

Practices in Less Commonly Taught Languages: Factors that Shape Teachers' Beliefs and Guide Their Practices

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, the researcher investigated teachers' perceptions about effective teaching and learning methodologies and discovered the factors that shape teachers' beliefs and lead them to prefer certain methodologies. Data was collected through interviews of Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Pashto, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Persian teachers (N=25) and their adult students, ten per teacher (N=241) at institutions of higher education in Southern California. In general, the teachers had similar views about effective teaching strategies and similar factors influenced their views- all the teachers emphasized the languages they teach differ from commonly taught languages; and, therefore, teaching and learning strategies should also be different. Knowing the factors that shape teachers' beliefs significantly contributes to the field of teacher education. In particular, educators will become more cognizant of content to include in their teacher training program curriculum to better influence teachers and alter their instructional methodologies.

Keywords: LCTL, teachers' beliefs, teaching foreign languages, teaching Arabic, teaching Dari, teaching Persian

Introduction

The demand for foreign language teaching and learning is increasing in the United States, and more schools are offering language classes (Charmey, 2009; Skorton & Altschuler, 2012). However, a shortage of foreign language teachers has always been a matter of concern. In an effort to cope with this problem, schools have begun hiring foreign language teachers from abroad on contracts for a maximum of three-year service (Charmey, 2009). But, how these teachers are being trained and how qualified they are to teach, is another issue. Through interviews with foreign-born teachers (N=25) of Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Pashto, Filipino, Japanese, Korean and Persian and collection of students' responses to an open-ended questionnaire, this study investigated teachers' perceptions about effective teaching and learning methodologies. In most cases, teachers hired from abroad hold preconceived beliefs about effective teaching and learning strategies. They are not familiar with the U.S. education system and contemporary world language pedagogy—shifting the focus from teaching to learning. A majority of those teachers use the traditional teaching methodologies of grammar translation and audio-lingual. They focus instruction on knowledge about the language (grammar) rather than proficiency (real-life application) (ACTFL, 2012; Florence, 2011).

Johnson (1992) argues that preconceived beliefs, established early in life, about teaching and learning guide teachers' classroom practices (Johnson, 1992). Teachers who have completed their schooling abroad traditionally (grammar-based instruction) are more likely to use “banking education” – a concept presented by Paulo Freire (1993) where classes are highly teacher-centered and students are considered the “depository” that needs to be filled with knowledge (Johnston & Janus, 2003).

Furthermore, according to Freeman (2002) and Horwitz (1988), pre-established beliefs can limit a teacher's ability to be critical of grammar-based teaching in a classroom environment. Borg (2003) adds, there is disparity in teacher's beliefs regarding foreign language education. He based his conclusion on the findings from analysis of

64 scholarly works from the field of foreign and second language teaching. Overall, researchers conclude that teacher training programs have little influence on teachers' pre-established beliefs about teaching and learning (Borg, 2003; Freeman & Brookhart, 1992; Freeman, 1988, Johnson, 1994; Lortie, 1975; Nurmich, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Saydee, 2016; Verloo et al., 2001).

Teacher educators must focus on why teachers generally do not implement content learned in teacher training programs in their classrooms. Understanding teachers' justifications for what they deem effective instructional methodology can offer new insight into the field of education and inform teacher educators on what elements to consider when designing and developing teacher training programs for teachers of less commonly taught languages.

Literature Review

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) defines "best practices" as those teaching methodologies that emerge out of communicative language teaching approaches and are informed by recent theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (ACTFL, 2012). Therefore, the literature review begins with (1) the major theories of SLA (i.e., behaviorist, nativist, and interactionist theories) and (2) reveals teachers' beliefs about pedagogical strategies and their relationship to classroom practices.

1. The Major Theories of Second Language Acquisition

- a. Behaviorists maintain that all learning, including language learning, is a matter of responding to external stimuli. The behaviorist theory of language is primarily concerned with spoken language. Behaviorists believe that spoken language takes priority when learning a language, as many languages do not have a written form. They also see language learning as a matter of habit formed through the establishment of a system of reinforcement and reward (Demirezen, 1988; Skinner, 1992). Behaviorists believe that people, especially babies,

learn their native language by copying others around them and forming habits. Rewards and approval from adults cause children to make changes and align their speech with that of their community in the same way that the lack of rewards or approval deter children from using certain words or sentences (Demirezen, 1988).

