EFL Teachers' Beliefs and their Actual Classroom Practices: Any Difference?

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Abstract

The present study investigated the possible difference between EFL teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. To this end, 210 Iranian EFL teachers (103 teachers from high schools and 107 from language institutes) participated in the study. The 45-item Likert-scale Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed originally by Horwitz, (1985) and validated by Kasraee Nejad (2014) for the context of Iran and an observation checklist, devised and validated by the researchers, comprised the data collection instruments adopted in the current study. The results of paired t-test revealed statistically significant differences between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers and their actual classroom practices. Moreover, the results of Independent Samples t-test indicated that the two groups of high school and language institute teachers were significantly different with regard to their beliefs on language learning. In addition, the results of Chi-square analysis demonstrated 43 out of 45 teachers' specific beliefs were significantly different from their actual classroom practices. In the light of the findings of the present study, educational policy makers and managers in both high schools and language institutes are recommended to introduce ways to raise EFL teachers' awareness of their beliefs to enhance their efficiency in their actual classroom practices.

1. Introduction

1.1. What is belief?

Instruction in the classroom is thought to be affected by many variables which might be either visible or invisible (Bernstein, 1975). One category of these variables consists of human factors including managers, learners and their parents, as well as teachers. In classroom setting, the human factor comprises learners and teachers who are directly related to the teaching and learning processes (Muller, 2001). Whatever role that a teacher might play in the classroom is affected by his/ her personality, characteristics, and beliefs; that is, teachers' attributes and features are important factors in the process of teaching and learning (Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1994).

The concept of 'belief' in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is fairly new compared to other fields such as Sociology and Psychology (Barcelos, 2003). As Barcelos (2014) maintains, the work on beliefs about language learning and teaching started since the mid1980s following the pioneering work of Horwitz (1985) and Wenden (1986). Beliefs have, since then, been referred to as *metacognitive knowledge* (Wenden, 1986), *teacher cognition* (Borg, 2003), *the culture of learning languages* (Barcelos, 1995), and *Beliefs-Assumptions, Knowledge* (BAK) (Woods, 1996). Beliefs are "mental states that are thought to drive a person's actions" and are "the permeable and dynamic structures that act as a filter through which new knowledge and experience are screened for meaning" (Zheng, 2009, p.74).

The concept of beliefs has changed radically since the eighties (Barcelos, 2014). That is, beliefs are now viewed as dynamic, socially-oriented, contradictory conceptions about language teaching and learning (Barcelos, 2014) whereas they were formerly viewed as stable, mental and individual conceptions about language learning and teaching. More specifically, following

the introduction of Sociocultural Theory (Johnson, 2009) and Complexity Theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997) into SLA, beliefs have accordingly taken more sociocultural and complex perspectives. Adopting this socio-cultural perspective in defining beliefs, Barcelos (2014) maintains that we should take into account the nature of language and language learning as well as social and cultural factors in defining beliefs about second language acquisition. Barcelos maintains that interactions with others and the environment (i.e., the society) can be regarded as the origin of beliefs.

An important type of beliefs emphasized upon in the literature of the fieldis teacher beliefs. Kagan (1992) defines teachers' beliefs as assumptions about students, classrooms, and the subject matter to be taught which are implied and unconscious. According to Kagan (1992), the actual nature of the education is reflected by teacher's belief. According to Johnson (1994), teacher beliefs are of paramount importance because the teachers' way of thinking, acting, and feeling are formed by their beliefs. However, the beliefs that a person holds about something are multi-dimensional. In other words, so many factors such as teachers' age, experience, family traditions, etc. can be effective in shaping their beliefs. It could thus be argued that these factors might indirectly affect teachers' practice in the classroom. One of the factors thought to be of significance in examining teachers' beliefs and practices is context (Mansour, 2009).

Teacher beliefs are also important in evaluating teaching because teachers bring with themselves a set of variables into the classroom such as expectations and mindsets based on which they act (Wan & Low, Li, 2011). Similarly, as Miheala and Oana (2015) maintain, teachers' thoughts, actions and behaviors can also affect the learners' learning as a result of social, educational, and personal experiences. However, as Pajares (1992) maintains, the study of

teachers' belief is difficult because defining the concept is problematic. Moreover, the poor conceptualization and various understandings of belief and its structure have made the study of belief difficult.

Calderhead (1996) categorizes teacher beliefs into five main taxonomies including teachers' beliefs about 1) learners and learning 2) teaching, 3) subject matter, pedagogical knowledge, 4) self and finally 5) professional development. The first category includes conceptual representations about how foreign/second languages are learned. Beliefs about teaching encompass, for instance, whether the teacher should act as an absolute authority in the class as is the case with the traditional Grammar-Translation method, or a facilitator as applies to more modern communicatively-oriented approaches to foreign language teaching. Beliefs about subject matter, pedagogical knowledge consist of preconceptions about whether, for instance, to consider subject matter knowledge/knowledge about language or knowledge of teaching/pedagogical knowledge as being more important. 'Beliefs about self' include the image teachers think they have in their students' minds and the conceptions teachers have of themselves as influential factors in the field of teaching. Teachers' beliefs about professional development incorporate, for instance, whether the teaching is viewed as a matter of personality and a constrained activity or whether it is viewed as a life-long learning process wherein teachers are willing to develop professionally their knowledge, skills and practices.

