

INTERPLAY BETWEEN TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND THEIR PRACTICES: A STUDY OF THE GOVT. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between English language teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices about teaching of English in the government secondary schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study undertakes the null hypothesis: "There is no relationship between Govt. English language teachers' beliefs and their practices about teaching of English at secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa." English language teachers who teach English as a subject to secondary classes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, constituted the population of the study. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a large province with 25 districts (at the time of the study) and it was not easy to collect data from each district therefore, the province as a whole, was divided into three main regions; the Northern, the Central and the Southern and one district was chosen for the collection of data from the aforementioned regions. In total, data was collected from 120 Govt. secondary teachers (male) 40 each from one district, by employing multi-stage cluster stratified sampling technique. Questionnaire was used as the only tool for data collection. The data was interpreted through Gamma coefficient correlation. The results show that although teachers had strong beliefs about teaching of English; yet, their beliefs often did not correspond to their actual classroom practices.

Key words

English language teachers, Secondary education, Govt. sector, Teachers' beliefs, Teachers' practices

1. Introduction

In modern perspective, English language is thought of as an infallible means of the modern worlds' progress. According to Paik¹

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English language has been playing a very prominent role in boosting and aggravating the World economy. Recently, the Government of Pakistan in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular, has diverted all her intent towards sorting out simple means in order to get mastery in the use and application of English as a language, for teachers as well as students. Greater amount of work is done in this regard however; there are schools that still portray an appalling look of both teachers' and learners' improvement in the subject of English. The vision and standard that the government has anticipated is yet to be attained. In more simple words, the gap between document and reality is still to be bridged because the overall performance and results of most of the secondary schools at both public and private level in the context of English, is below average.

Teachers' beliefs play a very imperative role in the process of teaching. Obviously, teachers' beliefs do reflect the instructional designs they exhibit inside the classroom. Most of the things that give beauty and rhythm to teaching learning process might be shaped and reshaped, taking into account the particular or unique beliefs that teachers hold. Such personal beliefs of teachers determine the effectiveness of their teaching about how and what to teach. In addition, teachers' personal and professional beliefs influence, verify and establish their attitude and actions to a greater extent.^{2,3}

2. Literature Review

It is an understood fact that teachers' beliefs have a vigorous impact on their classroom practices and are directly related to students' performance. Borg⁴ says that beliefs, to a greater extent, help and facilitate teachers by making them realize how to perceive, speculate and view their personal teaching, skills, knowledge, thinking, observation and belief patterns which directly pave their way for devising their own sound academic decisions. Many research experts conclude and agree that teachers' academic beliefs have indissoluble associations with their ideas and practices. In general, teachers' beliefs have an enormous influence on changing, modifying and reshaping their classroom practices and learners' performance.

According to Schwitzgebel⁵ beliefs are the intellectual depiction of things that occur and develop inside human mind, in a positive way. Beliefs and practices are interlinked, interwoven and interconnected. The interplay between "beliefs" and "practices" further reinforce the idea that beliefs are what teachers hypothesize and contemplate in their minds while practice has been the actual gist and essence of the whole mechanism that highly affect and boost up the classroom circumstances. In the same way a well-built correlation between

teachers' own beliefs concerning the nature of language, its learning and the intended performance of the learners, was found in the study of Butt.⁶ The study concluded that beliefs of teachers are directly proportional to the performance of students. It indicates that if the beliefs of the teachers regarding language and its learning are strong, the academic performance of the students will also be higher or vice versa.

Borg⁷ concludes that what people actually think and know, constitute the very nature of beliefs. Since beliefs of a group of diversified people don't match very often, therefore, they act together in a social or professional setting conversely. Teachers in general, exhibit a true display of what their beliefs which ultimately serve to act as a filter that help as a criteria, towards making academic judgments and, in the long run, lead to drawing solid decision.^{8,9}

Most of the time, the instructional objectives remain jumbled and are not clearly stated for students having diverse academic domains in Pakistan. In a report, Ahmad and Khan¹⁰ conclude that ideas, concepts and events that build and sharpen the creativity of learners are not considered and incorporated during the curriculum design.

