EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards Post-method Pedagogy and Their Students' Achievement

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Recently, a growing interest in research on L2 teaching, EFL teachers, and post-method condition is seen in the Iranian mainstream education that has led researchers to focus on the use of communicative language teaching (CLT) based methodology and materials in the teaching and learning environment. This study was conducted to explore any probable relationship between teachers' positive or negative attitudes towards post-method and their students' achievement. To this end, a questionnaire was designed to elicit EFL teachers' beliefs across dominant teaching methods (i.e. pre-CLT to post-CLT). The subjects were 594 Iranian EFL teachers selected from different cities all over Iran. After the administration of the questionnaires, the data were analyzed through statistical procedures. The results will provide a basis to discuss the impact of teachers' attitudes on their students' achievement & some useful guidelines for teacher trainers & teacher training courses for better results in the classroom, namely learner achievement.

Introduction

A constant stimulus for change in EFL educational system has been the frequently-voiced dissatisfaction with the results of the 'traditional methods'. Having spent a lot of time learning English in the classrooms, learners lack the proper knowledge or ability to use their language potentials for communication. Consequently, more recent deliberations of English language teaching methodology have focused on the importance of giving learners opportunities to communicate (Ellis, 2008).

The post-method pedagogy tries to explore the instructional means for real life communication in the L2 classroom and to get the learners not just to develop linguistic accuracy, but to expand fluency. Learners are assumed as partners in a cooperative venture, and they are pushed to the way in which they could reach to their fullest potential (Brown, 2001). By the same token, Harmer (2001) maintains that communicative language teaching (CLT) incorporates some beliefs emphasizing a re-examination of what language aspects must be taught; and how often they should be presented to be acquired (Doughty & Long, 2008).

CLT activities typically involve learners in real communication, where language accuracy is less important than successful achievement of the communicative task they perform. The important point in all these activities, as Ellis (2008) believes, is that even in formal instruction the metacognitive goal should be concerned with attempts to assist learners in using effective learning strategies to help them communicate and express themselves appropriately.

Likewise, in the Communicative Approach, studying teacher knowledge can both raise teachers' awareness of their current knowledge and promote reflections on their teaching (Bartels, 2005b). Of course, as Brown (2001) argues, the teacher is not an all-knowing person and presenter of knowledge; rather s/he is a facilitator and guide.

For centuries, the preferred curricula were typically those linguistically determined with structures as the core of the syllabus, and what students were mentally engaged in was memorizing long lists of words in English classes and their teachers were supposed live dictionaries (Wang, Han & Liu, 2007), but CLT proponents suggest that formal instruction is subsumed under different functional categories (Brown, 2001). Moreover, in order to have a coherent and well-functioning curriculum, as Johnson (1989) argues, all the participants' attitudes must be taken into account in all decision-making processes. The outcome can be observable in the form of policy documents, syllabuses,

teacher training programs, materials and resources for teaching, and the act of learning and teaching.

The recent years, there has been a growing interest among both the research and practitioner communities in L2 teachers' mental images, thoughts and processes employed while teaching (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Definitely, there is need to listen to teachers' voices in understanding classroom practice (Richards, 1996). As Clemente (2001) convincingly argues, a holistic approach to teaching a language should include the personal side of teaching; the way teachers feel about various parameters of their practice. Also as Wallace (1991, cited in Clemente, 2001) mentions, it seems that a more technology-oriented approach forgets the fact that almost no teacher starts training for their job with blank minds and neutral attitudes. According to some researchers (Hargreaves, 1994; Freeman, 1990; Prabhu, 1992) teachers' performance in class is shaped by "minds" and "attitudes". As Freeman (cited in Clemente, 2001) maintains, attitudes are such important factors that they can be considered the cause of teachers' success or failure. The way teachers see themselves in relation to their work is an attitudinal factor that has been overlooked. Usually, it is expected that a teacher should be assertive and self-confident. If they are doubtful about their role as teachers, in spite of all the positive attitudes about teaching, logically we should expect that they devalue their counseling roles (Clemente, 2001).

In recent lines of investigations in second language teaching, as Kumaravadivelu (2006) maintains, there seems to be a shift toward a post-method era that defines a new relationship between teachers and theorizers, which is pushing teachers towards the world of skills, knowledge, and autonomy. Through empowerment and pedagogical insights gained, teachers are able to theorize based on their practice and practice theories. As a result, some renewed attempts are being made to explore new educational patterns in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

The present study was primarily prompted by the current concern in EFL methodology for the active role of the teachers in the implementation of the Iranian EFL curriculum. More specifically, this study was conducted to explore EFL teachers' attitudes towards the present EFL methodologies and the content of high school textbooks and to examine any probable relationship between teachers' attitudes towards post-method pedagogy and their students' achievement. A secondary concern of the study was to explore any correlation between the teachers' teaching experience and their attitudes towards the present teaching methods and materials. Teachers' attitudes have been one of the least scrutinized areas of EFL instruction literature worldwide (Clemente, 2001). This study is particularly promising because it may provide insights regarding teachers' invaluable ideas as valid sources of improvements in the syllabus or any other sort of curriculum renewal. Within the context of the strictly top-down educational system, the teachers' roles in the processes of syllabus design and their attitudes towards what they are supposed to teach have typically been ignored.