The behaviorist school of thought has influenced language teaching approaches by focusing more on grammar translation and audio-lingual methods. In the grammar translation and the audio-lingual methods, grammar plays a central role in teaching and learning a language. In these approaches grammar is taught deductively, students memorize vocabulary and translate passages. Wong and VanPatte (2003) defined grammar-based and audio-lingual (GBAL) language teaching as approaches that originate from behaviorism. For instance, in the GBAL method student errors must be corrected immediately; otherwise it is assumed that students will build the habit of repeating the same errors. A typical audio-lingual method lesson begins with a dialogue followed by mechanical drills, and then transitions to drill-based activities (Celce-Murcia, 1991).

- b. However, nativists such as Chomsky (1965), suggest that a language can be acquired only because humans possess an innate or biological language acquisition system, or a Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Interactionist theories view SLA as a social process, explaining that learners acquire a language more effectively when they interact with the native speakers of that language (Swain & Deters, 2007). Language teachers vary in their perspectives about teaching and learning, depending on which view of SLA they ascribe their beliefs.
- c. The Interactionist school of thought emphasizes the role of social interaction in language development. The theory explains that a language is best learned and acquired when learners interact socially, culturally, and linguistically with

native speakers of the language. Lev Vygotsky (1986), the founder of this school of thought found language particularly fundamental in cognitive development since ideas are transmitted through words (Vygotsky, 1986). One of the main tenets of Vygotsky's theory (1986) is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He described it as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 187). ZPD is the stage of development where a child is close to independence but still requires some help from an adult or from a more experienced peer. Interactionist perspectives have greatly influenced approaches to teaching foreign languages including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

The CLT approach refers to the processes that facilitate language learning in communicative ways such as expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning in the social and cultural context of the language (Savignon, 2002). CLT enables students to interact with native speakers of a language to make meanings, obtain information, and ask for clarification. CLT is an outcome-driven, task-based, and learner-centered approach to teaching (Savignon, 2002; Startalk, 2014).

ACTFL defines knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom as the essence of effective human-to-human interaction. However, most language instruction focuses on "how" (grammar) and "what" (vocabulary), ignoring the "why, to whom, when" part of a language (ACTFL, 2012: p. 3). In other words, students must gain sociolinguistic competence to be able to understand what is accepted or not accepted socially and culturally in the target language (Ma, 2009). Some instructors believe that CLT is exclusively speaking in face-to-face settings and that this teaching approach denies the role of grammar in language learning (Savignon, 2002; Thompson, 1996). For example, Fox (1993) studied 147 graduate teaching assistants of

French and found that they preferred grammar-based instruction over CLT. While CLT does not deny the role of grammar in language learning, it does move away from purely grammar-based styles of instruction (Ma, 2009). Ma supported the concept of CLT and argues that grammar must be taught inductively. Learners learn the structure of a language when grammar is included in instruction in a meaningful way – being taught in the context of a dialogue, not just through drills (Canale & Swain, 1980; Ellis, 1997; Lightbown & Spada 1993).

2. Teachers' Beliefs about Pedagogical Strategies and Their Relationship to Classroom Practice

Pajares (1992) cited Van Fleet's case study (1979) and claimed a teacher uses his/her prior learner-experiences to form his/her beliefs about education, which in turn influences his/her professional life. The case study revolved around an eight-year-old child playing teacher in her room and pretending that her dolls were her students. The child held chalk in her fingers and ordered her students (dolls) to pay attention. Van Fleet concluded the child was exhibiting and developing her beliefs about teaching and such imitation at a learners-stage can lead to an introduction of education-based beliefs.

