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Iranian EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards Teaching Methods and Materials of High School English Textbooks

M. R. Atai*
M. Gheitanchian**

Abstract

Recently, interest in research on EFL teaching, CLT-based methodology and materials, and post-method pedagogy has gain momentum in the Iranian mainstream education. This study was conducted; 1) to explore EFL teachers' attitudes towards the present EFL methodologies and content of high school textbooks; 2) to examine any probable relationship between teachers' attitudes towards post method pedagogy and their students' achievement; and 3) to probe any correlation between the teachers' instructional experience and their attitudes towards the present teaching methods and materials. To this end, a questionnaire was designed to elicit EFL teachers' beliefs. The subjects were 594 Iranian EFL teachers selected from different cities all over Iran. After the administration of the questionnaire, the data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. The results indicated that: a) the Iranian EFL teachers hold different patterns of attitudes towards the dominant teaching methods and content of high school English textbooks, b) there is no relationship between the teachers' positive or negative attitudes towards post method and their students' achievement, and c) more experienced teachers' attitudes are different from the attitudes held by less-experienced ones.

Key Words: Teachers' attitudes, EFL methodology, Post method pedagogy, Reflective teaching, Students' achievement.

* - Associate Prof, Tarbiat moallem university, E-mail: atai@tmu.ac.ir

** - MA in TEFL, Khatam university, E-mail: mehmazgh@yahoo.com

Introduction

A constant stimulus for change in EFL teaching arena has been the frequently-voiced dissatisfaction with the results of the 'traditional methods'. After spending a considerable amount of time learning English in the classrooms, the learners lack the proper knowledge or ability to use English for communication. So, recent deliberations on the methodology of English language teaching have focused on the necessity of giving learners opportunities to communicate (Ellis, 2008).

The post method pedagogy is trying 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 their fluency. Learners are assumed to be partners in a cooperative venture, and they are persuaded to move toward the fulfillment of their fullest potential (Brown, 2001). Hence, it is maintained that communicative language teaching (CLT) incorporates some beliefs emphasizing a re-examination of what language aspects should be taught (Harmer, 2001); and how they should be presented to the students so as to facilitate the development of their communication potentials (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) argues, 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 and professional capabilities can both raise teachers' awareness of their current knowledge and promote their reflections on their teaching (Bartels, 2005). Of course, the teacher is not an all-knowing person and presenter of knowledge; rather s/he is a facilitator and guide (Brown, 2001; Pollard, 2005; Mccafferty, Jacobs & Iddings, 2006).

For centuries, the preferred curricula were typically those linguistically determined ones 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 as live dictionaries (Wang, Han & Liu, 2007), but CLT proponents suggest that there is more to EFL teaching than exposing the students to correct grammar (Brown, 2001). Moreover, in order to have a coherent and well-functioning curriculum, as Johnson (1989) argues, all the participants' attitudes should be taken into account in all decision-making processes. The outcome can be observable in the form of policy documents, syllabuses, programs for training teachers, materials and resources for teaching, and the act of learning and teaching. A coherent and dynamic curriculum stimulates reflective teaching on the teachers' side and motivates them to raise questions and come up with proper answers to those challenges. The questions may range from 'who the proper decision maker is and who does the job actually' to 'how these people are chosen and based on what qualifications'. Therefore, to avoid the 'danger of mismatch' between EFL teaching/learning outcomes on the one hand and the policy terms, objectives, syllabus types, and teaching methodology on the other, a coherent curriculum should incorporate the teachers' beliefs about their roles and their students' roles as well as the methodology and content of the textbooks (Johnson, 1989).

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in both researchers' community and practitioners' community to explore and make use of the mental images, thoughts and processes which L2 teachers employ while teaching (Ellis & Freeman, 2006; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Definitely, there is a need to listen to teachers' voices in understanding classroom practice (Richards, 1996; Richards & Farrell, 2005). 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 neglects the fact that almost no teachers start training for their job with blank minds and neutral attitudes. According to some researchers (Hargreaves, 1994; Freeman, 1990; Prabhu, 1992) teachers' performance in a class is shaped by "minds" and "attitudes". As Freeman (1990, cited in Clemente, 2001) maintains, attitudes are such important factors that

can be considered as the cause of teachers' either 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 roles as teachers, in spite of all the positive attitudes which they might have, logically we should expect that they devalue their counseling roles (Clemente, 2001).

