Relationship between EFL In-service Teachers' Language Learning Strategies and their Beliefs toward Teaching Methodologies

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Abstract

By the advent of new theories and approaches toward language teaching, a lot of attention has been paid to the role of those approaches on language learners. Superiority of psychology and linguistics in the area of language teaching urged scholars to develop new theories and techniques through a defined procedure. Most of the time the role of teacher's experience as learner has been neglected. The present study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between EFL In-service teachers' language learning strategies and their beliefs toward teaching methodologies. To find the relationship, a questionnaire was applied. The questionnaire in the study consists of three measures: (1) the individual background; (2) strategy inventory for language learning (Version 7.0 for ESL/EFL, Oxford, 1990); and, (3) beliefs toward English teaching methodologies (Chen, 2005). It was given to 252 in-service English teachers (136 female, 116 male) majoring in TEFL. To analyze the quantitative data of the present study, descriptive as well as inferential analysis including ANOVA and Pearson's correlations were used to investigate the relationships between language learning strategies and teaching beliefs toward EFL methodologies. Based on the teachers' answers to the questionnaire, there was a meaningful relationship between language learning strategies and teacher's methodology. The information provided in the present research can be helpful for teachers, policy holders of institutes and material developers. This study has also some implications for the researchers interested in teacher's education studies.

Keywords: language learning strategies, methodology, in-service course

1. Introduction

There has been an increasing interest toward language learning and language learners since 1970s with the emergence of cognitive revolution, and since then great attention has been paid to language learning strategies. The pattern shifted from behaviorism to cognitive science in psychology and education. Research led to efforts to explain the cognitive processes in all aspects of learning, including language learning. Initial studies of language learning focused on describing externally observable behaviors of language learners, followed by attempts to label strategic behaviors and ultimately to categorize those strategic behaviors and link them to language proficiency.

Applied research on language learning strategies investigates the feasibility of helping students become more effective language learners by teaching them some of the learning strategies that descriptive studies have identified as characteristic of the "good language learner" (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975). Learning styles are the general approaches – for example, global or analytic, auditory or visual –that students use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject. These styles are "the overall patterns that give general direction to learning behavior" (Cornett, 1983, p. 9).

In studies of good language learners, researchers mentioned lots of various behaviors that they referred to globally as strategies; some managed to describe strategies more specifically. Learning strategies have been described (Wenden & Rubin, 1987) as "any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information" (p.19). it was argued (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992) that "learning strategies are intentional behavior and thoughts that learners make use of during learning in order to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information" (p.209).

Learning strategies were also illustrated (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) as "special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p.1). Hence, learning strategies were seen as special ways of processing information that improve comprehension, learning, or retention of the information. Whereas prior descriptions of learning strategies paid more attention to products of learning and behaviors reflecting unobservable cognitive processes, definitions eventually provided clearer understanding of what learners think and do during

language learning. Furthermore, it was stated (Cohen, 2001) that "learning strategies are processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in actions taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language" (p. 4).

Chamot (2004) believes "learning strategies are the conscious thoughts and actions that learners take in order to achieve a learning goal. Strategic learners have metacognitive knowledge about their own thinking and learning approaches, a good understanding of what a task entails, and the ability to orchestrate the strategies that best meet both the task demands and their own learning strengths" (p.14).

One of the most applicable definitions which have been cited most frequently in the literature was provided by (Oxford, 1990). She defines language learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (p. 8). It is, indeed, a reflection of what the learner intends to do and the specific actions he can take. She also, prominently, includes how context plays a crucial role in the language learning process.

The 20th century was characterized by many changes and innovations in the field of language teaching ideologies. In the history of language teaching approaches and methods, there was a move away from methods that focus on writing and reading to methods that stronger concentrate on the skills speaking and listening. Even the actual questions concerning language teaching that are debated have already been discussed throughout the history of language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2007).

