

Impact of Teacher Training Course on Iranian EFL Teachers' Beliefs

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Abstract

Beliefs are an important aspect of any learning program as they affect the way teachers and students define their roles, and the way they approach their duties and responsibilities. Besides, they highly affect teachers' practices, methods, and lesson plans. The importance of beliefs inspired the present researchers to evaluate and compare EFL teachers' beliefs before and after a teacher training course (TTC) at language institutes in Isfahan to see if teacher training program influence the enrolled teachers' beliefs about different aspects of a learning situation. To this purpose, a modified version of Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was administered to a total of 110 Iranian EFL teachers in Isfahan. The teachers came from different majors (TEFL, translation, English literature, and other non-English majors), and were further divided into two groups: those who had participated in at least a TTC, and those who had no experience of attending a TTC. The BALLI scores of the teachers were then classified and analyzed by a *t* test and an ANOVA. The results revealed that beliefs about language learning did not significantly change in the wake of attending a TTC, and that no significant difference was observed as far as the participants' field of study was concerned.

Keywords: Teacher Training Course, teacher beliefs, beliefs about language learning, field of study

Introduction

In educational research, learners' beliefs about foreign language learning have been considered important because they are regarded as fundamental to learners' progress (cited in Sabry Daif-Allah, 2012). The beliefs teachers have are strongly influential in their approach to teaching and learning and the way they act in class (Debreli, 2012). In the context of language teacher education, beliefs are seen to be a key element in teacher training and have become an important focus for research (Borg, 2011). There has been surprisingly little research into the extent to which teacher education, particularly in in-service contexts, does actually impact in some way on the beliefs of participating teachers (Borg, 2011). That is why the current research study was designed to unearth the putative impacts of a teacher training course on different aspects of EFL teachers' beliefs.

Review of literature

According to Borg (2001), "belief is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior" (as cited in Stergiopoulou, 2012). As the studies on student teachers' beliefs indicate, student teachers carry with them some strong ideas and beliefs about education influencing the way they process the input in their program (Pajares, 1992). It is believed that student teachers use their previous

educational experiences to interpret the input provided in their teacher education program (Kagan, 1992). Research has shown that these beliefs are quite stable, strongly held, and resistant to change (Kagan, 1992). Findings of research on change in student teachers' beliefs are contradictory. Both change and stability was reported in teacher students' beliefs during their teaching training program by Nettle (1996). He confirmed these findings in his study (Nettle, 1998) in which the first year students' beliefs were analyzed after the practicum (Ozem, 2012). Findings of so many research studies indicated stability in teacher students' beliefs after graduation (Peacock, 2001; Powell, 1992; Wubbls, 1992). Brown and McGannon (1998) and Johnson (1994) indicate hardly any development/change in pre-service teacher students' beliefs throughout their training (Debreli, 2012). Other studies indicate that the development or changes in beliefs are very limited. According to their findings these programs are not influential enough to change pre-service teachers' beliefs (Kunt & Ozdemir, 2010; Mattheodakis, 2007; Peacock, 2001). On the other hand, studies of Bramald, Hardman, & Leat (1995), Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000), and Nettle (1998) have shown that pre-service teachers' beliefs could develop/change throughout their training programs (as cited in Debreli, 2012). Borg (2011), in a qualitative longitudinal study, examined the impact of eight-week in-service teacher education program in UK on the beliefs of six English language teachers. The findings indicate considerable, if variable, impact on the teachers' beliefs. Since previous studies yielded mixed results regarding the effectiveness of teacher training courses on L2 teachers' beliefs, the present study was an attempt to shed more light on the issue under question.

Methodology

Participants

In this research, 110 Iranian male and female teachers of English as a foreign language who were graduates of 4 different academic majors including TEFL, translation, English literature and, majors different from English were selected based on convenience and purposive sampling. The researchers divided 110 participants into two groups: group 1 consisted of 60 student teachers, who were applying for a teaching job and teaching training program in Gooyesh Language Institute in Isfahan; they had never passed any kind of TTC. Group 2 was composed of 50 teachers of nine different institutes in Isfahan with the teaching experience of less than 5 years, who had passed a course of TTC at least once. Teachers in the current study were aged from 22 to 32, and their participation was voluntary.

