables us to conclude that beliefs and attitudes do in fact have a causal relationship. Next, we present P1's response to the following query:

P1: Because I enjoy instructing English and keep that in mind, I feel fulfilled. From adolescence, I wanted to know "everything"

about English like my instructor did because he was so knowledgeable.

P2 considers his work as a teacher to be "difficult" (attitude) and attributes this to the large number of students in each class as well as some students' lack of interest (belief). The relationship between the teacher's attitude and the logistical factors, which enables us to state that these logistical factors influence the development of attitudes, is what we can infer from this.

When P5 admits that he does not have "any kind of support" and that "teachers lack resources," in addition to believing that the material is inappropriate, he appears to feel abandoned and without assistance to carry out his teaching job. This P5 student's attitude supports what Walker et al. (2004) claim about how teachers develop negative attitudes when they lack support to educate and must deal with the difficulties of using the English language.

Another question we used was, "In your opinion, what would be an excellent English teacher profile?" This question was intended to diagnose and understand beliefs and attitudes. The answer to this query automatically elicits an incomplete belief, which prompts judgements. I then show some data along with my conclusions.

For P2, an effective English teacher is one who presents the language to the class in both contextualized and reflective ways; this teacher does not teach the language in a methodical, rigorous manner. However, P3 affirms that the best English teachers are those who work part-time (belief/attitude). What catches my attention, in this case, is the teacher's use of the verb "believe" to begin his assertion, supporting the idea that beliefs are truth constructs that one joins (Garbuio, 2006). Here is P3's response to the question:

P3: In my opinion, a good English instructor should engage students in playful activities like games, dialogues, songs, etc.

Attitudes and Beliefs About Teaching

We then present some information on the second group of attitudes and beliefs towards teaching.

We used the question: How would a good English class look like for you in order to attempt to uncover the information regarding beliefs about teaching?

P1 thinks that an effective English lesson occurs when all students participate, interact, and contribute, which can be done through questions and contributions. P2 thinks that a successful English class occurs when there is noticeable student participation (belief) and when students are engaged (attitude).

A flexible teacher (beliefs/attitude), whose expertise is a sine qua non-condition to activate students' motivation, is necessary for a successful English class, according to P3.

Following these interpretations, it is possible to conclude that P1 and P2 express their opinions on what a successful English class would look like based on the student body, or more specifically, based on the students' responses. The following are their quotes:

P1: When I notice that all of the pupils were actively participating, I declare the class to have been successful. Consequently, participation, questions, and contributions are all necessary components of a successful English class.

P2: When every student participated and showed enthusiasm.

Based on these findings, it is feasible to say with some degree of confidence that the teacher, how they view their students, and the learning contexts and their approaches are among the factors that contribute to beliefs.

Next, we'll discuss my interpretation of the second category, which focuses on attitudes and convictions related to language and language acquisition.

Attitudes and Beliefs About the Language and About Learning Languages

Do you think it's possible to acquire English in school, we also asked them.

P1**:** holds the belief of the impossibility to learn English at high school. He argues that, though he believes learners will learn the linguistic structures, they will need an extra course, indeed, to learn the language. Thus, it is possible to state that P1 ascribes a discredited attitude to basic education, concerning the learning of English, putting in check his own professional performance, since he works in this educational sphere. Next is the P1's statement about this:

P1: No. I think students will acquire the linguistic and grammatical structures in their classrooms as a whole. However, I think that conversation classes will be more useful for learning a new language.

P2: shares P1's beliefs and outlook because he asserts that adjustments are required for high school English instruction. P3 thinks this is a chance. However, he claims that only the fundamentals of the language will be taught, indicating that he does not think English can be taught at the high school level in its entirety. And P6 thinks it's possible to learn English in high school (belief), but he thinks it will be challenging because, in his opinion, it requires discipline and commitment from both the instructor and the student.

In addition, we questioned them about the biggest issue preventing English language teaching and learning in the locations where they were employed.

P1 thinks that the hardest part of acquiring a language is first coming into contact with it, which is what he thinks makes the process challenging (attitude). However, he claims that as students become more familiar with the language, this issue gradually goes away.

According to P2, P3, and P5, the biggest issue is the lack of appropriate teaching tools, including contextualised and technological ones (belief). P4, an English teacher in rural areas, agrees that the dearth of teaching materials and technological resources is the greatest obstacle to learning consolidation because they are difficult to access there due to the distance from the centre (attitude).