In recent lines of investigations in second language teaching, as Kumuravadevelu (2006) maintains, we notice a shift toward post-method era that defines a new relationship between teachers and theorizers by pushing teachers towards the world of skills, knowledge, and autonomy. Then, by empowering teachers and giving them the pedagogical insights, they will feel confident to theorize based on their practice and practice their 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 content of high school textbooks and to examine any probable relationship between teachers' attitudes towards postmethod 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 research on instruction worldwide (Clemente, 2001). This study is particularly worthwhile because it may provide insights regarding teachers' valuable ideas as valid sources of improvements in the syllabus or any other sort of curriculum renovation. Within the context of the strictly top-down educational system of Iran, 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 those cities. The participants included in our sample comprised 594 male and female teachers with the age range of 24 to 68 years and with teaching experiences from 1 to 40 years.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire and a structured interview were utilized as instruments in this research. The questionnaire was organized in 3 sections: the first part was designed to record the relevant demographic information; the second part was intended to explore the respondents' attitudes towards teaching methods; and the third section was designed to elicit the teachers' attitudes towards the current high school textbooks. Additionally, sets of final exam grades of the students whose English teachers answered the questionnaire provided another source of data for this study.

The Questionnaire

In constructing the questionnaire for this study, as mentioned above, three major aspects were taken into consideration. The first section was intended to record the respondents' demographic information as their age, gender, field of study, university, and teaching experience. The second part included 24 questions was devoted to the searching of teachers' attitudes across teaching methods (in a 1-5 rating scale). The third section consisted of 35 items to examine the respondents' evaluation of different sections of high school English textbooks (in a 1-5 rating scale). To validate the questionnaire in terms of appropriacy, wording, and classification of items four raters (two university professors and two MA-holders) were consulted. Obviously, the questionnaire was piloted before the study and its psychometrics were calculated. The reliability of the first part of the questionnaire was estimated to be $\alpha=.6636$. Similarly, the reliability index for the second part was measured to be $\alpha=.7237$

which, again, attests to a satisfactory level of reliability for the questionnaire.

The Interview

The interview was not the main instrument for obtaining information. Rather, it was used just for cross-validating the questionnaire where the same questions as those of the questionnaire were orally asked from the interviewees. The language of the interview was Persian.

Procedure

To conduct the purposes of the present study, certain procedures were implemented. Some coordinators in different cities cooperated with the researchers in distributing and collecting the questionnaires. Out of 750 questionnaires given to the target sample, 594 questionnaires were completed and returned. The interviews were conducted by the researchers to explore the interviewees' thoughts and rationale concerning suitable teaching materials and appropriate approaches, and for cross-validating the results of the questionnaire.

Then, based on the teachers' positive and negative attitudes towards postmethod, 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 practical reasons, the questionnaires completed by the EFL teachers in Golestan province, a sub sample of our total sample, were examined to explore any variation in the data with regard to the teachers' overall attitudes towards postmethod.

Results

To examine the questions formulated earlier in this study, the data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The first question of this study was concerned with exploring EFL teachers' attitudes towards the present EFL methodologies and content of high school English textbooks. 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.

Table 1: Chi-square Test for Seven 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	

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 X² 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 significant.

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.

Table 2: Chi-square Tests for Seven Teaching Methods

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%			

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 Audiolingual 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 of high school English textbooks.

In order to explore EFL teachers' attitudes towards the current high school English textbooks, a chi-square test was utilized. Table 3 depicts the results:

Table 3: Chi-square Test for Contents of Textbooks

Choices	1	2	3	4	5
Frequencies	939 4%	7524 36%	2178 10%	8697 41.8%	1318 6.3%
Chi-square	13138.27		P<. 05	DF 4	X ² -critical 9.49

Key: 1-strongly agree 2-agree 3- neutral 4- disagree 5- strongly disagree

As the above table shows, the observed chi-square value for comparing the attitudes expressed by the EFL high school teachers, 13138.72, with 4 degrees of freedom at .05 level of significance, is greater than the critical value of X², 9.49. It can be concluded that the attitudes expressed by teachers towards the contents of the high school English textbooks have not been random, and the differences between the distributions are meaningful. Consequently, EFL teachers hold different attitudes towards present EFL teaching materials of high school textbooks. As can be seen, 49% of EFL teachers disagree on the contents of the textbooks, 10% of the subject pool are neutral, and only 40% of them have positive attitudes towards the English textbooks.

