AN INTERROGATION ON THE POSITIVE & NEGATIVE BELIEF OF TERTIARY LEVEL TEACHERS WITH ECLECTIC FRAMEWORK

John Joseph. A[a1], Dr. J. John Love Joy[b]

[a]*Ph.D Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Trichy – 620002, Tamil Nadu, India.*
E-mail: johnjose581988@gmail.com
[b]*Assistant Professor of English, PG & Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Trichy – 620002, Tamil Nadu, India.*
E- johnljoy@gmail.com

Abstract

The history of TESL has taken much criticism and appreciation to itself and has transformed over time often within its domain. Even though changes happen at regular intervals, teachers believe that they manage the incompatibility between the textbook and their classroom practices with their beliefs which they have inherited from different sources. In this article, the researcher presents the positive and negative aspects of teacher belief so as to find out the details about teacher diversion from the textbook prescribed to follow mixed method (eclectic) when there are disagreements between what they believe in and what is there in the textbook.

Keywords: Teacher's Belief, Textbooks, Teaching Methods, Classroom Practices, Teachers' diversion.

1.1 Introduction

The teachers imbibe various beliefs through the course of their teaching career. Their beliefs about the textbook, students, teaching methods, socio-cultural and ethical issues influence their decision-making process. In the process of teaching, a teacher works as a vehicle in encoding the content of the textbook or what has been assigned to them from the educational institution and decoding it to

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[1] Corresponding author.
E-mail address: johnjose581988@gmail.com

the students. However, it has always been a challenging task on the part of the teachers to train and improve the communicative competence of the learner with the prescribed textbook in practice. To resolve this problem, the teachers rely on the beliefs which they hold about their teaching. That which helps most of the challenges which a teacher faces concerns the incongruence that exists between the textbook and the linguistic needs of the learners. Hence this research paper tries to find out the sources of those beliefs which intrinsically come as an aiding tool for a teacher in times of peril. Before, entering the focal point of the study lets briefly outline the literature behind Teachers' belief in TESL.

1.2 Teachers' Belief

Pajares (1992 p. 316) defines teachers' belief as "an individual's judgement of the truth or falsity of a proposition". Li Xu (2012) quoting Michael Borg's definition of teachers' belief states,

> a 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 behaviour. (p. 1397)

While arguing on the teachers' beliefs Bandura (1997) mentions that such belief greatly affects the teaching procedures of a teacher more than the knowledge they possess in a particular subject. The decisions they make on the choice of methods, procedures and the practices with which they perform in the language classrooms is solely based on the set of beliefs that they possess consciously or unconsciously in their minds.

Most teachers vouch that the set of belief that they possess is best and true in comparison to other methods and approaches about the classroom, the textbook, teaching procedures, materials and the students. They give such credit to that belief and at times it helps them to accept or to reject the ideas presented in the textbook. Sometimes, guided by such belief they generate their definitions for teaching, textbook and for teaching practices, which they eventually perform in the classroom. Using the knowledge they possess on the particular subject they filter and screen what to teach and what not to teach in the classrooms. This forces one to question the source of these set of beliefs, their development and domination in the field of teaching.

1.3 Objectives

The study aims to find out
- how belief is formed?
- the influence of teacher beliefs on teaching-learning
- the positive and negative sources of teachers' beliefs

1.4 The rationale behind the study

As students are the epicentre of the classroom and are one of the most important stakeholders in the learning process, teachers have to consider the following factors: the textbooks prescribed, the expectations of the parents, the management and students' learning needs. There would be harmony in the learning process if the teachers' belief and other areas surrounding the teaching-learning endeavour are compatible. Lastly, teachers are prone to making decisions that would impact the teaching-learning process. For instance, while helping students with their linguistic needs, they have no choice but to divert from the textbook which does not address such specific needs. This incompatibility has a ripple effect on other related areas. Providing awareness on the positive and negative formation of belief would help them make informed decisions for the greater benefit of the students. On the whole false beliefs can have an overall adverse effect on education if this issue is unaddressed while the need for learning L2 increases.