After studying the beliefs of 25 ESL teachers about teaching and learning languages, Johnson (1992) claimed that teachers' early-life experiences as learners guide their teaching approaches. Nurmich (1996) agrees with and expands upon Johnson's work. He analyzed 26 diaries of ESL teachers who were enrolled in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) master programs. The teachers were asked to keep the diaries to reflect, among other things, on the factors that influenced their teaching methodologies (p. 131). Based on the diary data, and referring to Lortie's (1975) concept of "apprenticeship of observation", Numrich argued that teachers tend to replicate the teaching methods that they themselves were exposed to as students.

Moreover, another study was conducted by Farrell (1999) which observed and analyzed the beliefs of English language teachers in Singapore. This study focused on pre-service teachers' past experiences as students of English. Instructors were asked to discuss their implemented inductive or deductive approaches when teaching grammar in a formal setting. The results of the study indicated that some instructors had adopted the approaches that they were exposed to as students themselves. The irony of the study was that these strategies were adopted even though some of these teachers described the approaches as uninteresting and tedious drills.

Through the documentation of different perceptions among foreign language teachers on teaching and learning, Bell (2005) studied the behaviors and attitudes of 457 teachers. The study revealed a discrepancy in teacher's beliefs about SLA theories despite all the participants being members of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

In an exploratory study, Brown (2009) compared teachers' beliefs (n=49) with their students' beliefs (n=1409). Interestingly, the results indicated more variance among teachers than students. Teachers in the study were more likely to favor embedding grammar into lessons while their students preferred to learn grammar through explicit instruction. (Brown, 2009).

Research on teachers' beliefs and practices indicates that there is a difference in what teacher education deems necessary for novice teachers and what teacher trainees view as necessary (Florence, 2011; Nurmich, 1996). Kagan (1992) argued that foreign language teacher trainees enter teacher training programs with an inappropriate and unrealistic understanding of teaching; and teacher training programs have been ineffective in influencing perceptions about education. Borg (2003) and Freeman (2002) agreed and added that no clear evidence has demonstrated teacher training programs impact teachers' behaviors and in-class practices - although they may enable teachers to reconceptualize their understanding of teaching practices.

Researchers have extensively documented teachers' beliefs and how those beliefs influence and shape their instructional decisions and practices (Algozzine, Kissau, & Yon, 2012). Also, research has demonstrated that teacher training programs have little impact on teachers' beliefs and, consequently, their behavior and teaching methodology. However, what is missing from the literature, especially in the area of foreign language teaching, is a thorough understanding of the factors to which teachers attribute their beliefs. While some studies have highlighted a few factors such as context and working conditions as crucial in shaping teachers' beliefs (Arakaki & Crooks, 1999; Freeman, 2002), most research has overlooked the significance of identifying the actual factors that influence their beliefs and motivate them to prefer one instructional methodology over another. The current study investigates the following research questions:

- 1) What are teachers' beliefs about the effective teaching and learning strategies in a foreign language class?
- 2) What are the factors that shape teachers' beliefs about effective teaching and learning strategies?

Theoretical Framework

The experiential learning theory of constructivism provided the contextual insight for this study. It defines knowledge as the transformation of experience and reflection on past experiences. Reflection on past experiences is the essence of this theory. Dewey believes that people form habits to adapt to their environment; once their habits do not respond to their needs, problems emerge that require reflective thinking (Dewey, 1938, Kolb 1984; Piaget, 1964; Wells, 1995). Dewey (1938) connects experiential learning to education and adds that experiential learning supports experiential education by facilitating the process of construction of knowledge. Kolb and Kolb (2005) agree and add that the learning process is dynamic and cynical in nature and occurs based on learner's preference. Thus, the experiential learning theory, which was developed to explain how adults learn, provides insight into the relationship between teachers' prior experience, beliefs, and their teaching practices.

Methodology

4.1 Participants

Twenty five foreign-born LCTL teachers, who had received their formal education in their home countries and who were teaching at the time of the study, participated in the study. The participants were teaching Arabic, Chinese, Dari/Pashto, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Persian to adult students at community colleges, universities, and private schools in Southern California (see Table 1).

