International Academic Institute for Science and Technology

International Academic Journal of Humanities
Vol. 5, No. 1, 2018, pp. 19-25.

ISSN 2454-2245

International Academic Journal of Humanities

www.iaiest.com

Iranian EFL Teachers' Creativity and their Grammar Learning and Teaching Beliefs

Firooz Sadighi [a], Sara Shafie [b], Hashem Mazaherzade[C]

[a] *Full professor, Department of English, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran*
[b] *PhD candidate, Department of Foreign Languages, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran*
[C] *PhD candidate, Department of Foreign Languages, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran*

Abstract

The main objective behind this study was to determine to what extent Iranian EFL teachers' creativity is associated with their grammar learning and teaching beliefs. In so doing, two closed-ended scales, grammar teaching and learning beliefs scale and teachers' creativity inventory, were administered to 92 EFL teachers selected and conveniently. The two questionnaires were given to the participants simultaneously. Cronbach alpha was used to calculate the reliability of the scales and Multivariate analysis of variance was embarked on decide the significance of the difference between highly creative and lowly creative teachers' beliefs with regard to five issues in grammar teaching and learning. The findings indicated that the two groups of teachers significantly differ with respect to their grammar learning and teaching beliefs.

Keywords: Creativity, Grammar Beliefs, EFL Teachers

Received:16 January 2018/Accepted:9 April 2018/Published:1 June 2018

Introduction

Thornbury (1998) rightly stated that, despite the emergence of numerous second/foreign language (L2) acquisition theories and teaching methods over the years, teachers have yet adhered to the more traditional grammar oriented methods. He claims that while teachers have never abandoned instructional approaches based on grammar, newer approaches have not made any lasting impression on the current status of English language teaching. Studies such as Burns (1990), Kumaravadivelu (2006) and Nunan (1987) have also suggested that although teachers may declare commitment to a particular method or approach such as Communicative Language Teaching, the issues that underlie these approaches are rarely practiced in the classroom. Classroom teaching therefore seems to carry on unaffected by the development on the theoretical and research front.

Teachers' beliefs strongly affect not only how they teach (Richards & Lockhart, 1994), but also what and how much students learn (Calderhead, 1996). Research (e.g. Johnson, 1994) suggests that a teacher's prior learning experiences greatly contribute to the formation of beliefs about the issues of learning and teaching. As beliefs are transferred to novice teachers by teachers of a past generation, and teachers prefer to teach in the way they themselves were taught (Lortie, 1975), it appears to be a self-perpetuating system. If an educational system is to revitalize and teachers are to adopt new and better positions, it is vital that teachers change their beliefs. In this study, however, instead of focusing on the ways that teachers' practices may be affected by their beliefs, the underlying individual factors which can shape and influence teachers' grammar learning and teaching beliefs are targeted. The construct of creativity has increasingly attracted the attention of practitioners in the field.

The significance of creativity in education has been greatly insisted on (Iakovos, 2011). Creativity is a capability through which one amalgamate concepts which normally are not seen as related in to one another; so that practical novel ideas or answers can be created (Mednick, 1962; Ansburg, 2000). Creativity as a mental construct is a notion which has a long history in this field due to the fact that it impacts both language teaching and learning (Cole & Sugioka & Lynch, 1994; Albert & Kormos, 2004).It is important to be well familiar with such individual distinctions as they can be utilized to foretell future acts of people such as their academic achievement or their language achievement (e.g., Naderi, Abdullah, Aizan, Sharir, & Kumar, 2009; Otto, 1998). Thus, creativity which implicitly includes, flexibility, risk-taking, unconventionality, imagination and creating new categorizations and systematizations of knowledge (Sternberg, 1985), it can be a factor which affects second language acquisition.