The other side of the coin of teachers' beliefs is their actual classroom practices. Lampert (2010) states that teachers' classroom practices mean what, when, and how the functioning of teaching is supposed to happen. Lampert places practice against theory and states that "practice means what people do rather than what they think or know" (2010, p.23) and describes practice as performing an opinion rather than having that opinion. He believes that

practice is a method in arranging the time and space between teachers and students as well as among students. He also values context as an important factor in formation of teachers' practice (Lampert, 2010).

Studies on Teacher Beliefs

Graham, Santos, and Francis-Brophy (2014) studied teachers' beliefs and practice about listening in foreign language. They utilized a researcher-made questionnaire, class observation, and interview to gather data from 115 teachers in England. After analyzing the data, Graham et al. found there was a mismatch between teachers' stated beliefs and their practice in teaching listening. In addition, their findings showed that the teachers had similar stated beliefs. Graham et al. (2014) concluded that the teachers were not familiar with the principles of teaching listening which, they held, should be resonated in order to make change in practice.

Similary, Jamalzadeh and Shahsavar (2015) conducted a study on the impact of contextual factors on 30 teachers' beliefs and their practices. To collect the required data, Jamalzadeh and Shahsavar adopted a questionnaire developed by Shahsavar and Tan (2012) as well as an observation sheet the dimensions of which were based on that presented by Borg (2006). The researchers found that there was no significant difference between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual classroom practices. In addition, all the teachers held similar beliefs about teaching context, teaching instruction, and language learning.

By the same token, Yigitoglu and Belcher (2014) explored the association between teachers' beliefs and practices about writing in Spanish as the first language and English as the second language). To this end, two second language writing teachers with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds

took part in the study. The data in the study came from different sources including observational audio-recordings, audio-recorded interviews, and documents. The documents included students' writing samples with teachers' written feedback, writing assignment prompts and grading rubrics. Yigitoglu and Belcher (2014) found that personal second language experiences might impact upon views on second language writing practices. Furthermore, reflection on any experience in the first language played a role in teaching second language writing.

In a similar vein, Flores (2001) studied the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their relation to self- reported practices. For this purpose, 176 bilingual teachers participated in the study. The findings showed that bilingual teachers had implicit beliefs about bilingual children's cognition. In addition, Flores (2001) found that teachers' beliefs about learning were interdependent and context-dependent and that the teachers' practice was influenced by their preparation and professional teaching experiences. Furthermore, personal experience was a crucial factor in forming teacher beliefs.

Sato and Kleinsasser (2004) studied the relationship between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices as well as their interactions. In order to collect the required data, interviews, class observations, and documents about 19 EFL teachers were utilized to explore teacher beliefs. Sato and Kleinsasser concluded that teachers' experiences about learning a second language, their primary teaching experiences as well as their socialization were significant factors in shaping their beliefs. In addition, they found EFL teachers' beliefs, practices, and actions interacted with each other within the English language teaching setting. They also found the norms and values of school determined not only the materials to be taught, but also the method of teaching the materials.

The relationship between teachers' beliefs on reading strategies and their stated practices was also studied by Khonamri and Salimi (2010). Seventy five high school EFL teachers in their study answered Teaching Reading Strategy Questionnaire devised by Chou (2008). They also attended an interview. Khonamri and Salimi found that teachers considered reading strategies as an important issue for reading comprehension. However, they found the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their stated practices was a complex one. That is, on the one hand, a positive correlation was found between teachers' beliefs about the necessity of reading strategy in teaching practice and their stated implementation of reading strategies. On the other hand, there was no significant relationship between teachers' beliefs about the importance of reading strategies and their stated classroom practices. Khonamri and Salimi (2010) thus concluded that there was a mismatch between teachers' beliefs and their stated practices about reading strategies. They argued that this discrepancy might emerge due to the effect of contextual factors such as time limitations, size of English classes, different levels of motives and competency of learners, final examinations, teachers' motivation, and parents' and managers' expectations.

1.2. Significance of the Study and Research Questions

It became obvious from what was mentioned above that teachers' beliefs are of crucial importance in shaping teachers' actual classroom practices. That is, teachers' beliefs are the bases of their thoughts, actions and behavior (Johnson, 1994), are important in evaluating teaching and its success or lack thereof (Wan, Low & Li, 2011), and impact upon curriculum implementation, students' learning, teacher's role in the class and even the content and materials covered. However, on the one hand, as Basturkmen (2012) maintains, there is, in reality,

little consistency between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. On the other hand, according to Phipps and Borg (2009), this inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices can be viewed as an undesirable and negative phenomenon in the process of teaching and learning. Most importantly, teachers' beliefs and classroom practices are believed to be heavily context-specific and teaching/learning situation-dependent (Flores, 2010; Mansour, 2009; Phipps & Borg, 2009). Although much research has been done on teachers' beliefs, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, little investigation has been conducted regarding teachers' belief and its correspondence with their actual classroom practices in the EFL context of Iran. Therefore, all the issues mentioned, taken together, made the conduct of the present study plausible and inevitable. The following research questions were thus formulated for the present study:

1. What are the Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about foreign language teaching?

2. *Overall*, is there any significant difference between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers and their actual classroom practices?