Method

Subjects

After having a panel discussion with the authorities in the Iranian Ministry of Education, some cities were selected based on their geographical locations and educational potentialities. Then, the subject pool was chosen from these cities. The participants included in the sample comprised 594 male and female teachers with age ranges varying from 24 to 68 years and with teaching experience from 1 to 40 years. At the end, 50 of them, as a sub-sample, were chosen for the main part of the study.

Procedure

In this research, in order to collect data, two instruments were developed: a questionnaire and an interview. All the subjects were given questionnaires containing two main sections: the first part was designed to elicit the relevant demographic information, and the second part was intended to explore the respondents' attitudes towards teaching methods (in a 1-5 rating scale). In addition, the interviews were conducted with a group of samples by the researchers to elicit the interviewees' thoughts and rationale concerning appropriate approaches and for cross-validating the results of the questionnaire. Additionally, sets of final English grades of the students whose English teachers answered the questionnaire provided another source of data for this study.

Then, based on the teachers' positive and negative attitudes towards post-method, they were divided into two groups in order to compare their students' grades and to explore any probable relationship between their attitudes and their students' achievement. To this end, for some manageability reasons, the questionnaires completed by the EFL teachers in one of the provinces, a sub sample of the big sample, were examined to explore any variation in the data with regard to the teachers' overall attitudes towards post-method. The mean rates of the respondents were calculated and compared; that is to say, the choices were first given values: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, neutral = 0, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1. Then, based on their rates — over -2.5 and under -2.5 –, they were assigned to two groups with positive and negative attitudes. Moreover, some of the teachers' classes with both positive and negative attitudes towards post-method were observed by the researchers.

Results

The main concern of the study was to explore EFL teachers' attitudes towards teaching methods. To this end, the respondents' answers to the questions of the questionnaire were tabulated and put to chi-square tests. Table 1 shows the result of this test on the basis of the overall attitudes of the teachers towards teaching methods.

Choices	1	2	3	4	5
Frequencies	4162 29%	5598 39%	939 6.5%	2975 20%	415 2.9%
Chi-square 6692.55		P<. 05	DF 4	X^2-critical 9.49	

Table 1. Chi-square test for seven teaching methods
* Key: 1= strongly agree   2- agree   3-neutral   4-disagree   5- strongly disagree

As Table 1 depicts, the observed chi-square value for comparing the attitudes expressed by the EFL high school teachers, i.e. 6692.55, with four degrees of freedom at .05 level of significance, is greater than the critical X^2 value, i.e. 9.49. These results indicate that the attitudes expressed by the teachers have not been random, and the differences between the distributions of the choices are significantly meaningful.

To probe the respondents' attitudes towards each EFL teaching method, seven separate chi-squares were run; the results of which are shown in Table 2.

Methods	Choices					Observed chi-square	DF	Critical chi-square
	1	2	3	4	5			
GTM	434	838	197	1243	217	1375.45	4	9.49
	14%	28%	6%	41%	7%			
ALM	360	551	89	688	59	880.21	4	9.49
	20%	30%	4%	38%	3%			
SW	188	300	49	44	4	523.52	4	9.49
	31%	50%	8%	7%	0.6%			
Sug.	793	346	25	24	0*	1336.46	3	7.82
	66%	29%	2%	2%	0			
CLL	824	1072	118	307	51	1718.72	4	9.49
	34%	45%	4.9%	12%	2%			
TPR	455	531	177	17	0*	584.75	3	7.82
	38%	44%	14%	1%	0			
Post-method	1108	1958	284	652	85	2732.68	4	9.49
	26%	47%	6%	15%	2%			

Table 2. Chi-square tests for seven teaching methods
- The cells with zero frequencies are omitted.   P< .05
- Key : 1- strongly agree   2- agree   3- neutral   4- disagree   5- strongly disagree

As Table 2 depicts, EFL teachers hold inconsistent attitudes towards each EFL teaching method. While 42% of the teachers have positive attitudes towards Grammar Translation Method, and 50% agree on Audio-lingual Method, they hold more positive attitudes towards the humanistic approaches (i.e. Silent Way, 81%; Suggestopedia, 95%; Total Physical Response, 82%, and Community Language Learning, 79%). In addition, 73% of the EFL teachers agree on the communicative approaches. These findings confirm that EFL teachers hold different attitudes towards the dominant teaching methods.

The second step was to find the probable relationship between EFL teachers' attitudes towards post-method condition and their students' achievement. Therefore, for a subpart of the sample, as mentioned earlier in the method section, profiles of student achievement in the English course were studied. The mean scores of the students in each class, for both groups of teachers (i.e. positive attitude group and negative attitude group) were calculated and a t-test was run. The statistics are presented in Table 3.