Later, we queried: How do you believe your students could learn more effectively?

According to P4, engaging in lessons with a positive attitude helps pupils learn more effectively (belief). P1 expresses a similar viewpoint when he claims that playful activities like songs and games help his pupils learn more effectively (belief). P1's belief appears to be quite simplistic and restricts learning activities and songs. Although this point of view is true in many situations, it is important to realise that the teaching and learning process involves much more than just passing moments of distraction. It also involves moments of reflection, action, and consciousness.

The data conversation based on the questionnaire is now complete, and we move on to share some information from the interview.

The Interview

One research tool that better enables the researcher to understand a social fact is the interview. The spontaneity with which research participants answer the questions, in some way, to some degree unexpected, is one factor that contributes to the data's dependability. Interviews, according to Barcelos (2006), are the main methods for examining ideas because they enable clarification and prevent ambiguities.

Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs

Another question was: How do you feel when your pupils fail? This one was intended to elicit responses from category one.

P2 admits to feeling regretful when his students perform poorly on the English language proficiency test. He believes that this should be viewed from various angles in order to determine whether the student or P2 is to blame for the student's failure. Next, we present his assertion:

P2: I feel a little depressed and assess myself, but mostly through reflection. If the teacher was at fault, where was the fault? Because I have a lot of students who are like this, I can sometimes tell which students have

a deficiency of base or literacy and which ones don't have a proper understanding of the text because of this deficiency of base. Since I can tell from a student's behaviour that he didn't follow the class or perform well, I am able to pinpoint that student. However, when I examine other students, I see that some of them have the capacity for intelligence and have learned the material before there was a failure. Therefore, this evaluation is done from a variety of angles to determine what went wrong.

Additionally, we questioned them on what area they felt they needed to develop.

P2 acknowledges that his approach needs to be strengthened. His conviction is supported by the fact that he has been a grammar-focused English teacher for more than twenty years. The following is his statement:

P2: I need to change my methods because they haven't changed in years. I've been teaching English for a little over 20 years with a strong emphasis on grammar, and I'm already readapting myself to get a change by adhering to Clill's tenets.

Attitudes and Beliefs About Teaching

What do you think about your classes? is a question we posed to them in an effort to elicit responses that fit this category of attitudes and views about teaching.

According to P5, his classes are either intriguing or quite interesting. Though it was impossible to confirm the cause, he nevertheless believes that other courses need to be improved. Next is P5's response:

P5: I group my classes into, uh, categories. I can't generalise about all of them, but I rate some as intriguing, some as quite interesting, and others as needing improvement.

Attitudes and Beliefs About Language and Learning Languages

If they thought it was possible to acquire English in high school, we asked them. P1 believes that attending a regular school is only a temporary incentive to learn English. He attributes language classes with the

responsibility of guiding students towards mastery of oral expression and considers them to be the best setting for this, which supports his attitude towards this learning environment in contrast to a regular school.

Since P1 thinks language classes are the best place to learn a language, it appears to us that he somehow does not value his own performance as an English teacher:

P1: I think that classes are the best setting for learning the language because they focus more on conversation, whereas I think that education is just a means to an end for them to feel motivated.

The data analysis is now complete, and we move on to share our concluding thoughts.

Conclusion

Studying beliefs has been a very helpful practice in illuminating instructors' classroom behaviour, specifically the reasons behind their actions. Studying attitudes has also been very instructive because it has led to thoughts that suggest improved approaches to comprehending the educational environment. Studying ideas and attitudes simultaneously is much more difficult, though.

As a result, we developed categories of analysis based on Borg (2002) in order to put our research into reality. The instructors' statements contained these categories, which supported our theory that there is a connection between belief and attitude.

Without outlining our personal worldview, we could not complete this essay. Based on this study, we draw the conclusion that since beliefs are in an abstract plane, they are actually ways of perceiving the people and events that surround us cognitively. However, they come into being through our behaviour, mindset, and speech. That is to say since beliefs result from an evaluative response, evaluative reactions are fundamental to beliefs. We conclude by stating that teachers' practises are influenced by their beliefs and attitudes when they assess what they do, how they do it, and the environment in which they work. As a result, these elements are incidental and contextual.

References

Allport, G. (1968). The historical background of modern social psychology. *Cambridge University Press*. https://ci.nii.ac.jp/naid/10010860919

Alonso, T. & Fogaça, F. C. (2007). Crenças sobre o ensino de inglês na prática de ensino. In: Gimenez, T. (Org.).