The overall aim of this study therefore is to explore the connections between teachers' beliefs, and their creativity. It is specifically concerned with investigating the process of change that teachers are expected to undergo as a result of their creative acts. In particular, this investigation seeks to answer the following research question:

1. To what extent Iranian EFL teachers' grammar learning and teaching beliefs correspond to their creativity level?

Literature Review

Related Studies on teachers' creativity

In literature various definitions exist for creative thinking, and what creativity is. Karkockiene (2005) points out that:" there is no agreement on what creativity actually is". All the scholars agree that individual creativity is a highly complex phenomenon. Berman (1995) asserts that:" the more studies on the subject of creativity, the more complex and bewildering it seems, and the closer one comes to accepting Freud's conclusion that it simply cannot be understood" (as cited in Buchanan, 1990, p. 14). All the definitions proposed for creativity highly depend on the domain approach in which it was defined as well as its context. The notion of creativity deals with variant but relevant phenomena such as "the creative performance or product, the creative person, the creative situation, the creative process, and the

Received:16 January 2018/Accepted:9 April 2018/Published:1 June 2018

creative potential" (Brown, 1989; Lubart; 1994; as cited in Albert and Kormos, 2011, p.75). Matsouka et al. (2003) state that creativity is a trait which has different dimensions and can be measured as either a creative style or a personality trait. Based on Abutalebi and Costa (2008) definition, it is a unique and secret ability of the brain which has not been fully discovered.
Other scholars have also defined this concept in a way which suits the purpose of this study. For instance, Chance (1986, p.5) defines it as ones "... ability to analyze facts, generate and organize ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments and solve problems". Creativity is "to bring into being or form out of nothing" and "the creative process… refers to the sequence of thoughts and actions that leads to novel, adaptive productions" Martin (2000, p. 52). Creativity is also associated with new modes of observing existing problems, or with looking at first hand opportunities. It is pointed out that several characteristics which are related to creativity. These include: a) absence of conventionality, b) being brilliant, c) refined sense of taste and creating imaginary mental images, d) being able to decide and flexibility, e) keenness of perception (in questioning social norms), and f) inner urge for fulfillment and acknowledgment.

The main relationship between language learning and creative thinking is that it is first observed in the very first steps of learning. As a matter of fact, to quote Chomsky (1966) "Every language user is linguistically creative" this sentences clarifies the relationship between creativity and language usage. "The nature of language is such that the vast majority of utterances produced or heard are done so for the first time. Most of what we hear and speak are created rather than recalled from memory" (Baghaei, and Riasati, 2013). Thus, it can be concluded that all individuals possess creative thinking, though it can be acquired, exercised and improved by particular techniques, and by eliminating some boundaries (Baghaei, and Riasati, 2013). According to Craft, Jeffrey, and Leibling (2001), there are two types of creativity. The first type of creativity is the one which is observable in famous and talented people such as Mozart, Picasso, and Einstein. The second type is not specific to gifted and talented ones and does belong to creative and innovative outbursts which have had big influence on society, rather it is mentally and is an ability through which one finds new and innovative solutions for everyday problems. This second type is suitable for the educational sectors (Baghaei, and Riasati, 2013).

Related studies on teachers' beliefs

While much can be gained from research on teacher beliefs in mainstream education, it is necessary to establish a similar research base that is unique to L2 education. Such explorations are necessary not only to understand how L2 teachers' thinking, decisions and planning affect their classroom practices, but are also essential, as Johnson (1994) notes, if L2 teacher education programs are to integrate information about the cognitive dimension of L2 teaching into the content of teacher education programs.
It has been only relatively recently that L2 education researchers began to recognize the importance of exploring the cognitive dimensions of teachers' thoughts, attitudes and decisions, and how they may affect the nature of instruction (e.g. Freeman 1989; Johnson 1990). Research on L2 teacher cognition started to appear in the 1990s, the number of studies increasing towards the end of the decade, and continuing to do so in the new millennium. In his review of research on language teacher cognition, Borg (2003) notes that between 1976 and 2002, 64 studies have been published in this field. Most of the research does not examine teacher cognition in relation to a specific curricular area, but focuses on more general processes such as knowledge growth and change or planning and decision making.
In terms of research design, data collection methods and the number of teachers involved, the studies are diverse. Many (e.g. Johnson 1996; Borg 1998) provide detailed case studies of individual teachers while others (e.g. Richards, 2005; Peacock 2001) report on large scale surveys of teachers' beliefs. Methods of data collection utilized in these studies include questionnaires (e.g. Mac Donald,Badger et al. 2001), teachers' retrospective commentaries on their instructional decisions (e.g. Farrell 1999), repertory grid

Received:16 January 2018/Accepted:9 April 2018/Published:1 June 2018

data (e.g. Sendan and Roberts 1998), video based stimulated recall (e.g. Woods, 1996), interviews (e.g. Borg 2001) and classroom observations of teacher's practices (e.g. Borg 1999).Several themes can be identified in this body of research. Three of these, which relate to the present study, will be dealt with in this review: (a) beliefs in relation to classroom practice; (b) beliefs in relation to teacher education; and (c) beliefs in relation to the teaching and learning of grammar.