Table 1: Teacher Demographics

Teacher #	Language	Age	Gender	Country of origin	Yrs. Exp.	Type of Program	No. of Students Participated
1	Arabic	41-45	F	Middle East	10+	Intensive	9
2	Persian	41-45	F	Iran	5-10	Gen. Edu.	18
3	Arabic	41-45	M	Middle East	5-10	Spe. Inter.	9
4	Dari/Pashto	41-45	M	Afghanistan	5-10	Spe. Inter.	14
5	Dari/Pashto	46+	M	Afghanistan	5-10	Spe. Inter.	16
6	Dari/Pashto	26-30	F	Afghanistan	5-10	Spe. Inter.	12
7	Dari/Pashto	26-30	M	Afghanistan	4	Intensive	17
8	Chinese	46+	F	China	5-10	Intensive	6

9	Persian	36-40	F	Iran	5-10	Gen. Edu.	4
10	Persian	41-45	F	Iran	5-10	Gen. Edu.	8
11	Persian	36-40	F	Iran	5-10	Intensive	9
12	Chinese	46+	M	China	10+	Gen. Edu.	18
13	Arabic	36-40	M	Middle East	10+	Gen. Edu.	6
14	Chinese	26-30	F	China	5-10	Gen. Edu.	11
15	Persian	46+	F	Iran	5-10	Intensive	10
16	Persian	46+	F	Iran	10+	Gen. Edu.	14
17	Dari/Pashto	46+	F	Afghanistan	5-10	Intensive	7
18	Dari/Pashto	41-45	F	Afghanistan	1-5	Intensive	6
19	Filipino	46+	M	Philippines	5-10	Gen. Edu.	8
20	Korean	46+	M	Korea	5-10	Immersion	2

21	Arabic	46+	F	Middle East	5-10	Gen. Edu.	9
22	Japanese	46+	F	Japan	10+	Other	11
23	Arabic	46+	F	Middle East	10+	Other	5
24	Arabic	18-25	F	Middle East	0	Intensive	6
25	Persian	18-25	F	Iran	1-5	Intensive	6

Gen. Edu = general education Spe. Inter. = special interest

About ten students per each teacher (N=241) also participated in the study.

4.2 *Data Collection and Procedures*

The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions to guide the interviews (a copy is attached). The interviews were conducted in English. During the 20-30 minutes interviews, the teachers explained their typical class routine, specific strategies that they believed were effective for teaching and learning languages, and their rationale for such beliefs. The researcher tried to understand the teachers' perspectives by requesting concrete examples.

The interviews were transcribed and coded, keeping the purpose of the study in mind. Categories and codes were developed and organized based on the conceptual framework, research questions, problems areas, purpose of the study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; MacQueen, 1998); and, open/emergent coding system (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Demographic data was collected from the teacher participants through administration of pen-and- paper questionnaire.

The researcher also administered an online questionnaire to the teachers' students and asked them to reflect on the instructional methodologies of their teachers. The questionnaire consisted of a short demographic section and four open-ended questions which asked students to reflect on their teacher's most and least effective teaching strategies. They were also asked to provide detailed responses and provide specific examples. Student responses were coded and categorized accordingly.

4.3 *Data Analysis and Findings*

The findings from the teacher interviews were coupled with (1) student responses to an online survey for triangulation purposes.

Research Question 1: What are teachers' beliefs about the effective teaching and learning strategies in a foreign language class?

The teachers were asked to explain the methodologies they use most frequently and less frequently in their class and explain their rationales for favoring one methodology over another. The teachers' responses were coded and the following four themes emerged:

1. *Teaching Grammar Explicitly*

Seventeen of the 25 teachers were in favor of teaching grammar explicitly. A Chinese teacher believed that students must understand Chinese grammar to produce Chinese correctly. The students' responses also revealed a similar finding. Over half of the students were in favor of learning the structure of the language through explicit instruction, which, in some cases, may require use of L1 (English, in this case) to explain concepts.