Schwitzgebel¹¹ declares beliefs as the mental but positive representation of something, an assumed truth, or a type of disposition. Clandin in and Connelly¹² show a point of disagreement in deciding to ensure that beliefs emerge from where the knowledge ends. They conclude that most of the fabrication confers the same idea although it does not match in size and shape. However; teachers' beliefs do work and help in filtering and sifting the latest information intuitively Pajares,¹³ and can modify and structure teachers' knowledge in language teaching.¹⁴ Correspondingly, Kagan¹⁵ and Richardson conclude that teachers' beliefs can motivate, reinforce and strengthen their attitude in classrooms rather than distressing their overall pre-service teaching.

In the findings and conclusions of a study by Ballard¹⁶, the researcher sorts out somehow a valid reason for the poor communicative competency on the part of non-native students, that it is actually the distorted academic structure that has debilitated to a greater extent, and still is the source of impeding the linguistic progression of the non-native learners. Butt¹⁷ in their study came across the existing of a strong association between teachers' beliefs regarding the nature of language, its learning and its relationship to learners' overall dependability. They concluded that teachers' beliefs are directly proportional to the performance of learners. On the other hand, contextual state of affairs or certain personal factors might affect the overall performance of teachers. Cain¹⁸ concludes that it is not essential

that teachers should always replicate some relationship between beliefs and practices in all cases. His findings and conclusions suggest clear differences in teachers' beliefs and their practices.

Teachers' beliefs and its nature are not fixed; they change with the passage of time. A study by Nishino ¹⁹ sums up that due to individual unique nature or the needs and demands of the learners, teachers' beliefs change and alter at times about teaching learning process. According to Caner ²⁰ language teachers who involve students in teaching-learning process and strive hard to make the environment conducive to learning, receive a higher level of satisfaction and appreciation from their students. Teachers' and students' beliefs have a very strong association with successful teaching learning process. However; it is also noted that beliefs also change from time to time and this change is subject to the experience of the teachers as the experience increases their beliefs also change. Therefore, it is evident that teachers' beliefs do play a noteworthy role in transforming learners' beliefs. ²¹

Andrews²² illustrates that teaching is something quite complicated, tricky and tough to deal with, it needs hard mental labour and much psychological effort to impart, inculcate and propagate abstract ideas and acquire the skill to infuse the learners with excellence and style in their instruction. The literature review in general, suggests about the existence of a very strong connection between teachers' beliefs and their practices; however, things might go against as it is not necessary that this connection should always be found obvious in the actual classroom setting. It is very often, affected by the prevailing tradition, culture, related academic disparity, and the overall time frame. Teachers need to consider and manage these factors intelligibly, reasonably and without any delay in case they aim to execute their beliefs into actual practices.

In the situation of Pakistan, chiefly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the efforts of the govt. are appreciable in focusing to attach reasonable significance to the learning of English as a language. Likewise, it should be considered quite imperative at secondary level that due weightage should be given to the learning of English as a language. The school time-table plainly discloses the scope and preference towards English language learning even from the very beginning. However; there are certain contextual factors that sometimes contribute to and occasionally slow down teachers' fast growing trend for learning, adopting, and using English as a language.

Statement of the Problem

Despite much consideration, secondary level students are not producing the desired result in the area of English language; although studying the subject from the very primary level. There might be an issue with the teachers' methodologies and/or with their classroom practices. It is believed that every teacher holds certain beliefs about his/her teaching and the subject he/she teaches. This study strives to highlight the beliefs that Govt. secondary school teachers of English hold about the English language and how these beliefs are reflected in their classroom practices. There might be a gap between English language teachers' beliefs and practices, which may ultimately affect the level of comprehension of secondary school students in the subject of English and its functional side.

3. Hypothesis of the Study

H_0 There is no relationship between Govt. English language teachers' beliefs and practices about teaching of English at secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

4. Research Methodology

Adeyemi²³ explains that there are typically nonparametric correlations that are applied to two ordinal kinds of variables. English language teachers' beliefs and practices were analyzed quantitatively by employing Gamma coefficient correlation using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in order to obtain a true depiction of data in an objective environment.