Methodology

Participants

In order to uncover Iranian EFL teachers' grammar learning beliefs and their creativity level, a sample of 92 EFL teachers teaching at Language institutes and universities in Shiraz, Iran was selected through availability sampling method. They were both male and female teachers. The participants were divided into two groups based on their creativity score, high and low group. Out of 92, 24 were assigned into high group and 36 into low group. The other 32 participants were excluded from further statistical analysis.

Instruments

English Language Teaching Creativity Quotient (ELTCQ) Questionnaire

It was developed by Albert Rayan which consists of 30 items in a 3-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree", "agree to a certain extent" "disagree". To obtain the level of the teacher's creativity, all the scores were added up for all 30 questions. A score of 120 – 150 suggests that the participant possesses a high potential level for creativity. Scores which were within 100 - 120 shows that the participant possesses above-average potential of creativity. A score of 75 – 100 shows average potential. Finally, a score that is below 75 suggests that the participant has a lower level of creativity.

Grammar beliefs questionnaire (GBQ)

A seven page questionnaire revised and developed by Mohamed (2006) was used in this study in order to elicit teachers' beliefs about different aspects of grammar learning and teaching. It consisted of a mix of close- and open-ended questions. It was divided into four separate parts Part D which was made up of 35 statements about the teaching and learning of grammar, was selected and used.The respondents were required to rate each statement on a given five point scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The 35 statements which reflect some of the key issues in the field, obtained from reviewing the literature, were categorized according to the following:

1. The importance of teaching grammar
2. Approaches to teaching grammar
3. Feedback and error-correction
4. Readiness to learn grammar
5. Arguments against teaching grammar

Data collection procedure

The two questionnaire was administered simultaneously either in person or through E-mails. The teachers were requested to answer in 20 minutes. The participants were also provided with some explanations about the purpose of the study in order to enhance the validity of their responses. They were told that there is no obligation for participation in this study and their participation is completely voluntary

Data analysis procedure

The following statistical procedures were adopted in order to analyze the collected data:

1. Cronbach Alpha will be utilized to decide on the internal consistency of the questionnaires

Received:16 January 2018/Accepted:9 April 2018/Published:1 June 2018

2. Multivariate analysis of variance was used to answer the research question of the study.

Findings

As mentioned before, two questionnaires were administered in this study. In order to determine the internal consistency (reliability) of the questionnaires, Cronbach alpha was used. The results are provided in Table 1. Based on the findings, both of reliabilities computed were above 0.7 (Note that a reliability score of 0.7 or above is considered convenient or highly reliable.). This entails that the questionnaires drawn on in this study were all reliable and accordingly suitable to be used as instruments in this study.

Table 1. Reliability analysis

Statistics / Scale	**Cronbach Alpha**	**No of Items**	**No. of Participants**
Grammar beliefs scale	0.838	35	92
Teacher creativity questionnaire	0.887	30	92

In order to answer the research question one-way MANOVA was employed. The **Multivariate Tests** (table 2) is where the actual result of the one-way MANOVA can be found. One should first inspect the second Effect, labelled "**level**", and the **Wilks' Lambda row**. It can be seen from the table that we have a "**Sig.**" value of .000, which means $p < .0005$. Therefore, we can conclude that creative and non-creative teachers do not significantly differ with respect to their grammar learning and teaching beliefs.