2. *Teaching Grammar Implicitly*

Eight of the 25 teachers indicated their preference for teaching grammar implicitly within some context. However, they offered various definitions of the word "context" such as discovery method, real-life, meaningful, situational, role-play, text reading, watching a movie, and background information. For instance, a Persian teacher provided the following excerpt in regard to teaching grammar in the discovery method:

TEACHER#10: I like to teach grammar in more of the discovery. We read the text, if there is a particular grammar point that comes up in the text few times then I like to focus on that ... I put up maybe 3 sentences, let's say that I am teaching present tense, I ask them what these sentences have in common and so, look at the verb, what the verb structure have in common and what do these imply, so I let them to discover the grammar; and then for the activities, I also have them use it in more communicative way, like I give them questions in present tense that they can ask each other and use verbs in the present tense to answer, they practice meaningfully.

The above excerpt indicates that, although, the teacher claimed she teaches grammar implicitly, she practices explicit instruction.

3. *Use of English*

Fifteen of the 25 teachers of the teachers in the study referred to English (student's first language) usage as an effective strategy in teaching and learning of a foreign language. These teachers believed that if they did not use English, their students would be confused and would not understand all the concepts. For instance, a Persian teacher who taught an intensive Persian course indicated:

TEACHER#11: I usually teach grammar really short, to the point, sometimes use English to teach grammar because it is really important for them to understand the concept in English format, because in Farsi it gets really confusing [if concepts are not explained in English].

A Chinese teacher added that she uses English to make sure students know and understand the concepts. Two Persian teachers indicated they employ translation methodology by providing sentences in English to their students and asking them to translate them into Persian. An Arabic teacher also believed that English plays an important role in bridging concepts with the target language. The teachers believed English usage aids foreign language teachers in teaching grammar, providing instruction for an activity, comparing and contrasting grammatical points of the target language with English, and saves instructional time. The students also believed that the use of English (L1) can facilitate learning of L2.

4. *Use of Target Language*

Seventeen of the 25 teachers referred to target language usage as an effective teaching and learning strategy that boosts student confidence and helps them learn and acquire the target language better. However, the amount of target language usage in the classroom varied among the teachers. For instance, a Chinese teacher with 5-10 years of experience teaching intensive courses disagreed with exclusive usage of the target language in class. She believed

using only the target language was difficult for teachers as well as for their students. In addition, she found that in those situations students might get confused. Another Chinese teacher shared similar thoughts and argued English usage is necessary to explain some complicated concepts. Student responses were mixed. Over half of the participants believed that exclusive use of the target language may not be an effective strategy.

Research Question 2: Factors that Shape Teachers' Beliefs about Effective Teaching and Learning Strategies

1. *Real Life Application*

Findings from eight of the 25 teachers suggest that teachers trust research findings and agree to adopt a methodology if it has real life application. Teachers usually test the applicability of proposed methodologies before embracing them. Teachers want to ensure that a particular method or strategy will prepare their students to handle real-life situations.

2. *Fixed Curriculum*

A fixed and rigid curriculum poses pedagogical constraints for some teachers. Seven of the 25 teachers described their curriculum as fixed and stated they must adhere to its contents and instructional methodologies, regardless of the applicability or non-applicability of some strategies in their class. For instance, a teacher who teaches general education Arabic courses explained that her institution imposes curriculum top-down.

3. *Uniqueness of the Language*

Eight of the 25 teachers believed the language they teach is unique to other commonly taught languages, and most of the instructional methodologies considered "best practices" may not apply to the particular language that they teach. For instance, an Arabic teacher believed that Arabic grammar must be memorized because Arabic is "a difficult language." A Persian teacher shared a

similar belief and added that Persian grammar needs to be explained explicitly in English, otherwise students will not understand the grammatical concepts of the language. On the same topic, a Chinese teacher found vocabulary retention a problem for students who learn Chinese, mostly due to the lack of cognate words in the Chinese language. The teacher further stated that some of the proposed practices based on theories of second language acquisition may not be effective in a Chinese class. He specifically referred to group activities and mentioned the Chinese language is different from commonly taught languages, such as Spanish, which have a lot in common with English. If students work in groups, they will not receive the level of scaffolding from their peers that they receive from their teachers. A Korean teacher stressed the importance of formal language. She believed that Korean American children need to learn formal language as they only get exposed to informal discourse while interacting with their parents. When these children attend college and enroll in Korean language classes, they demonstrate a lack of formal language, especially the written form. The teacher, therefore, focused on student accuracy by correcting errors. A Dari/Pashto teacher shared the same beliefs and indicated that Dari is a fast language; and when the teacher speaks it naturally, students sometimes cannot distinguish between the end of a word or phrase and the beginning of the next word or phrase. Therefore, the teacher believed that she must talk slowly. It was evident the teachers believed that the language they teach is uniquely different from other languages, especially from commonly taught languages, and consequently, the teaching methodology should also be different.