Data Collection Instrument

The original BALLI (see Appendix A) consists of 34 Likert-scale items in five different categories. The modified version of BALLI used in the current study was adapted from a doctoral dissertation in Thailand (Vibulphol, 2000). The modified questionnaire consisted of 41 items, 34 original items and 6 new items, with one original item being split into two items, and was divided into two sections (see Appendix B). In section 1, there were 39 Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*), and in section 2, there were two multiple-choice items. The modified questionnaire was revalidated to see if the added items were just suitable for English language learning context in Iran. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. Obtained scores showed reliability of 0.78 for the questionnaire.

Procedure

For gathering the relevant data, first, the questionnaire was once administered to group 1 who were prospective EFL teachers with no experience of taking part in teacher training

BALLI	Equal Variance Assumed	.009	.923	1.30	108	.196	2.59	1.99	-1.36	6.55
	Equal Variance not Assumed			1.29	101.46	.199	2.59	2.00	-1.39	6.58

According to Table 2, there was not a significant difference in BALLI scores for the pre-TTC group ($M = 147.61$, $SD = 10.08$) and post-TTC group ($M = 145.02$, $SD = 10.82$), $t(108) = 1.30$, $p = .196$ (two-tailed). This was so because the p value was greater than the specified level of significance ($.196 > .05$). If the p value were less than the level of significance, the conclusion would be that the two groups were significantly different in terms of their beliefs about language learning. The results of the preceding t test are also graphically shown in Figure 1.

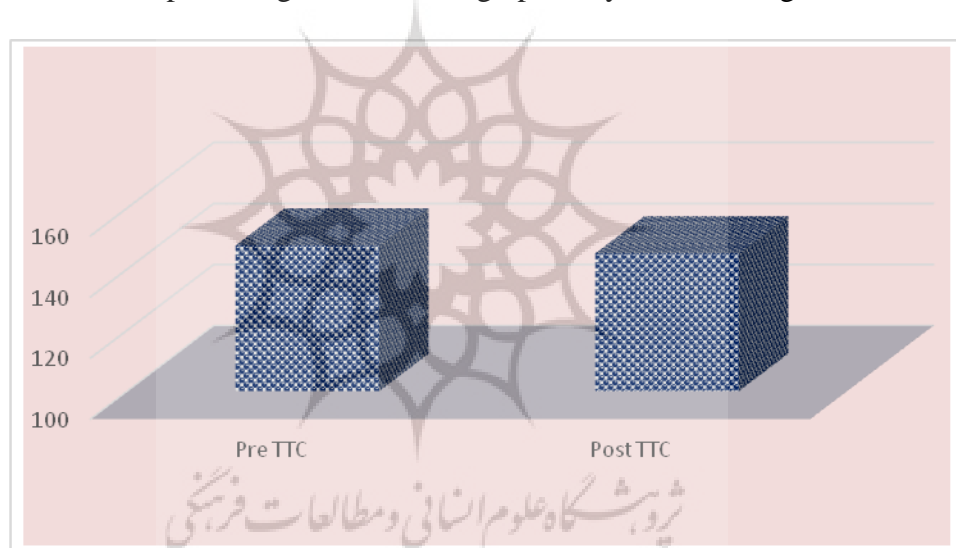


Figure 1. The Mean Scores of the Pre-TTC and Post-TTC Groups on BALLI

As it could be seen in Figure 1, the difference between the pre-TTC and post-TTC groups on BALLI was very small.

A second aim of the current study was to find out whether teachers of different academic majors had similar beliefs about English language learning. Since there were teachers from four different groups (TEFL, translation, literature, and other non-language majors) in the sample, one-way between-groups ANOVA was used to help the researchers achieve this purpose. Tables 3 and 4 show the results of this analysis.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the BALLI Scores of Student Teachers from TEFL, Translation, Literature, and Other Academic Majors

	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>Std.</i> Deviation	<i>Std.</i> Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimu m	Maximu m
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
TEFL	19	148.15	10.56	2.42	143.06	153.24	131.00	176.00
Translation	10	145.80	12.83	4.05	136.62	154.97	130.00	163.00
Literature	5	142.40	6.22	2.78	134.66	150.13	135.00	150.00
Others	26	148.92	9.25	1.81	145.18	152.66	134.00	167.00
Total	60	147.61	10.08	1.30	145.01	150.22	130.00	176.00

The mean scores of different groups of teachers could be seen in Table 3: The highest mean score belonged to other majors ($M = 148.92$), followed by the mean scores of TEFL ($M = 148.15$), translation ($M = 145.80$), and literature ($M = 142.40$). Table 4 shows whether the differences among these mean scores were statistically significant or not.