In order to examine the respondents' attitudes towards each part of high school English textbooks, six separate chi-square tests were run. The results are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Chi-square Tests for Parts of the Textbooks

Contents	Choices					Observed Unexpected End of Formulated chi-square	DF	Critical Chi -square
	1	2	3	4	5			
Vocabulary	266	171	158	168	268	2678.99	4	9.49
	5%	36%	12%	39%	5%			
Reading	112	103	145	222	321	3486.49	4	9.49
	2%	24%	11%	53%	7%			
Grammar	146	173	148	208	253	3460.96	4	9.49
	3%	36%	10%	43%	5%			
Conversation	200	155	134	133	93	2655.76	4	9.49
	5%	43%	9%	37%	2%			
Pronunciation	157	110	149	337	26	2118.45	4	9.49
	8%	61%	8%	18%	1%			
Textbook	58	358	154	850	357	1565.51	4	9.49
	3%	20%	8%	47%	20%			

P < .05

Key : 1-strongly agree 2- agree 3- neutral 4-disagree 5- strongly disagree

As the above table depicts, EFL high school teachers have different attitudes towards each part of the English textbook materials. The observed chi-square values for each part are greater than the critical values.

It is interesting to note that 60% of the EFL teachers don't approve of the reading part of textbooks, while only 26% have positive attitudes towards this part. On the other hand, 69% of the teachers are positive about the pronunciation modules, while 19% have negative attitudes towards them. In the other parts of the textbooks i.e. the

vocabulary part, the grammar part, and the conversation section little difference in the teachers' attitudes is observed. However, in general 67% of the subject pool disagrees on the appropriateness of the whole textbooks.

The second research question addressed the probable relationship between EFL teachers' attitudes towards postmethod condition and their students' achievement. Therefore, for a subpart of our sample, as mentioned earlier in the method section, profiles of the students 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 5.

Table 5: T-test on Students' Achievement and Teachers' Attitudes towards postmethod

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				

As it can be seen in Table 5, 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 postmethod ($X=14.65$), and those who hold negative attitudes in this regard ($X=14.31$). Accordingly, the findings show that teachers' attitudes towards postmethod do not have any significant impact on the achievement of their students.

In order to answer the last research question, examining the correlation between EFL teachers' teaching experience and their attitudes towards teaching methods and materials of high school English textbooks, the teachers' teaching experience at high schools were taken into consideration. Then, the teachers were divided into two groups; the first group consisting of the teachers with more than 15 years of teaching experience, and the second including the teachers

with fewer than 15 years of teaching experience. Then a chi-square test was utilized to explore the correlation between their teaching experience and their attitudes across teaching methods. Table 6 depicts the results.

Table 6: Chi-square for Teachers' Experience/Teaching Methods

Experience	Choices				
	1	2	3	4	5
+15	2248 16%	3035 21.5%	561 4%	1701 12.1%	260 1.8
-15	1914 13.6%	256 18.2%	378 2.7%	1274 9%	156 1.1%
Chi-square 422.811 25.77570 P<.05 DF 4 X ² -critical 9.49					

Table 6 shows that the observed chi-square value is 25.77, which is greater than the critical X², 9.49, with 4 degrees of freedom and .05 level of significance. Thus, there is a relationship between the teachers' teaching experience and their attitudes towards dominant teaching methods.

Accordingly, in order to examine any correlation between the teachers' teaching experience and their attitudes across the contents of high school EFL textbooks, another chi-square test was run. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Chi-square for Teachers' Experience/Textbooks Materials

Experience	Choices				
	1	2	3	4	5
+15	388 1.9%	4220 20.4%	1324 6.4%	4647 22.5%	874 4.2%
-15	551 2.7%	3304 16%	854 4.1%	4050 19.6%	444 2.1%
Chi-square 179.54879 P<.05 DF 4 X ² -critical 9.49					

As Table 7 depicts, the observed chi-square value is 179.54 which with 4 degrees of freedom and at .05 level of significance, is greater than the critical X², 9.49. This result confirms more experienced

teachers' attitudes are different from the attitudes held by less experienced ones.