4. Preconceived Beliefs

The findings of this study are in agreement with other research that have proven pre-established beliefs continue to influence teachers' instructional practices after training. All the teachers revealed evidence of preconceived beliefs about effective and ineffective teaching and learning. As an example, a Persian teacher referred to grammar translation methodology through which she learned English in her home country and mentioned that she

learned English that way (grammar translation method) and therefore uses that same method to teach Persian to her American students.

5. *Data and Results*

Data in the form of students' learning outcomes and results were recognized as another major factor that shapes teachers' beliefs about effective and less effective teaching and learning strategies. A teacher in the study, after seeing improvement in student learning outcomes, found teaching vocabulary with audio, PowerPoint, and interactive practice effective.

6. *Student's Feedback*

Six of the 25 teachers referred to students' feedback as an important element in improving teaching and learning methodology. For instance, a Persian teacher mentioned that she asks her students every day to get a piece of paper and write "what they understand, what they struggle [with]." After reading her students' comments, she understands what elements she needs to spend more time explaining. A Chinese teacher agreed and added that she listens to her students.

7. *Teacher Training Programs*

The study found that teacher training programs shape teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning strategies and impact teacher's beliefs and consequently their instructional methodologies. Modeling, for example, can shape teachers' beliefs about a strategy. Teachers like to see and learn how a specific strategy is actually implemented. For instance, what strategies a teacher educator uses to stay in the target language at all times. A Persian teacher affirmed the importance of modeling in a teacher training program and added that modeling helps her understand how she can apply the strategy to her class.

The study further found that understanding the logic behind a methodology or activity also shapes teachers' beliefs about effective or less effective teaching and learning strategies. If teachers know the purpose for an activity, they will embrace it. For instance, A Chinese

teacher, in response to the question of what strategies he uses less frequently in his class, indicated that he does not ask his students to repeat after him because, according to him, this strategy does not engage students cognitively. In other words, the activity does not require students to think in order to respond.

5. Discussion

The researcher found homogeneity among the teachers in regard to their beliefs about effective teaching and learning strategies. The findings demonstrated that teachers primarily use an explicit method of instruction. The teachers believed that explicit instruction avoids confusion on the part of students, especially when a teacher explains the structure of the target language. Although the teachers tried to distance themselves from explicit instruction, their examples were clear evidence of explicit instruction. For instance, a Persian teacher explained that she teaches grammar in the context, such as “reading a text.” To the inquiry of the researcher, the teacher explained that if any grammatical points come up in the text, she puts them on the board and writes three similar sentences. This methodology is an example of explicit grammar teaching as the focus is on form (Stathis & Gotsch, 2013). It was evident that the teacher had a different interpretation of “teaching in the context.” This finding is crucial as it indicates that teachers have different understandings of educational terminologies.

The explicit method of instruction often requires teachers to switch to students’ first language (English, in this case) to explain grammatical aspects of the target language. Twenty four of the 25 teachers in the study indicated that they use English (student’s first language) to teach the structure of the target language. This may be due to the fact that exclusive use of the target language in the classroom often requires teachers to use different strategies to make their lesson comprehensible to students (i.e., gesturing, acting, and modeling). Thus, teachers may find it difficult to maintain target language usage and switch to English to explain structures and concepts of the target language in English.