3. Is there any significant difference between *specific* beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers and their actual classroom practices?

4. *Overall*, is there any significant difference between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers of high schools and those of EFL teachers of language institutes?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

A total of 210 EFL teachers from English language institutes and high schools in Hamedan Province, Iran participated in this study. 103 teachers were from high schools and 107 teachers were from language institutes. Sixty three

percent of the teachers were female and the rest (i.e., 37 percent) were male. The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 61 years. Out of 210 teachers, the classes of 50 teachers from both language institutes and high schools were randomly selected to be observed. Convenience sampling was used in this study for selecting the participants.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Horwitz's Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)

The questionnaire which was used in this study was Horwitz's (1985) BALLI. This questionnaire was validated by Kasraee Nejad (2014) to be utilized in the EFL context of Iran through expert judgment, pilot study and factor analysis. Also, Kasraee Nejad (2014) found Cronbach's Alpha consistency to be 0.89. A copy of this questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1. This questionnaire has two parts. The first part inquires participants about some demographic information and the second section consists of 45 statements about beliefs towards language teaching and learning on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (=totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

2.2.2. Observation Checklist

The second instrument utilized in the study was an observation checklist devised by the researcher based on BALLI as explained above. That is, items of the checklist lay on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (not observed at all) to 5 (observed completely).Two experts in the field holding Ph.D.s in Applied Linguistics checked the observation checklist for validity purposes.

2.3. Procedure

The data for the study were collected from 210 EFL teachers in English language institutes as well as from teachers in high schools in Hamedan Province. In order to collect the data, the researchers adopted two instruments: BALLI and the observation checklist as described in 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 respectively. A justification was issued by Hamedan Department of Education for the researchers to enter high schools to collect the required data. Also, the informed consent of the participants including those observed was obtained before the study began.

First, BALLI was administered to the participants of the study and the purpose of the study was stated briefly to them. Also, the participants were assured that their information would be kept confidential. On average, it took them about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Next, 25 high school English teachers and 25 language institute EFL teachers were randomly selected to be observed. To do so, one of the researchers attended the classes and observed the teachers' actual practices in the classroom. Every item in the checklist was answered by the researcher observer according to a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not observed at all) to 5 (observed completely).

2.4. Data Analysis

The statistical analyses were carried out through SPSS version 20. Regarding the first research question of the study, descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and standard deviation) were calculated to investigate the Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about foreign language learning and teaching. To answer the second research question of the study, a paired t-test was applied to calculate the difference between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers and their practices. For the

third research question of the study, Chi-square analysis was run in order to see the difference between specific beliefs of EFL teachers and their actual classroom practices. In addition, Cramer's V value was calculated to see whether the significant differences found between EFL teachers' specific beliefs and their actual classroom practices were high enough to be dealt with later in the Discussion section. An Independent Samples t-test was then run to answer the fourth research question to examine the difference between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers of high schools and those of EFL teachers of language institutes.

3. Results

The first research question of the study explored the Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about foreign language teaching. In order to answer this research question, descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and standard deviation) were calculated, the results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Beliefs of Language Institute Teachers and High School Teachers*

Item No	Item Title	N	Min.	Maxi.	Mean	Standard deviation
31	Natural abilities to teach are developed	210	2	5	4.61	.58
30	Teaching needs educational preparation	210	1	5	4.58	.68
29	Individuals have inborn teaching ability	210	2	5	4.56	.59
44	Knowing how to present information in various ways is important	210	1	5	4.56	.58
45	Knowledge of ways of learners' assessment is important	210	1	5	4.55	.57
32	Expertise is significant in teaching	210	2	5	4.55	.67
43	Class management is important	210	2	5	4.53	.56
22	Repetition for learning is important	210	1	5	4.45	.77
39	Motivating learners is important	207	2	5	4.42	.55
42.	Knowing specific methods for teachers is important	210	1	5	4.41	.65
15	Grammar is the most important part	210	1	5	4.39	1.07
41	Knowing learners' strengths and weaknesses is important for teachers	210	1	5	4.38	.75
40	How to deliver information is significant	210	1	5	4.37	.68
24	English is important in getting a job	210	1	5	4.35	.88
37	Theoretical foundation for teaching is important	210	2	5	4.19	.73
9	English is fairly difficult	208	1	5	4.13	.85
23	Speaking English is important for Iranians	210	1	5	4.12	.82
36	Learners' cultural background is important	208	1	5	4.09	.88
14	Vocabulary is the most important part	210	1	5	4.01	1.06
10	Speaking is easier than understanding	208	1	5	3.99	1.00
28	English is significant to communicate	210	1	5	3.93	.88
38	Having extensive knowledge of subject matter is important	210	1	5	3.86	.82
27	English is important for higher study	210	1	5	3.81	1.03
35	It is important to know learners' development	208	1	5	3.78	1.23
2	Some have special learning ability	208	1	5	3.73	1.03
34	There are various teaching techniques for teaching	210	1	5	3.70	1.11
4	No relationship exists between learning Math and English	206	1	5	3.65	1.02
88	Some languages are learned easily	210	1	5	3.60	1.19