5.1 Population and Sample

All the male English language teachers of Govt. and Private secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa constituted the population of the study. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (name of a province in Pakistan) is geographically alienated into three main regions: Northern, Central, and Southern. The names of the districts included in Northern region are Abbotabad, Battagram, Buner, Chitral, Haripur, Lower Kohistan, Upper Kohistan, Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Malakand, Mansehra, Shangla, Swat, and Torghar. The Central region is enclosing the districts of Charsadda, Mardan, Nowshera, Peshawar, and Swabi. Similarly, the Southern region is comprised of the districts like Bannu, Hangu, D.I.Khan, Kohat, Karak, Laki Marwat, and Tank.

Keeping in view, the geographical division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Regions, and districts) multi-stag cluster sampling was used in order to observe an in-depth vicinity of clusters and stratum. Suter²⁴ is of the view that, for the sake research expediency, any

researcher can easily select at least two or more stages randomly. This arrangement is normally interpreted as two-stage or multi-stage random sampling. In the same way, there is another concept in research known as cluster sampling where, as recommended by Johnson and Christensen²⁵, clusters like schools, colleges, universities, households or city blocks are selected rather than individual units like students, teachers, or parents in a random way. Likewise, when the whole population is divided into various exclusive groups known as strata, leading towards the selection of simple random sampling from each stratum, normally called stratified sampling is yet another mode used in research. Such clusters and strata were selected for the sample in order to have in-depth details about the research in hand. One district each was selected from the proposed Northern, Central, and Southern regions. The districts selected were Buner, Peshawar, and Kohat; from each single district, forty secondary schools were selected.

In sample selection, each region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had an equal representation. The districts selected from all the three regions were Buner, Peshawar and Kohat. Furthermore, from each single district, 40 secondary schools with 40 secondary English language teachers were chosen. The overall number of sample included 120 secondary schools and 120 secondary English language teachers.

5.2 Research Instrument and its Construction

A detailed questionnaire for teachers containing part “A” and “B” based on research questions, research objectives and hypotheses of the study was designed in order to explore teachers’ beliefs and their actual classroom practices, and was used as a tool for data collection. Both parts of the questionnaire were divided into 07 categories with 06 questions for each. Thus, the questionnaire contained 84 question items in total, 42 question items from each individual part. The categories in both parts focused on/dealt with language learning, basic language skills, pedagogy, and teaching of grammar, students’ learning, curriculum of English, and learners’ assessment. Inter-consistency among the question items in both the questionnaires was calculated by employing Cronbach Alpha Reliability. The researchers personally visited the selected schools and administered the questionnaire.

5.3 Data Analysis Technique

The data solicited from the questionnaire, was analyzed through descriptive analysis and percentage in order to present and explain a comprehensive preview of data results. In addition, Gamma correlation was also employed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

(SPSS)to find out the correlation between teachers’ beliefs and their practices about teaching of English.

5. Results and Discussion

The results of the data are produced and explained in the following 07 tables. Each table explains one category. The data provided in the tables below exposed that H_0 was accepted as there was found a very little relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices, whereas a greater part of the question items (93%) did not explain a relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices.

6.1 Correlation between Teachers’ Beliefs & Practices about Language and its Learning

| Items | Gamma Value | P Value |
|--|-------------|---------|
| Significance of learning English language | .233 | .423 |
| Following the process of imitation and repetition in language learning | .303 | .235 |
| Motivation towards learning of English as a language | - 1.000 | .040 |
| Creating opportunities for mutual interaction | .533 | .161 |
| Attention given to mastery of vocabulary | .396 | .109 |
| Recommending audios and videos for learning English | .157 | .485 |

The data exposed in Table- 6.1 displays anall-inclusive analysis of the 06 question items under the main category of *Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices about Language and its Learning*. The significance value of teachers’ responses is analyzed on 0.05. A strong correlation between teachers’ beliefs and their practices is found on question item 3 with significance level of .040 out of the 06 questions items which means that on the remaining 05 question items, teachers do not have any conformity on their beliefs and practices. This seems very crucial on the part of English language teachers. As a result, this table noticeably indicates the discrepancy between the teachers’ beliefs and practice about English language teaching and learning.