The findings of this study further uncovered factors that influence teachers' beliefs about effective teaching and learning strategies. The literature review reveals that teachers' prior foreign language learning experiences influence their pedagogical beliefs and instructional decisions when they become teachers (Peacock, 2001). However, the researcher found additional factors such as "real life application," "fixed curriculum," "uniqueness of the language," "data and results," and "student's feedback," shape teachers' beliefs about effective/ or ineffective teaching and learning strategies.. Top-down curriculum was also found as a factor that affects teachers' beliefs. Constant implementation of the same strategy, due to the rigid nature of curricula that teachers regularly use in their classrooms, may effect teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning strategies, as actions become habits, and habits become character (Riebe, 2010). Thus, it is important to involve teachers in curriculum development from the beginning. The teachers further believed that the language that they teach is unique and methodologies that are considered "best practices" may not apply to their class. For instance, a Dari/Pashto teacher believed that the Dari language is "a fast language" and must be spoken by a teacher slowly in order for students to distinguish the beginning and end of a word. These beliefs encourage teachers to speak to their students in an unnatural way. It is, therefore, crucial for teacher educators to consider the type of language and programs that teacher-trainees teach in, and adjust their workshop curricula accordingly. One way to do so could be to group teachers based on the language and type of program that they teach in order to address their specific needs. As an example, an Arabic teacher in a general education program may need to focus more on accuracy; whereas, a teacher who teaches Arabic in intensive or special interest programs may need to focus more on exchange of information at the survival level in which accuracy may not be that important as long as the students' message is understandable. These types of groupings will provide teachers with customized training and improve the effectiveness of a teacher training workshop.

The findings also revealed that teachers prefer to see modeling at teacher training workshops. They do not like to get overwhelmed with too much information through lecture type settings that are

difficult to remember or apply to their teachings. The teachers further wanted teacher educators to connect theory to practice. In other words, teachers like to know the logic behind implementing or not implementing certain methodologies. For instance, teachers prefer to know why “repeat after me” is not an effective strategy in language teaching and learning.

The findings of this study indicate that teachers’ beliefs about effective teaching and learning methodology can be changed if teacher educators consider the factors that have been revealed in this study. However, teacher educators need to consider that it may take more than a couple of sessions for some teachers to understand the concepts and embrace what they learn at a teacher training workshop, especially those teachers who hold pre-established beliefs about effective teaching. Thus, educators should conduct regular teacher training workshops, in short intervals, to orient teachers with new teaching strategies.

5. Conclusion

Teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning strategies are similar and shaped in similar ways. The teachers in the study believed that the target language that they teach is different from other languages, especially from commonly taught languages such as English, Spanish, French, etc., therefore, teaching strategies should also be different. Teachers like to know the rationale behind using/ or not using a methodology, and also want to see results in the form of student learning outcomes before accepting and adopting a strategy as a “best practice.” This finding is aligned with the theory of experiential learning that teachers experiment and test the applicability of a method before accepting it as an effective teaching and learning strategy. The findings indicated that the teachers reflected on their experience and constructed knowledge about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a methodology after they experimented it.

The findings further suggest that teacher training programs and workshops can impact teachers’ beliefs positively, and consequently, their in-class practices, if teacher training programs and workshops consider the specific needs of each group of teacher trainees. These

findings are significant and can provide insight into teacher training education.

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Interview Protocol (Teachers)

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Teacher's # _____

1. For what purpose are your students taking your class?
2. Tell me about the last teaching session you had with your students, give me details of:
 - i. what you did
 - ii. what your students did

3. How typical was that day? (if not typical, please provide me with information about a typical day)
4. How do you teach vocabulary; if yes, how?
5. How do you teach grammar; if yes, how?
6. How do you teach culture; if yes, how?
7. Everybody has different beliefs about what is most effective instruction;
 - i. What are the specific strategies that you use in your class that you believe are effective teaching and learning strategies?
 - ii. Why do you believe that way?
 - iii. Any other strategies that you use less frequently?
8. You have mentioned in the survey questionnaire that you have attended teacher training programs.
 - i. What kind of teacher training programs have you experienced?
 - ii. What parts of the training program were the most effective?
 - iii. What parts of the training program were the least effective?
9. Do you have any further comments?

Thank you very much for your time and information.