11	Children learn more easily	210	1	5	3.45	1.47
6	Bilinguals are more intelligent	208	1	5	3.39	1.09
18	Excellent pronunciation is important	206	1	5	3.31	1.15
11	Reading and writing are easier than speaking and understanding	210	1	5	3.30	1.05
20	Familiarity with natives is joyful	210	1	5	3.24	1.44
16	Learning English is different from other subjects	210	1	5	3.22	1.23
3	Bilinguals learn more easily	206	1	5	3.19	1.08
33	Skills are learned for teaching	210	1	5	2.97	1.33
13	Best learning occurs in English-speaking countries	208	1	5	2.92	1.39
17	Translation is the most important part	210	1	5	2.85	1.34
25	Finding native friends is joyful	208	1	5	2.69	1.45
7	Everyone can learn English	210	1	5	2.59	1.07
26	English is important in getting information	210	1	5	2.54	1.36
19	You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly	209	1	5	2.49	1.16
21	It is ok to guess unfamiliar words	210	1	5	2.30	1.19
5	Women are better at learning languages	210	1	5	2.26	1.09
12	Knowing English culture is necessary to speak English	210	1	5	2.20	1.04

As is evident in Table 1, items 31, 30, 29, 44, and 45 of the questionnaire with the means of 4.61, 4.58, 4.56, 4.56, and 4.55 and standard deviations of .58, .68, .59, .58, and .57 respectively, were the ones in which teachers highly believed.

The second research question of the study explored whether, overall, there was any significant difference between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers and their actual classroom practices. To answer this research question, a paired t-test was applied, the results of which are displayed in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Beliefs of Iranian EFL Teachers and their Classroom Practices*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Beliefs questions	155.30	50	14. 18	2.00
Beliefs observed	139.26	50	29.02	4.10

Table 3. *Paired t-test Investigating the Difference between Beliefs of Iranian EFL Teachers and their Classroom Practices*

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's Effect Size D
	Mean	SD	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	16.04	36.11	5.10	5.77	26.30	3.14	49	.003	.459

As indicated in Table 3, *overall*, there was a significant difference between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers and their actual classroom practices t 49 =3.14 (*p*<0.05).

The third research question set out to investigate whether there was any significant difference between *specific* beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers and their actual classroom practices. To answer this research question, Chi-square analyses were run, the results of which are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. *Chi-square Analysis for the Difference between Specific Beliefs of Iranian EFL Teachers and their Actual Classroom Practices*

Item No	Item Title	Pearson Value	df	Sig.	Cramer's V
1	Children learn more easily	20.27	4	.00	.27
2	Some have special learning ability	89.68	4	.00	.39
3	Bilinguals learn more easily	26.93	4	.00	.32
4	No relationship exists between learning Math and English	61.06	4	.00	.48
5	Women are better at learning languages	23.58	4	.00	.30
6	Bilinguals are more intelligent	8.86	4	.06	.18
7	Everyone can learn English	46.79	4	.00	.42
8	Some languages are learned easily	37.96	4	.00	.38
9	English is fairly difficult	59.06	4	.00	.47
10	Speaking is easier than understanding	5.15	4	.27	.14
11	Reading and writing are easier than speaking and understanding	81.88	4	.00	.56
12	Knowing English culture is necessary to speak English	67.45	4	.00	.50
13	Best learning occurs in English-speaking countries	84.68	4	.00	.57
14	Vocabulary is the most important part	65.44	4	.00	.50
15	Grammar is the most important part	79.91	4	.00	.55
16	Learning English is different from other subjects	16.76	4	.00	.25
17	Translation is the most important part	56.31	4	.00	.46
18	Excellent pronunciation is important	54.41	4	.00	.46
19	You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly	106.99	4	.00	.64
20	Familiarity with natives is joyful	66.40	4	.00	.50
21	It is ok to guess unfamiliar words	37.87	4	.00	.38
22	Repetition for learning is important	131.40	4	.00	.71
23	Speaking English is important for Iranians	78.99	4	.00	.55
24	English is important in getting a job	23.31	4	.00	.29
25	Finding native friends is joyful	82.01	4	.00	.56
26	English is important in getting information	93.40	4	.00	.59

27	English is important for higher education	40.73	4	.00	.39
28	English is significant to communicate	77.85	4	.00	.54
29	Individuals have inborn teaching ability	151.96	4	.00	.76
30	Teaching needs educational preparation	117.77	4	.00	.67
31	Natural abilities to teach are developed	141.99	4	.00	.73
32	Expertise is significant in teaching	84.68	4	.00	.57
33	Skills are learned for teaching	21.01	4	.00	.28
34	There are various teaching techniques for teaching	38.22	4	.00	.38
35	It is important to know learners' development	32.26	4	.00	.35
36	Learners' cultural background is important	47.18	4	.00	.42
37	Theoretical foundation for teaching is important	113.53	4	.00	.66
38	Having extensive knowledge of subject matter is important	93.86	4	.00	.60
39	Motivating learners is important	149.87	4	.00	.76
40	How to deliver information is significant	143.22	4	.00	.74
41	Knowing learners' strengths and weaknesses is important for teachers	104.04	4	.00	.63
42	Knowing specific methods for teachers is important	118.41	4	.00	.67
43	Class management is important for teachers	198.21	4	.00	.87
44	Knowing how to present information in various ways is important	142.82	4	.00	.74
45	Knowledge of ways of learners' assessment is important	213.33	4	.00	.90