Tecendo as manhãs: pesquisa participativa e formação de professores de inglês. Londrina: UEL, p. 23-40.

Anjos, F. A. (2018). "Passei o semestre todo estudando o verbo to be": Atitudes, (des)motivação e orientação para aprender inglês de alguns bacharelandos da UFRB. PhD Thesis. 254 f. Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA). Salvador.

Barcelos, A. M. F. (2001). Metodologia de pesquisa das crenças sobre aprendizagem de línguas: estado da arte. *RevistaBrasileira De Linguística Aplicada*, *1*(1), 71–92. https://doi.org/10.1590/s1984-63982001000100005

Jasnievski, C. C. (2012). Crenças e ensino de línguas: foco no professor, no aluno e na formação de professores. *Revista NUPEM*, *2*(3), 232–242. https://doi.org/10.33871/nupem.v2i3.51

Barcelos, A. M. F., & Kalaja, P. (2012). Beliefs in Second Language Acquisition: Learner. *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0082

Barcelos, A. R. G. (2015). Unveiling the relationship between language learning beliefs, emotions, and identities. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, *5*(2), 301–325. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2015.5.2.6

Bernat, E., & Gvozdenko, I. (2005). Beliefs about Language Learning: Current Knowledge, Pedagogical Implications, and New Research Directions. *TESL-EJ*, *9*(1). http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1065832.pdf

Borg, M. (2001). Teachers' beliefs. *ELT Journal*, *55*(2), 186–188. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/55.2.186

Borg, M. (2002). *Learning to teach : CELTA trainees' beliefs, experiences and reflections.* https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/1009/

Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, *36*(2), 81–109. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444803001903

Connors, M. H., & Halligan, P. W. (2015). A cognitive account of belief: a tentative road map. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *5*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01588

Bemfica, S. (2016). PRÁTICA REFLEXIVA: TENSÕES INSTRUCIONAIS VIVENCIADAS PELO PROFESSOR DE LÍNGUA INGLESA. *Cefetop*.

Gabillon, Z. (2012). Revisiting Foreign Language Teacher Beliefs. *Frontiers of Language and Teaching*, *3*, 190–203. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Zehra_Gabillon/publication/259803382_Revisiting_Foreign_Language_Teacher_Beliefs/links/00b4952df4e4939442000000.pdf

Gao, Y. (2014). Language Teacher Beliefs and Practices: A Historical Review. *ResearchGate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269634374_Language_Teacher_Beliefs_and_Practices_A_Historical_Review

Garbuio, L. M. (2006). Crenças sobre a língua que ensino: foco na competência implícita do professor de língua estrangeira. In A. M. Barcelos and M. H. Vieira Abrahão, Crenças e ensino de línguas – foco no professor, no aluno e na formação de professores. São Paulo: Pontes, p. 87-104.

Gardner, R. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning : the role of attitudes and motivation.* https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA00118070

Hosseini, S. B., & Pourmandnia, D. (2013). LANGUAGE LEARNERS' ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS: BRIEF REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE AND FRAMEWORKS. *International Journal on New Trends and Education and Their Implications*, *4*(4), 63–74. http://ijonte.org/FileUpload/ks63207/File/06a.hosseini.pdf

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). Language Teacher Education for a Global Society. In *Routledge eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203832530

McKenzie, R. L. (2010). The Social Psychology of English as a Global Language. In *Springer eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8566-5

Reis, S. (2012). Perspectivas cognitivas na pesquisa sobre aprender a ensinar (leitura em inglês como língua estrangeira) In K. Silva, F. G. Daniel, S. M. Kanero-Marques, and A. C. B. Salomão (Orgs.). A formação de 62 dos Anjos et al. professores de línguas: novos olhares. Campinas, SP: Pontes, Vol. 2, p.107-161.

Utami, D. D. (2016). THE EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND THEIR TEACHING PRACTICES. *Okara: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra*. https://doi.org/10.19105/ojbs.v10i2.974

Walker, A. , Shaferd., J. , & Liams M. (2004). "Not in my classroom": Teacher attitudes towards English language learners in the mainstream classroom. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice, 2*(1) 130-131.

Xu, L. (2012). The Role of Teachers' Beliefs in the Language teaching-learning Process. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2*(7) 1397-1402. https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.7.1397-1402