1.5 Sources of Teachers' Belief

Kennedy (1997) while speaking of the source of teachers' belief states that the sources of teachers' beliefs are uncertain; sometimes generating from their educational, cultural and social background in which they are part of. In most cases, the sources of teachers' belief develop externally from the formalized educational set up and internally from the personal experiences of the teachers. Buehl and Fives (2009) recognize six areas from which teachers develop their epistemological beliefs on teaching: formal education, personal teaching experience, formal bodies of knowledge, observational learning, collaboration with fellow workers and finally with self-reflection.

In view of finding out the sources of teachers' belief among the teachers the researcher has made use of the teachers who assembled for a workshop and with their permission has administered a questionnaire (Appendix – A) based on the literature available about the sources of teachers' beliefs.

The teachers' profile was overlooked in this research paper due to their identity. A few of the participants have provided details like contact number and email- ID for future contact through which the researcher has requested them to share their experience on the origin of their beliefs.

1.6 Analysis of the data collected

The questionnaire was administered to 63 teachers. The first and second part of the questionnaire received responses from 63 of them. The third and the fourth part of the questionnaire

had respondents of only 37 and 22 respectively. To make the study authentic the collected data was taken as it was and the analyses were made.

The primary question asked to the teachers was: What are the sources of your teaching beliefs? Before administering this questionnaire to the teachers the researcher had interacted with a few teachers about the sources of their belief and collected data required for the study, shortlisted the information given by them and tabulated it for getting responses from the other teachers.

S.No	Source of Developing teaching Beliefs	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Exemplary teachers	-	-	-	21	42
2	Own teaching experience	-	-	-	23	40
3	Educational Learning	-	-	-	26	37
4	Fellow teachers	-	-	9	28	26
5	Learning materials	-	-	7	34	22
6	Educational, Social, Cultural Moral experience	-	-	13	30	20
7	Institutions' regulations	-	-	9	37	17
8	Books & websites	-	-	17	34	12
9	Seminar / Workshops	-	-	20	31	12
10	Parents & elders	-	-	28	25	10

Table: *1.1*

From table 1.1 it is vivid that the teachers developed their teaching and learning beliefs from multiple sources. Surprisingly, the degree varies for each teacher to detect the source from which they have inherited it. Nearly, three fourth of the respondents strongly agreed that they have developed their teaching-learning beliefs starting with their own teachers who inspired them, their own teaching experience and their educational learning from their respective schools and colleges.

From six sources listed above, nearly one-fourth of the teachers stated that they were uncertain whether they developed such belief from the above-listed sources (sources 4 to 10).   This provides a reason to state that belief could be developed unconsciously from various sources. Thus, the formation of belief need not be from the conscious efforts of the teachers rather, it could be from their unconscious efforts also. While further interacting with a few teachers on how practice develops into a belief, the following example was arrived at:
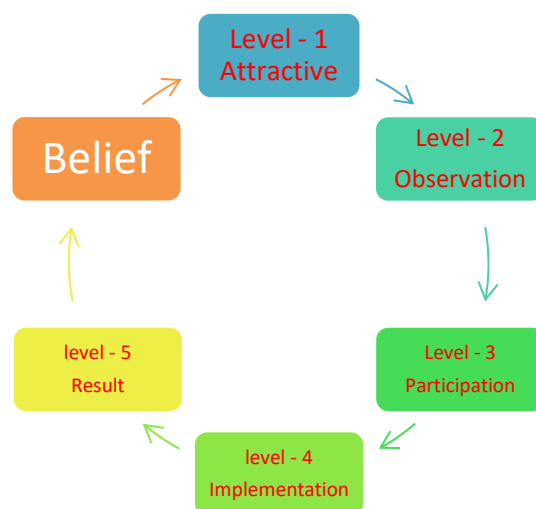
Figure *1.1*

The above figure 1.1 depicts how practice develops into a belief after five levels. As the figure showcases, the initial process to develop a belief that consciously or unconsciously requires a teaching or learning problem in the context. In an attempt to solve such problems, the teachers go back to many sources which they have established as reliable resources for addressing any teaching issues from their list of beliefs. When inquired about the origin of such practice in their list of beliefs, nearly three-fourth of the teachers answered that it was something new, catchy, and interesting and these factors provided hope that this practice could be the solution for their problem. The process is described as follows: When something is new it attracts the attention of the viewer and hence sparks observing on what is happening around them. While observing it they become motivated and volunteer to participate in such practices. Upon participating in it they feel comfortable, see a positive output, experience it, and in turn, implement it when the need arises.