As shown in Table 4, except items 6 and 10, all the items were found to be significantly different; however, taking Cramer's V value into consideration, it became obvious that although the differences between the two groups relating to those 43 items were significant, the magnitude of association for some items was not large enough and was, thus, ignorable. That is, those items with low Cramer's V value were not taken into account in discussing the results.

The last research question of the study explored whether, *overall*, there was any significant difference between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers of high

schools and those of EFL teachers of language institutes. In order to answer this research question, an Independent Samples t-test was utilized, the results of which are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5.*Descriptive Statistics of Beliefs of Iranian EFL Teachers of High Schools and those of Language Institutes*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
School	103	161.24	13.58	1.33
Institute	107	165.25	10.81	1.04

Table 6. *Independent Samples t-test Showing the Difference between Beliefs of Iranian EFL Teachers of High Schools and Those of Language Institutes*

	Levene's Test		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Cohen's Effect Size D
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
Equal variances assumed	2.929	.088	-2.37	208	.01	-4.01	.1.69	-7.34	-.67	.326
Equal variances not assumed			-2.36	194.65	.01	-4.01	1.69	-.7.35	-.66	

As indicated in Table 6, the two groups of high school teachers and language institute teachers were found to be significantly different with regard to their beliefs, t 208 = -2.37(P< 0.05).

4. Discussion

The first research question of the study investigated the beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers. The results indicated that the EFL teachers highly believed in the development of natural abilities, innate talent and pedagogical preparation as well as inborn ability to teach (items 30, and 29 of the questionnaire) over other

beliefs. This finding might be supported by Strauss and Ziv (2012) who maintain that cognition and its development are at the crux of teaching and learning foreign languages.

'Providing information in different ways' was another item in which the teachers highly believed. This could be corroborated by Liu and Reed (1994) who state that learners choose different ways of learning because of the different learning styles; therefore, the information should be transferred in different ways by teachers. Another item in which the teachers in the study highly believed was knowledge of how to evaluate students' performance. This could be supported by Bachman (1990) who states that the effectiveness of learning and teaching can be observed by evaluation; hence, it is important for teachers to know how to assess the students' performance.

Another item in which teachers highly believed was the role of repetition and practice in learning English. Chastain (1988) maintains that one of the teachers' responsibilities is to highlight the significance of repetition and practice in learning a second language as stated by teachers in the current study. In addition, teachers in the present study believed that teachers must know how to motivate students corroborating Ames' (1990) stance that motivation is not only always important for all students in the classroom, but it should also be regarded as an outcome in the educational settings. Another firmly-held belief of teachers was 'knowledge of subject specific teaching methods'. Specific teaching methods for a specific subject can enhance the amount of student learning that is the outcome of teaching (Bourner, 1997).

According to the participants' responses to the items of the questionnaire, teachers believed that the most important part of learning a foreign language was learning grammar. That is, as corroborated by Azar (2007), the participants in the study might have also believed the nature of language is discovered

through grammar and that without grammar the language is boiled down to only individual words and sounds. 'Knowing the strength and weaknesses of the students by teachers' was another belief which teachers highly emphasized. Supporting this, Coffield, Moseley, Hall, and Ecclestone (2004) maintain that if teachers know and respond to learners' strengths and weaknesses, the amount of retention and achievement will increase in formal programs. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to know their learners' strengths and weaknesses.

The findings of the second research question of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers and their actual classroom practices. One possible reason for this discrepancy might lie in the fact that in Iranian educational context, teachers do not or cannot normally implement what they have in their minds because some inflexible prescribed and pre-planned teaching formats and practices are presented to them which provide a restricted framework for them where in they do not have much freedom of action. Teachers in the study were themselves mainly taught in such a limited manner and context lending support to the idea that, in reality, most "teachers teach the way they were taught"(Rita& Dunn, 1993, p.241). Ourfindings in this respect are in line with those of Graham, Santos, and Francis-Brophy (2014) who found that there was a discrepancy between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices in teaching listening. The findings of the present study in this regard are also congruent with the results of Khonamri and Salimi (2010) who, as mentioned earlier, found there was a mismatch between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices about reading strategies. Such findings emphasize the need to make teachers aware of the theoretical principles behind teaching and what teachers actually do in the classroom. In contrast with the findings of the present study, Richardson, Anders, Tidwell and Lloyd (1991) found American teachers'

beliefs about reading comprehension were in line with their actual practices in teaching reading.