Groups	No. of subjects	Mean	SD.	DF	t-observed	t-critical	α
+Attitudes	21	14.65	1.125	33	.71	2.04	.05
-Attitudes	14	14.31	1.671				

Table 3. T-test on students' achievement and teachers' attitudes towards post-method

As it can be seen in Table 3, the amount of t-observed (.71) is less than the t-critical, 2.04, with 33 degrees of freedom at .05 level of significance. This suggests that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the students whose teachers hold positive views towards post-method

(X=14.65), and those who hold negative attitudes in this regard (X=14.31). Accordingly, the findings show that teachers' attitudes towards post-method do not have any significant impact on the achievement of their students.

Discussion

The results of the statistics revealed a significant difference in EFL teachers' attitudes towards dominant EFL teaching methods, and while it was expected that the positive attitudes of teachers towards post-method pedagogy would cause better achievement among their students, the results indicated no such correlation. Of course, classroom observation from both groups' classrooms – teachers with positive attitudes towards post-method and those with negative attitudes towards it – showed no significant difference in their instruction and material presentation. There might be different factors which cause this result.

One probable justification may be that EFL teachers' positive attitudes towards post-methodology may not necessarily be indicative of their following CLT procedures in their classrooms. In addition, based on psychology, new things are always alluring. Introducing new approaches and talking about their merits and positive effects on learners' achievement attracts teachers' attention and draws their agreement while in practice they do not follow those approaches. According to Elbaz (1983), practical knowledge includes practical principles and rules of practice. Literature suggests that incongruence between belief and practice is an issue that should be addressed by teacher educators so that teachers may become better equipped to reconcile beliefs and practices in order to implement more effective instruction.

Moreover, teacher-trainees should be exposed to perfect models and observe the classes of teachers who are experienced in using post-method rules in order to have live and practical examples to help them with their own teaching. However, although more experienced teachers are expected to be the backbone of the teaching staff in EFL education, they may lack adequate professionalism and updated teaching skills. Apparently, as long as teachers continue to teach what they were taught, the past will be perpetuated into the future if they do not constantly renew their knowledge, educational beliefs, teaching techniques and methodologies. Student teachers, while taking methodology courses at university, become familiar with and develop a positive attitude towards post-method rules; however, while teaching in the real classroom context, they follow the method through which they were taught during their school years or the method they were observed teaching in during their practical classes. In other words, they have difficulty putting their theoretical knowledge into practice; or maybe do not really know how.

Furthermore, some teachers as whole persons based on individual differences are field-dependent. They would rather not or cannot change the method through which they have handled their classes for years. They do not feel confident changing their method.

In addition, many in-service programs fail to demonstrate practical, successful and coherent models and approaches to the teachers to enable them to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Yet, these programs should support teachers' peer learning and encourage them to participate in in-service programs more often to enhance interaction among teachers. This will not only serve to foster the development of critical thinking but also motivate teachers to become classroom researchers by which they will be able to both put their practice into theory and practice the theories.

Another probability is that teachers do not feel the need and necessity of implementing communicative approaches as they do not believe in enabling students to communicate during their school years. Since the top goal of instruction in high schools is to prepare students to enter the universities and students' oral skills are not evaluated on university entrance exams, teachers spend

all their time and energy to instruct based on pre-CLT rules and follow a linguistic syllabus not communicative one.

On the other hand, as teachers get their instruction feedback in the classroom environment, not in the real world situation, through their students' results on different achievement tests which are all teacher-made and designed based on pre-CLT rules, they suppose there is no shortcoming in their classroom procedure; so they do not feel the need to change their method.

Another possibility for not following post-CLT rules by the teachers in the classroom could be the mismatch between the teaching materials and the post-CLT methodological rules. In the new millennium, while teachers are expected to teach through modern methods, the linguistically designed textbooks do not meet the communicative world's expectations.

One more probability is that non-native EFL teachers who were once taught English through pre-CLT methods are not really able to present post-CLT methods in their own classes. They do not have enough confidence to teach in the target language as they had no opportunity of communication in GTM classes. Therefore, unsurprisingly, they prefer to handle their classes in their mother tongue although they have positive attitudes towards post-method and accept its suggestions.

The final reason could be not having any direct or indirect observations to indicate the shortcomings of their teaching although such observations would be of great help for their improvement in teaching no doubt.

Conclusion

Briefly stated, this study aimed to explore EFL teachers' attitudes towards dominant teaching methods and observe any existing relationship between EFL teachers' attitudes towards post-method and their students' achievement. The results indicate that EFL teachers have different attitudes towards dominant teaching methods but that there is no relationship between the teachers' attitudes towards post-method and their students' achievement. Hence, in order for EFL teachers to meet the challenges of the 21st century, prospective teacher candidates must be provided the with the skills and techniques needed to understand contemporary educational developments as well as to gain extensive linguistic and cultural knowledge so that they may build up the confidence for successful delivery of communication-oriented language classes.

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