Discussion

The results of the chi-square tests revealed a significant difference in Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the dominant EFL methodologies and content of high school English textbooks. One probable justification is that Iranian EFL teachers are deprived of highly effective teacher education and teacher training programs to be informed of the latest effective pedagogy. As Gradman (1971) maintains, the ideal components which should be included in the teacher preparation programs are: knowledge of language, language acquisition, historical and current methods of language teaching, materials and error analysis, measurement and testing, and the prerequisite of competence in English for the teachers who are non-native speakers of the language. While, based on the research which was done by the researchers in the Ministry of Education, and having an interview with one of the authorities (i.e. an expert in the center for compiling high school textbooks), they found out during the history of EFL teaching in the country, no specific syllabus design and curriculum planning and no teachers' manual were designed for EFL teachers at high schools. The only reference was a handbook prepared by Zareii and Anani in 1993, containing some guidelines for teaching different skills using different teaching methods-pre-CLT to post-CLT.

In addition, many in-service programs fail to demonstrate a practical, successful and coherent models and approaches to the teachers to bridge the gap between theory and practice. These programs should support teachers' peer learning and encourage them to participate in in-service programs more often. This may arouse more interaction on the teachers' side which, in turn, will foster the development of their critical thinking that motivate them to become classroom researchers to put their practice into theory and practice their theories.

On the other hand, in the process of compiling the textbooks, the authorities and textbook writers do not consider teachers' ideas and perceptions very seriously. This might make teachers biased. While, in

the modern age, teachers' understanding of the materials, their thoughts and beliefs are important since they are always in close contact with students and aware of their needs and what they bring into instruction and how easily they learn. Alongside of inserting CLT-based materials and methodologies in the textbooks, teachers should be trained on how to apply them.

On the other hand, the t-test conducted to probe the second research question indicated no correlation between the teachers' positive or negative attitudes towards postmethod and their students' achievement. Maybe, teachers' positive attitude towards postmethodology is not necessarily indicative of their following CLT procedures in their classrooms. 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.

Furthermore, the results of the last chi-square tests mentioned above revealed a significant difference between more-experienced and less-experienced teachers' attitudes towards the present teaching methods and materials. This may indicate the point that although more experienced teachers are expected to be the backbone of the teaching staff in the EFL education, they are lacking adequate professionalism and updated teaching skills. Apparently, as long as the 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, and teaching techniques and methodologies. In other words, more follow-up research should address the new approaches to EFL teacher education. According to Velez-Rendon (2002), " Reflective approach views prospective teachers as active agents of their learning-to-teach and provides the groundwork for continuous self-development." Therefore, even experienced teachers still need to maintain and improve their language skills and to familiarize themselves with the current educational trends, fresh teaching methodologies, and recent research conducted in the EFL field (Peyton, 1992).

Conclusion

Briefly stated, this study aimed to explore the Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes towards dominant teaching methods and high school English textbooks, to observe any existing relationship between EFL teachers' attitudes towards postmethod and their students' achievement, and to investigate any probable correlation between EFL teachers' teaching experience and their attitudes towards teaching methods and materials of textbooks. The results indicate EFL teachers' different attitudes towards dominant teaching methods and contents of high school English textbooks and show no relationship between the teachers' attitudes towards postmethod and their students' achievement. Also, the findings indicated that attitudes of more-experienced teachers are different from attitudes of less-experienced ones.

According to Beh-Afarin and Mirhassani (2004), considerable attention has been paid to the process of training EFL teachers all over the world. Points such as teacher background and competence, content of teacher training, political influences, cultural appropriateness, as well as processes and methodologies of training programs have been broadly discussed. However, in Iran, comprehensive EFL teacher education programs have not been implemented (*ibid*). Not many teacher training courses are capable of achieving the objective of improving the abilities of the trainees to implement communicative courses. In-service teacher training programs, then, have to take into consideration the need to improve the language command of their trainees as well as their professional skills.

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