Table 2. Multivariate Test

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.998	18486.221[b]	8.000	283.000	.000	.998
	Wilks' Lambda	.002	18486.221[b]	8.000	283.000	.000	.998
	Hotelling's Trace	522.579	18486.221[b]	8.000	283.000	.000	.998
	Roy's Largest Root	522.579	18486.221[b]	8.000	283.000	.000	.998
level	Pillai's Trace	.453	29.285[b]	8.000	283.000	.000	.453
	Wilks' Lambda	.547	29.285[b]	8.000	283.000	.000	.453
	Hotelling's Trace	.828	29.285[b]	8.000	283.000	.000	.453
	Roy's Largest Root	.828	29.285[b]	8.000	283.000	.000	.453

Received:16 January 2018/Accepted:9 April 2018/Published:1 June 2018

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects should also be checked to determine the significance of the differences among all dependent variables, issues of learning and teaching grammar. The results are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3.Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
level	**The importance of teaching grammar**	.956	1	.956	9.470	.001	.022
	Approaches to teaching grammar	1.766	1	1.866	10.281	.001	.031
	Feedback and error-correction	2.986	1	2.986	10.161	.000	.024
	Readiness to learn grammar	18.135	1	18.135	113.061	.000	.202
	Arguments against teaching grammar	2.861	1	2.861	18.251	.000	.052

The results of Table 3 shows that highly creative and lowly creative teachers' grammar learning and teaching beliefs are significantly different regarding all 5 issues. What one can infer from these findings is that have got different approaches to correct errors, different techniques to teach grammar and different ideas regarding the importance of grammar in SLA.

Conclusion and Discussion

As an attempt to better understand the underlying motives of teachers' beliefs and views regarding instructional issues, the study was designed and conducted to determine if teachers' levels of creativity influence their beliefs about issues of grammar learning and teaching. The findings of this study revealed that higher levels of creativity lead different perspectives towards grammar learning and teaching. To put in into other words, higher and lower creative teachers hold significantly different conceptions of grammar teaching and learning. Such findings can be partly attributed to the fact that creative teachers are more involved in the process of theorizing from practice therefore they form deeper insights of learners' contextual needs.

Teachers' stated beliefs and views are, however, sometimes not in harmony with their actual practices. In contrast to Iranian teachers' reports of the adherence to communicative methodology in the survey samples, observational data revealed that teachers followed a transmission approach. Grammar teaching involved a routinized pattern of rule explanation followed by practice exercises. A student's ability to correctly complete an exercise was taken to be evidence of successful learning.

Received:16 January 2018/Accepted:9 April 2018/Published:1 June 2018

References

Abutalebi, J., & Cosat, A. (2008). Editoal, acquisition, processing and loss of L2: Functional, cognitive and neural perspectives. Journal of Neurolinguistics, 21, 473-476.

Baghaei, S., Riasati M. J. (2013). An Investigation into the Relationship between Teachers' Creativity and Students' Academic Achievement: A Case Study of Iran EFL Context. Middle East Journal of Scientific Research; 14 (12): 1576-1580.

Borg, M. (2001). Teachers' beliefs. ELT Journal, 55(2), 186-187.

Borg, S. (1999). Studying teacher cognition in second language grammar teaching.

System, 27(1), 19-31.

Borg, S. (1998). Teachers' pedagogical systems and grammar teaching: a qualitative study. TESOL Quarterly, 32(1), 9-38.

Chance, P., (1986). Thinking in the Classroom: A survey of programs. New York: Teachers College / Columbia University.

Johnson, K. E. (1992). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices during literacy instruction for non-native speakers of English. Journal of Reading Behavior, 24(1), 83-108.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). Maximising learning potential in the communicative classroom. ELT Journal, 47(1), 12-21.

Iakovos, T. (2011). Critical and Creative Thinking in the English Language Classroom. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 1(8), 82-86.

MacDonald, M., Badger, R., & White, G. (2001). Changing values: what use are theories of language learning and teaching? Teaching & Teacher Education,17(8), 949-963.

Martin, E. (2000). Creativity in Organizations. Retrieved October 4, 2009 from Suite101: http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/volunteerism/42389

Peacock, M. (2001). Pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs about second language learning: a longitudinal study. System, 29, 177-195.

Richards, J. C. (2005). Professional development for language teachers. Cambdrige: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1994). Reflective teaching in second language classrooms: Cambridge University Press.

Sendan, F., & Roberts, J. (1998). Orhan: a case study in the development of a student teacher' personal theories. Teachers & Teaching: Theory & Practice, 4, 229-244.

Woods, D. (1996). Teacher cognition in language teaching: beliefs, decision-making, and classroom practice. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Received:16 January 2018/Accepted:9 April 2018/Published:1 June 2018