Table 4. Results of One-Way ANOVA for Comparing the BALLI Scores of Student Teachers from TEFL, Translation, Literature, and Other Academic Majors

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	14.12	3	4.70	1.62	.19
Within Groups	161.81	56	2.88		
Total	175.93	59			

As is shown in Table 4, there was not a statistically significant difference in the BALLI scores for TEFL majors ($M = 148.15$, $SD = 10.56$), translation majors ($M = 145.80$, $SD = 12.83$), literature majors ($M = 142.40$, $SD = 6.22$), and other majors ($M = 148.92$, $SD = 9.25$) since the p value under the *Sig.* column was greater than the specified level of significance (i.e. $.19 > .05$), the conclusion being that the student teachers with different academic majors did not significantly differ in terms of their beliefs toward language learning. This is also evident in the bar chart below.



Figure 2. The Mean Scores of the TEFL, Translation, Literature, and Other Majors Groups on the BALLI

This bar chart shows that the differences among the four teacher groups on the BALLI were not considerable.

Discussion and conclusion

One purpose of this study was to find out the impact of teacher training courses on Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about English language learning. Toward this end, an independent-samples *t* test was run to compare the beliefs of EFL teachers with and without the experience of a TTC. Moreover, to find out the impact of another factor, i.e. university major, on EFL teachers' beliefs about English language learning, a one-way ANOVA was used. The results of the study showed that the teachers' beliefs did not change significantly after participating in a TTC. Results of this study support those of Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000), Clarke (2008), MacDonald et al. (2001), Mattheoudakis (2007), Busch (2010), and Borg (2011), who provide no evidence of change in student teachers' beliefs during language teacher education. As Borg (2011) explains, if impact implies a deep and radical change in beliefs, then we would conclude that Delta (an intensive eight week in-service teacher education program in the UK) did not have a significant impact on teachers' beliefs; however, if we interpret the impact more broadly to encompass a range of developmental processes, then the impact of the program on teachers' beliefs, though variable, was considerable. Overall, the results of this study add evidence for Borg's contention that a TTC course falls short of engendering a radical change in beliefs of language teachers.

Regarding the effect of academic major, the findings showed that academic field of study had no significant impact on teachers' beliefs about language learning. Teachers from the four major groups showed no significant difference in their answers to the BALLI. The results of this study are in line with Altan's (2006), who found that there was similarity of beliefs among pre-service teachers in five major areas.

This study focused on the impact of TTC and academic major of Iranian EFL teachers. Future studies may opt for examining the role of other factors (e.g. gender, academic degree, teaching experience, etc.) on the beliefs EFL teachers hold towards language learning.

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Appendix A

Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), by Horwitz (1987)

All the items in the survey uses rating scales, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), except items 4 and 15. There are five categories of beliefs about language learning that the inventory was designed to examine.

I. Foreign language aptitude

1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.
6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages
10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
11. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.
16. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.
19. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.
30. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.
33. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.

II. The difficulty of language learning

3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.
4. English is:
 - a) A very difficult language
 - b) A difficult language
 - c) A language of medium difficulty
 - d) an easy language
 - e) A very easy language
5. I believe that I will learn to speak English very well.
15. If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well?
 - a) Less than a year
 - b) 1-2 years
 - c) 3-5 years
 - d) 5-10 years
 - e) You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day
25. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language
34. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.

III. The nature of language learning

8. It is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English.
12. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.
17. the most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.
23. the most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.
27. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.
28. the most important part of learning English is learning how to translate from my native language.

IV. Learning and communication strategies

7. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.
13. I enjoy practicing English with the Americans I meet.
14. Its O.K. to guess if you don't know a word in English.
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.
21. I feel timid speaking English with other people.

22. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.

26. It is important to practice with cassettes or tapes.

V. Motivations

20. People in my country feel that it is important to speak English.

24. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know Americans better.