Another possible reason for this mismatch might be concerned with the fact that the English classes in both high schools and language institutes in Iran are held for a very short period of time i.e. two to four hours a week on average. Teachers confront with time limitation in the class which might hinder them from implementing what they have in their minds. This issue is also pointed out by Phipps and Borg (2009) who hold time limitation is a contextual factor which might intercede between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices.

The third research question of the study sought to investigate the difference between specific beliefs of EFL teachers and their actual classroom practices as measured by individual items of the questionnaire and the observation checklist, respectively. As shown earlier, there was a significant difference between all the items of the questionnaire except for two items. However, Cramer's V value indicated that some of these differences were ignorable; therefore, those items being significantly different with high Cramer's V values are discussed in this part.

The first item of the questionnaire that was highly significantly different from its corresponding item in the checklist was 'to read and write English is easier than to speak and understand it'. That is, based on what was observed in the classes, the students had basic problems in reading and writing. They were not equipped with the knowledge of even some basic strategies in reading (e.g., guessing unknown words from context or breaking unknown words down into their constituent elements) and writing (e.g., drafting, revising and redrafting, topic initiation and development strategies, etc.) most plausibly because their teachers did not train them to do so.

Another item which came to be significantly different from its reflection in the classes observed was 'you shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly'. Although this item received the fourth lowest mean (M=2.49) in the questionnaire showing the teachers did not believe in interrupting the learners continuously to correct them, in practice, it was observed they did the opposite and did not tolerate the students' errors. However, as Nunan (2003) maintains, learners cannot speak fluently if the teacher constantly interrupts them to correct them. That is, making mistakes should be considered as a part and parcel of learning a new language; therefore, learners' unwillingness to speak in the classes observed might be attributed to the teachers' practice of a wrong belief in this respect.

'It is important to repeat and practice a lot' was another item significantly different from its reflection in the classes observed. Although the teachers highly believed in this item, in reality, the sessions devoted to English teaching and practice were only two to three in a week. In addition, in language institutes, because of the midterm and final examinations, teachers did not usually find enough time to review and repeat the language materials taught. The shortage of time could thus be considered as the main reason for lack of enough repetition and practice in English classes observed in the study.

'People in my country feel that it is important to speak English'(i.e., item 23) was another item of the questionnaire that was significantly different from its corresponding item in the observation checklist. Although the teachers in the study highly believed in this item, they and their students did not focus much on speaking in the classes observed. Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) state that at the crux of learning speaking skill lies motivation and there are some factors in the class such as the teacher, peers, materials, and equipment

that might demotivate the learners to speak; therefore, less emphasis on speaking skill in the classes observed might be attributed to any of these factors. 'Having extensive knowledge of the subject matter by the teacher is important' was another item significantly different from its demonstration in the classes observed. That is, although the teachers believed they should have extensive knowledge of the subject they teach, they did not appear to be highly knowledgeable in the subject they taught (i.e. English) in the classes observed. Boe, Shin, and Cook (2007) believe that qualified teachers should have both verbal ability and content knowledge matter, two factors of crucial importance which were found not to be possessed satisfactorily by the teachers observed in the study in reality.

'Knowing how to motivate and engage students by teachers' was another item different from its manifestation in the classes observed. The first priority for teachers is to know "why motivation is important" (Ames, 1990, p.410) which should be incorporated in the textbooks. Indeed, in in-service education courses held sporadically (once or twice per academic year) by the Ministry of Education, no attention is paid to such psychological matters as how to create and raise motivation in teaching, which might be a plausible reason why the teachers in the study could not, in practice, provide their learners with enough motivation.

Another teacher belief which was found to be different from its actual practice was knowledge of specific teaching methods. That is, teachers highly believed having knowledge of specific teaching methods was important for teachers (M=4.41). Notwithstanding this, they were observed not to possess knowledge of and/or follow various teaching methods and techniques. That is, they almost unanimously followed the age-old Grammar-Translation method at high schools and Audio-lingualism of some sort in language institutes, both

of which killed the creativity and autonomy of the learners. This might call for the pressing need to hold pre-service and/or in-service foreign language teacher training programs in Iran wherein there is enough attention to and focus on continuous professional development of English teachers in order to make them acquainted with the findings of recent trends in foreign language teaching including various teaching methods and techniques.

Another belief that was incongruent with its corresponding practice was 'knowing how to assess students' performance'. That is, although this item was among the top five firmly-held beliefs of teachers (M=4.55), the teachers observed did not, in practice, show much variety or depth in their assessment literacy especially at schools where the bulk of tests adopted were multiple-choice and/or fill-in-the-blank summative tests of grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension. Of course, as Wolf, Herman, Bachman, Bailey, and Griffin (2008) maintain, heterogeneous characteristics of learners make language assessment a complex task. In the classes observed, learners were heterogeneous regarding their characteristics as well as language proficiency which might, in practice, have made assessment a difficult task for the teachers. With respect to the fourth research question which investigated the difference between beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers of high schools and those of language institutes, the results showed that the two groups were significantly different with regard to their beliefs. One possible justification for this difference could be attributed to the context of teaching. This means that teachers in high schools have to teach in accordance with the written-in-the-stone regulations of the Ministry of Education that dictates educational policies, curricula, syllabi, and materials which naturally leaves no room for the creativity of the teachers. That is, in high schools, English is taught in the same way as other subjects such as Art and Mathematics are taught. In addition, the higher age of teachers in

high schools might have been an impressive factor in their beliefs on teaching a foreign language.