6.2 Correlation between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Basic Language Skills

| Items | Gamma Value | P Value |
|--|-------------|---------|
| Asking questions to keep the class attentive | .257 | .404 |
| Creating opportunities for improving language skills | .016 | .933 |
| Forcing students to participate in group discussion | -.307 | .037 |
| Attention on promotion of reading comprehension | .370 | .247 |
| Involving students in various writing competitions | .322 | .024 |
| Arranging contests for developing students' creative writing | -.188 | .261 |

The data shown in Table-6.2 displays a detailed analysis of the 06 question items under the main category of *Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Basic Language Skills*. The significance value of teachers' responses is analyzed on 0.05. A strong correlation between teachers' beliefs and their practices is found on question items 3 and 5 with significance level of .037, and .024 respectively out of all the questions which shows that on the remaining 04 question items, teachers lack agreement on their beliefs and practices. As a whole, it suggests incongruity between the teachers' beliefs and practice about English language teaching and learning.

6.3 Correlation between Teachers' Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices

| Items | Gamma Value | P Value |
|---|-------------|---------|
| Using English language in the class | .134 | .441 |
| Teaching students in a communicative way | .122 | .135 |
| Changing of method when students don't understand | .450 | .098 |
| Teaching purely in mother tongue | .380 | .140 |
| Teaching purely in mother tongue | .094 | .583 |
| Focusing on translating the text-book only | .061 | .720 |
| Application of up-to-date and modern methods | | |

The data shown in Table-6.3 centers around the overall analysis of 06 question items under the main category of *Teachers’ pedagogical beliefs and practices*. The significance value of teachers’ responses is analyzed on 0.05. All the 06 questions items in this table do not bring forth any correlation between teachers’ beliefs and practices which signify that there exists a very strong disparity and gap between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practice regarding English language teaching and learning.

6.4 Correlation between Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices about Teaching Grammar

| Items | Gamma Value | P Value |
|---|-------------|---------|
| Using English language in the class | .931 | .001 |
| Explaining grammatical rules properly | .586 | .027 |
| Teaching grammar by involving the whole class | .369 | .326 |
| Appreciating student’s own sentence analysis | .233 | .304 |
| Valuing accuracy in writing | .493 | .000 |
| Satisfaction after teaching tenses, voice and narration | .324 | .158 |

The data presented in Table-6.4 centers around the joint analysis of the 06 question items under the main category of *Teachers’ beliefs and practices about teaching of grammar*. The significance value of teachers’ responses is analyzed on 0.05. A strong relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their practices is therefore; found on question items 1, 2, and 5 with significance level of .001, .027, and .000 respectively while on the remaining 03 question items teachers rigorously require concord on their beliefs and practices. Ultimately, this implies incongruity between English language teachers’ beliefs and their practice about teaching and learning of English.

6.5 Correlation between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Students' Learning

| Items | Gamma Value | P Value |
|---|-------------|---------|
| Providing clear, relevant, easy and precise details in teaching | .016 | .978 |
| Engaging students in activities | .806 | .008 |
| Negotiating tasks and activities before application | .263 | .173 |
| Neglecting student's mistakes | .321 | .082 |
| Feeling sure about student's little understanding | .012 | .938 |
| Imposing tasks and activities on students | .507 | .000 |

The data displayed in Table-6.5 represents the joint analysis of the 06 question items under the main category of *Teachers' beliefs and practices about students' learning*. The significance value of teachers' responses is analyzed on 0.05. A strong correlation between teachers' beliefs and their practices is found in question items 2 and 6 with significance level of .008, and .000 respectively out of all the questions items. This demonstrates that on the remaining 04 questions items there is no agreement of teachers with respect to their beliefs and practices which once again proposes a severe disagreement between the teachers' beliefs and practice about English language teaching and learning.