29. If I learn English very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.

31. I want to learn to speak English well.

32. I would like to have American friends

Appendix B

Modified Version of BALLI (Vibulphol, 2004)

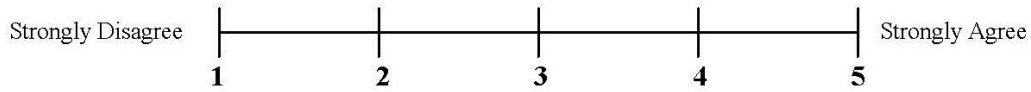
English Translation of the Modified Version of BALLI (Final Version)

Part I

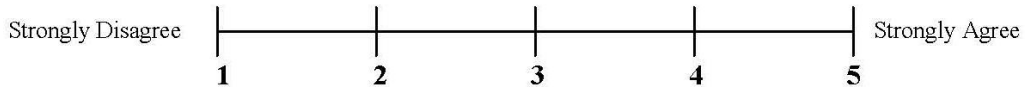
Direction: The statements below are beliefs that some people have about learning a foreign language, English in particular. After reading each statement, mark “✓” under the column (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) which indicates your opinion about the statement. The number on the top of each column means the following:

Strongly Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Strongly Agree

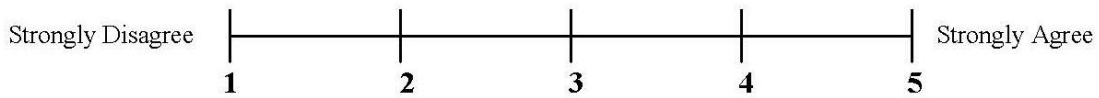
Statements	Opinion				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.					
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages such as English.					
3. Thai people are good at learning foreign languages.					
4. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.					
5. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.					
6. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.					
7. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.					



Statements	Opinion				
	1	2	3	4	5
8. People who speak more than one language are intelligent.					
9. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.					
10. Some languages are easier to learn than others.					
11. I believe that I will learn to speak English well.					
12. In learning English, it is easier to speak than to understand what people say.					
13. In learning English, reading is easier than speaking and listening.					
14. In learning English, writing is easier than speaking and listening.					
15. It is difficult for Thai people to learn English because of the difference in the alphabet system.					
16. It is necessary to know the customs, the cultures, and the ways of life of English-speaking people (such as the British, Americans, or Australians) in order to speak English correctly and appropriately in a particular context.					
17. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country such as England, the United States, or Australia.					



Statements	Opinion				
	1	2	3	4	5
18. Learning vocabulary words is an important part of learning English.					
19. Learning the grammar is an important part of learning English.					
20. Learning how to translate from Thai is an important part of learning English.					
21. Learning English is different from learning other academic subjects.					
22. Learning English involves a lot of memorization.					
23. It is important to speak English with a correct pronunciation.					
24. We shouldn't say anything in English until we can say it correctly.					
25. I enjoy practicing English with the foreigners I meet.					
26. It's O.K. to guess if we don't know a word in English.					
27. In learning English, it is important to practice a lot.					
28. I feel timid speaking English with other people.					
29. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.					
30. In learning English, it is important to practice with cassettes or tapes.					



Statements	Opinion				
	1	2	3	4	5
31. In learning English, it is important to practice by listening to TV or radio programs in English frequently.					
32. Thai people feel that it is very important to learn English.					
33. I would like to learn English so that I can get to know people who speak English (such as the British, Americans, or Australians) better.					
34. If I can use English well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.					
35. I want to be able to speak English well.					
36. I would like to have friends from other countries.					
37. I want to learn English well because it can help me access information from around the world.					
38. English is important for higher education level, especially graduate programs.					
39. Learning English will help me communicate with people from other countries because English is an international language.					

Part II

Directions: Please read each statement and mark ✓ by the choice that indicates your opinion about the statement.

1. I think English is:

- a) a very difficult language
- b) a difficult language
- c) a language of medium difficulty
- d) an easy language
- e) a very easy language

2. If someone spent one hour learning English everyday, how long would it take him or her to speak English well.

- a) less than a year
- b) 1-2 years
- c) 3-5 years
- d) 5-10 years
- e) You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day

Thank you for your participation in the survey. Lastly, I'd like to learn about you a little bit before you finish the survey.

Please mark ✓ by the choice that corresponds to you the best and fill in the blanks as requested.

Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Age: _____

Gender: Female Male