Regarding the importance of context in shaping teachers' beliefs, Richards, Gallo, and Renandya (2001) believe that personal factors as well as the professional context in which teachers work are among factors that can change teachers' beliefs. In addition, Mansour (2009) emphasizes the crucial role of context in examining teachers' beliefs and practice. Moreover, Gabillon (2012) and Phipps and Borg (2009) also believe in context as a significant factor in forming teachers' beliefs. The findings of the present study in this regard are congruent with the results of Baleghizadeh and Farshchi (2009) who also found that the beliefs of Iranian EFL teachers of high schools were different from those of EFL teachers of language institutes most plausibly because the two micro-contexts of teaching are different. For instance, as Balaghizadeh and Farshchi (2009) maintain, high school teachers long experience out-of-date textbooks at schools. Therefore, it might be true to say that the content of the books taught, as a contextual factor, can be considered as an important factor in shaping teachers' beliefs.

5. Conclusion and Implication of the Study

Based on the findings of the study, some highly-stated beliefs of teachers were recognized and discussed at length above. Moreover, Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs were found to be incongruent with their actual classroom practices. Such findings emphasize the need for improving conditions in which teachers act based on their beliefs. In order to do so, several factors are to be taken into consideration. First, expectations of other people can result in the formation of teachers' beliefs. Therefore, the unjustified interference of such people as managers and learners' parents in the process of teaching should be lowered.

Second, context is a crucial factor which intercedes between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. According to Turner and Meyer (2000), context involves goals, values, physical space, and evaluative climate of teaching and influences the teacher, students, and content area to be taught. Hence, each of these factors might be of crucial importance in shaping teachers' beliefs which, might consequently, affect their instructional decisions. In addition, beliefs are shaped on the basis of teachers' own schooling (Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001). Hence, professors and practitioners in education courses are the ones who affect their students' beliefs. Third, experience in teaching, the size of the classes, educational decision-making authorities such as managers and officials in the Ministry of Education are factors contributing to the formation of teachers' beliefs and, and as a result, their actual classroom practices. Fourth, the content of the books taught in the English classes as well as the formats of teaching and testing methods might result in different beliefs in the context of high schools and language institutes as the main centers of learning English in Iran.

A number of implications could be suggested based on the findings of the study. Firstly, teachers' beliefs might undergo transformation as a result of social and instructional changes as well as personal experiences (Miheala & Oana, 2015). Hence, by holding in-service training courses (in which both linguistic matters and psychological issues are raised) for high school teachers to enhance the quality of education and to develop them professionally, teachers' beliefs and consequently, their actual classroom practices can be changed and improved. Thus, the awareness of the teachers needs to be raised and their 'detrimental' beliefs (Peacock, 2001) should be corrected and changed so that they can act based on the beliefs that conform to new teaching trends.

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Secondly, foreign language education policy makers in Iran both in language institutes, which are run by the private sector, but are authorized by the Ministry of Education, and especially in high schools, which are directly run by the Ministry of Education, should pay more attention to the role of teachers' beliefs in shaping their actual classroom practices. In addition, some written-in-the-stone regulations especially in the Ministry of Education should be changed so as to rethink about and shorten the size of the English classes, enhance the number of hours students are exposed to English per week, and change the content of the textbooks based on modern foreign language teaching trends to enable the teachers to practice their beliefs without any concern and hindrance.

It should thus be noted that because both school and language institute teachers in Iran, especially the former, have to behave based on the regulations of the Ministry of Education, more involvement of them in the decision-making processes and providing them with more freedom of action are needed for them to act based on their beliefs.

Finally, for the sake of professional development purposes, teacher education programs are suggested to make the teachers understand and reflect upon their beliefs about successful language teaching and compare them with their actual classroom practices simply because teacher beliefs form the basis of their behavior, the change of which often follows belief changes (Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001).Therefore, teacher education programs that provide courses in teaching should not take it for granted that teachers graduate with beliefs based on new teaching reforms and practices. Regular continuous professional development programs thus need to be designed and implemented.

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Appendix 1

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پرسشنامه عقاید مدرسان درباره شیوه های یادگیری و تدریس زبان

جملات زیر بیانگر عقایدی هستند که افراد نسبت به یادگیری یک زبان خارجی، به ویژه زبان انگلیسی دارند. بعد از خواندن هر جمله یک عدد از یک تا پنج را که نشانگر نظر شما درباره جمله است انتخاب کنید. معنی اعداد به شرح زیر است:

۱. کاملا مخالفم   ۲. مخالفم   ۳. نظری ندارم   ۴. موافقم   ۵. کاملا موافقم

	۱. کاملا مخالفم	۲. مخالفم	۳. نظری ندارم	۴. موافقم	۵. کاملا موافقم
۱-یادگیری یک زبان خارجی برای کودکان راحت تر از بزرگسالان است.					
۲- بعضی از مردم توانایی خاصی در یادگیری زبانهای خارجی دارند.					
۳-برای کسی که از قبل به یک زبان خارجی صحبت می کند، یادگیری یک زبان دیگر ساده تر است.					
۴- افرادی که در ریاضیات یا علوم قوی هستند در یادگیری زبانهای خارجی قوی نیستند.					
۵- خانمها در یادگیری زبانهای خارجی بهتر از آقایان هستند.					
۶-افرادی که بیشتر از یک زبان صحبت می کنند خیلی باهوش هستند.					
۷-هر کسی توانایی یادگیری صحبت به یک زبان خارجی را دارد.					
۸-یادگیری بعضی از زبانها آسانتر از دیگر زبانهاست.					
۹-زبان انگلیسی زبانی با سطح دشواری متوسط است.					