This implementation reoccurs in the teaching context when such teachers encounter such problems and eventually becomes habitual. Finally, this habit is fine-tuned and shaped by the teachers to become their belief when the results are positive, whereas when they are not suitable for their teaching context, it is dropped by them. To add more to the discussion, the researcher put forward the question: When do you consider that you have developed a negative belief?

While interacting with the respondents, one-third of the teachers said that there could be no 'negative belief' as beliefs are developed with a strong theoretical background. Each practice or belief has evolved with a different background. Hence a belief that works well for a group of students five years ago may or may not work well for the students in the present. So, instead of calling an established belief as 'negative', a teacher has to understand the real need of the learners and adopt the right belief (solution) that could make the learners increase their comprehension.

In the discussion, the researcher asked a teacher to apply these levels to their personal experience; a teacher then came forward to narrate an incident from her life with other teachers. She said;

> It was 1995; I was studying 7th std in a convent school. Studying in a Tamil medium school, I had a tough time to **read English** and **pronounce the English names of the missionary sisters** (the problem) who were running the convent school. It was not only my problem but it was the problem of most of my classmates. My English teacher being a nun who has learnt English from the missionary Sister's introduced **tongue twisters** (used as a solution) in our class. It was quite new to us, and the way the nun read it to us **attracted** (L stands for Level) (L-1) me, hence I paid keen attention and **observed** (L-2) how she pronounced each word and the pauses she used while she was reading. On the second day when she asked us to read it, I volunteered to read, (**participated**) (L-3) in that practice. As I grew up I taught and **implemented** (L–4) the same tongue twisters to my own brothers and cousins as fun speaking practice. Since it gave a **positive result** when I became a teacher I used and I continue to use the **tongue twister** exercises to my students who find difficulty in pronouncing a particular sound and combination of sounds. And thus, it became my **belief**. From it, I understood reading and repeating and listening a particular sound will enhance one's pronunciation.

This is an example of the positive belief which a teacher has inherited from one of the ten sources.

There is no surprise that negative beliefs have also developed from any one of the sources stated. The methods and approaches to teaching English have developed over time with various advancements and technological support in the teaching field. A few positive beliefs of teachers have turned into a negative effort and have thus become a negative belief among the teachers. Every teacher vouched to a particular statement made by a teacher in the group: "Caning and punishing the students turned out to be the negative belief of teachers". Methods like the Grammar Translation Method, Direct method and Audiolingual methods have embraced physical punishments in the belief that it has helped the teachers to get the desired results from the learners. Whereas in modern times, the new roles of the methods, teachers, textbook and the new rules from the educational board have proved that punishments of any short should be kept away from the teaching context. A teacher opened up in an interaction with the researcher:

> During my school days, I received corporal punishments from my English teacher hence, whenever I see him a *psychological fear* crept into my mind and that induced me to do study. But years later when I became a teacher I started to give corporal punishments to the students but the result was just opposite to our times. Students

started to go away from me by hating my subject and me. As the result, it paved way for diverse effects in the classroom.

From the above incident, it is obvious that in the modern scenario the previous role of a teacher as authoritarian is being replaced by the modern role of a teacher as facilitator. When enquired about what were the negative beliefs the teacher carried with them and dropped them over time due to the adverse effects a few were listed: giving corporal punishment (canning, kneeling down in the class), giving impositions, exam orientated teaching, etc.