6.6 Correlation between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Curriculum of English

| Items | Gamma Value | P Value |
|--|-------------|---------|
| Declaring English course as incompatible with learner's mind and needs | .470 | .000 |
| Change in curriculum affects student's learning | .435 | .000 |
| Neglecting basic language skills while designing curriculum | .210 | .153 |
| Focusing on the in-time completion of course | .290 | .156 |
| Focusing on the in-time completion of course | .268 | .179 |
| Change in curriculum affects your learning and performance | -.008 | .948 |

The data shown in Table-6.6 shows the joint analysis of the 06 question items under the main category of *Teachers' beliefs and*

practices about curriculum of English. The significance value of teachers’ responses is analyzed on 0.05. A strong correlation between teachers’ beliefs and their practices is found on question items 1 and 2 with significance level of .000, and .000 respectively out of the 06 questions items which confirms that on the remaining 04 questions items teachers are short of agreement with reference to their beliefs and practices. As a result, this exhibits the oddity and incongruity between the teachers’ beliefs and practice about English language teaching and learning.

6.7 Correlation between Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices about Learners’ Assessment

| Items | Gamma Value | P Value |
|---|-------------|---------|
| Easily noticing student’s lack of vocabulary | .221 | .638 |
| Follow-up of the assigned work | -.190 | .259 |
| Evaluating learner’s pronunciation and intonation | .239 | .326 |
| Testing Students and vocabulary | -.314 | .026 |
| Not encouraging students due to lack of time | .253 | .088 |
| Analyzing student’s writing | .116 | .648 |

The data displayed in Table-6.7 presents a comprehensive analysis of the 06 question items under the main category of *Teachers’ beliefs and practices about learners’ assessment*. The significance value of teachers’ responses is analyzed on 0.05. A strong correlation between teachers’ beliefs and their practices is therefore; found on question items 4 with significance level of .026 out of the 06 questions items which elicits that on the rest of the 05 question items teachers do have a strong disagreement on their beliefs and practices. This furthermore, advocates a variance and mismatch between the teachers’ beliefs and practice about English language teaching and learning.

6. Findings of the Study

1. The relationship between teacher beliefs and practice about language and its learning was found insignificant having the *p* value above 0.05.
2. A strong correlation was found regarding teachers’ arranging writing competition and involving students in group discussion with the *p* value .024.
3. Teachers found valuing accuracy high in students’ writing with a strong significance level of .000.

4. Teachers also found imposing activities and various tasks on the students with a significant correlation value of .000.
5. Teachers' beliefs and practices revealed a quite depressing depiction as their beliefs and practices did not correlate with each other in most of the statements having the p value above 0.05.
6. A small number of 11 question items out of the total 42, presented correlation between teachers' beliefs and practices by having p value below .05.
7. Teachers of Govt. sector are mostly deficient in their classroom practices regarding their claims and the beliefs they hold about English language.

7. Conclusions

It is concluded on the basis of the findings that teachers' beliefs and practices hold a strong connection about students' learning and absence of one can create lack of English language proficiency among the students. The results of this study revealed that although teachers held the stated 07 beliefs about English language teaching at secondary level however, their classroom practices did not relate to their obtained beliefs. This gap between their beliefs and practices ultimately resulted into non-proficiency of English language skills among the secondary level students of Peshawar, Buner and Kohat districts. Based on the results, it is also concluded that the null hypothesis of the study is accepted.

8. Recommendations

'What teachers say' and 'what they do' has been the beauty of education process since long. The entire edifice of education is laid on the foundation of equal blend of teachers' beliefs and their practices. Wilson²⁶ describes the sphere of teachers' beliefs as 'the secret garden of teacher education'. After thoroughly exploring and then analyzing the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices, the following remedial measures are recommended:

1. English language learning may be made easier and comprehensible for teachers by infusing and incorporating localized text and context in the textbooks of English as the existing textbooks are the creation of a small representation of teachers and/or experts.
2. In theory, almost all teachers have acknowledged the significance of basic language skills by calling it four pillars of the edifice of language learning; however, in practice teachers

neglected its utility. They confined themselves only to text-book reading and writing the meanings of difficult words on writing board which in turn caused the linguistic retardation on the part of students. It is therefore, recommended that teachers ensure the application of all four language skills with greater emphasis on listening and speaking in their classroom practices.

3. Students may be made independent in the field of learning. Govt. may arrange frequent seminars and conferences that should focus on motivating learners to develop the habit of self-learning because most of the material is uploaded on internet that help in broadening the understanding of students to a greater extent.
4. Teachers may arrange a separate class for verbal and non-verbal interaction and exchange of ideas with students on weekly basis.

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