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					۱۰-صحبت کردن به یک زبان خارجی راحت تر از فهمیدن آن است.
					۱۱-خواندن و نوشتن به زبان انگلیسی راحت تر از صحبت کردن و فهمیدن آن است.
					۱۲-برای اینکه به زبان انگلیسی صحبت کنیم لازم است درباره فرهنگ افراد انگلیسی زبان بدانیم.
					۱۳-بهترین راه یادگیری زبان، یادگیری آن در کشوری است که مردم آن به زبان انگلیسی صحبت می کنند.
					۱۴-مهمترین قسمت یادگیری یک زبان خارجی یادگیری واژگان آن است.
					۱۵- مهمترین قسمت یادگیری یک زبان خارجی یادگیری دستور (گرامر) آن است.
					۱۶-یادگیری یک زبان خارجی متفاوت از یادگیری سایر رشته های تحصیلی است.
					۱۷-مهمترین قسمت یادگیری زبان انگلیسی یادگیری ترجمه کردن از زبان مبدا به زبان دیگر است.
					۱۸-مهم است که با تلفظ عالی انگلیسی صحبت کنیم.
					۱۹-تا زمانی که نتوان جملات را به درستی بیان کرد نبایستی به انگلیسی صحبت کرد.

					۲۰-از تمرین زبان انگلیسی با سخنگویان بومی که آشنا می شوم (مثل آمریکائی ها، انگلیسی ها، و ...) لذت می برم.
					۲۱- اگر معنی کلمه ای را به انگلیسی نمی دانید اشکالی ندارد که حدس بزنید.
					۲۲-تکرار و تمرین زیاد در یادگیری زبان مهم است.
					۲۳-مردم کشور من فکر می کنند که انگلیسی صحبت کردن مهم است.
					۲۴-اگر دانشجویان من یاد بگیرند که به خوبی انگلیسی صحبت کنند، این به آنها کمک می کند که شغل خوبی به دست آورند.
					۲۵-دوست دارم دوستان انگلیسی زبان (افراد بومی که به زبان انگلیسی صحبت می-کنند) پیدا کنم.
					۲۶- می خواهم به خوبی انگلیسی یاد بگیرم زیرا به من کمک می کند که به اطلاعات سراسر جهان دسترسی داشته باشم.
					۲۷-زبان انگلیسی برای مقاطع تحصیلی بالاتر مهم است.
					۲۸-یادگیری زبان انگلیسی به من کمک خواهد کرد با مردم دیگر کشورها ارتباط برقرار کنم زیرا زبان انگلیسی یک زبان بین المللی است.
					۲۹-افراد با توانایی ذاتی تدریس به دنیا می آیند.

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					۳۰- تدریس نیازمند استعداد ذاتی و آمادگی علمی است.
					۳۱-برای مدرس بودن، افراد باید توانایی های ذاتی خود را گسترش دهند.
					۳۲-تدریس، مهارتی است که با تعلیم و تخصص رشد می کند.
					۳۳-مهارتهای مورد نیاز برای مدرس شدن یاد گرفته می شوند.
					۳۴-برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که شیوه های تدریس متنوعی را بدانم.
					۳۵-برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که درباره پیشرفت کودکان/بزرگسالان اطلاعات داشته باشم.
					۳۶- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که درباره زمینه فرهنگی دانشجویانی که به آنها درس می دهم اطلاعاتی داشته باشم.
					۳۷- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که پایه های نظری و مفاهیم شیوه های تدریس خود را بدانم.
					۳۸- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که دانش وسیعی در زمینه موضوعی که تدریس می کنم داشته باشم.
					۳۹- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که بدانم که چگونه به دانشجویان انگیزه بدهم و آنها را مجذوب کنم.

					۴۰- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که بدانم چگونه اطلاعات را به دانشجویان منتقل کنم تا دانشجویان آن را بفهمند.
					۴۱- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که نقاط ضعف و قدرت دانشجویانی را که به آنها درس می دهم بدانم.
					۴۲- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که شیوه های تدریس مخصوص آن موضوع را بدانم.
					۴۳- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که دانش چگونگی مدیریت کردن کلاس را داشته باشم.
					۴۴- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که بدانم چگونه اطلاعات را به شیوه های مختلف ارائه دهم.
					۴۵- برای من، به عنوان یک مدرس، مهم است که بدانم چگونه عملکرد دانش آموزان را ارزشیابی کنم.