The second question in the questionnaire was: Do you believe that your teaching beliefs influence your choice of methods, practices, materials adapted, materials prescribed and the perspectives on modern learners? The chart in figure – 1 provides the answer to the question.
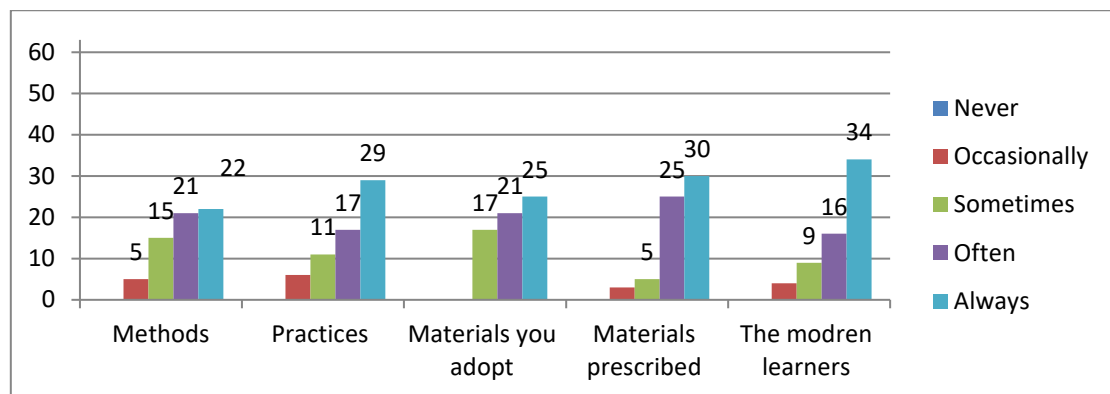

Figure 1.2

The graph above clearly depicts how the beliefs of teachers influence the different aspects of classroom teaching, in the process of selecting a method, practising it in the classroom and enhancing it with the correct material to meet the modern linguistic needs of the learners. Out of 63 teachers, surprisingly no teacher stated that their belief does not affect the above-listed factors. Nearly one-third of the teachers strongly agree that their decision-making solely depends on the belief which they developed from various sources of their teaching and learning career.

1.7 Conclusion

The role of teachers' belief is essential in understanding second language teaching. Since every action and attitude of a teacher is influenced by what he/she believes in. In this dynamic field, innovation and development seem to take the front of the learning process. Change is permanent; however, the longstanding beliefs of teachers go temporary. The set of beliefs a teacher possesses is not a single process or an easy task to change. It is a complex phenomenon, which a teacher formulated from, varies

sources, which he/she considers true, and best. The development of different theories, and changing environments in the classrooms, and the advancement in technology, teaching materials, procedures, rules, policies and curriculum demands a teacher to adopt a context-specific method or procedure that will meet the linguistic needs of the learners in the given context. By holding their beliefs, teachers indeed divert from the textbook given to them. The teachers without diverting from the aims and objectives of the lesson have to adapt or choose a favourable method that enhances the learners to learn effectively. This confluence is found in the eclectic teacher as they utilise the mixed methodology in a single lesson. The diversion of the teacher is essential when the textbook and the curriculum fail to address the issues of the students.

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APPENDIX – A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name : _____   Qualification:_____

Teaching Experience: _____ E- Mail ID _____

Rating Scale: 1. Strongly Agree   2. Agree   3. Neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

I. Rate your sources of beliefs	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Exemplary Teachers	1	2	3	4	5
2. Formal Educational Learning	1	2	3	4	5

3.	Fellow Teachers/ friends	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Fellow Learners /friends	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Learning Materials	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Own Teaching Experience	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Books	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Seminars/Workshops	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Online Learning/Teaching Resources	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Parents/Elders/	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Institutions regulations	1	2	3	4	5

Rating Scale: 1. Never   2. Occasionally 3. Sometimes   4. Often   5. Always

II. Do you believe that your teaching beliefs influence your choice of

1)	Methods	1	2	3	4	5
2)	Practices	1	2	3	4	5
3)	Materials you adopt	1	2	3	4	5
4)	Materials which is in practice	1	2	3	4	5
5)	Perspectives on the learners	1	2	3	4	5

III. Can you name any other bad practices which you inherited from any of the resources and dropped it in course of time encountering their negative side of it?

IV. Give one annotation about your best learning practice which you inherited from any of the above resources