The studies to inspect the relationship between EFL in-service teachers' language learning strategies and their own beliefs toward teaching methodologies are very scarce. This study can be helpful to better understand whether EFL teachers can use their own beliefs and strategies in their classrooms or not. This study can also be helpful to the in-service EFL teachers. They will better realize their own language learning strategies and teaching beliefs through this study. By knowing these, they can promote their own English learning to increase their English ability and expand their teaching styles to fit the needs of their future students.

2. Research Questions

The present study aims at answering the following question:

Research Question 1: What kinds of language learning strategies do Iranian in-service teachers hold?

Research Question 2: What kinds of beliefs toward teaching methodologies do Iranian in- service teachers hold?

Research Question 3: Is there a meaningful relationship between language learning strategies and beliefs toward teaching methodologies?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The sample participating in this study consisted of 252 in service teachers out of a total of 349 teachers (136 female and 116 male) from some cities in Golestan province, Iran. They were working as English teachers in education departments and institutes. The subjects were all chosen through stratified random sampling. The stratified random sampling is a kind of sampling in which the researcher subdivides the population into groups, or strata. This kind of sampling is a combination of randomization and categorization. Based on its characteristics, stratified random sampling was utilized, because in this study there were groups of in-service teachers in different area of Golestan province.

3.2 Instrumentation

Questionnaires

The questionnaire in the study consists of two measures: (1) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Version 7.0 for ESL/EFL, Oxford, 1990); and, (2) Beliefs toward English Teaching Methodologies (the Audiolingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching) which was designed by Chen (2005).

Section I: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

This section was adapted from the 7.0 version of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL, Oxford, 1990) for ESL/EFL learners. The purpose of the SILL is to measure the frequency of the language learner's strategy use. It is composed of six parts and totals 50 items. According to Oxford (1990), the six parts describe six categories of language learning strategies: memory strategies (remembering more effectively, nine items), cognitive strategies (using all your mental processes, 14 items), compensation strategies (compensating for missing knowledge, six items), meta-cognitive strategies (organizing and evaluating your learning, nine items), affective strategies (managing your emotion, six items), and social strategies (learning with others, six items). The 50 items are all statements, such as "I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them." Participants needed to, according to their self-evaluation, rate the statements on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never) to 5 (always or almost always).

Section II: Beliefs toward EFL Teaching Methodologies (BETM)

This section was to investigate participants' beliefs toward two EFL teaching methodologies: the Audiolingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching. The questionnaire items in this section were adapted from Chen (2005). There are two parts in this section. One is teaching beliefs toward language and language learning theories; the other is teaching beliefs toward curriculum design. Each part had 13 items, including six statement items describing the

Audiolingual Method, six statement items describing Communicative Language Learning, and an open-ended question. For statement items, participants needed to rate the statements on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.3 Reliability of the Questionnaires

For the reliability of the BETM, examining Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was determined to be .80 which is acceptable in social science research. Moreover, the reliability of the SILL was determined and found to be 0.84.

3.4 Procedure

The data were collected in January, 2014. The researcher contacted school authorities via an email or a letter, on the phone, or in person. The school authorities were informed of purposes of the questionnaire and the wishes of investigating the in-service teachers in their programs. After obtaining the approval of the school authorities, the researcher administered the survey in person in most classes. During the survey administration, the researcher complied data with the following procedures:

1. Inform the participants in Persian that the survey is research-used only.

2. Tell the participants the purposes of the survey, how they learn English and how they think of teaching English.

3. Introduce the content of the questionnaire. Tell them that there are three sections of the questionnaire.

4. Interpret the procedures of finishing the questionnaire.

5. After participants finish and hand in the questionnaire, briefly review the questionnaire. If some items are left blank, the researcher informs the participant who has some items left blank. After the data were collected, all data were keyed into computer. Statement items were keyed into the database of SPSS.

3.5 Data Analysis

For analyzing the data, two procedures were used:

1. Descriptive analysis: Mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentage of each item, except the open-ended question, were analyzed by using the SPSS 16.0 for Windows.

2. Inferential analysis: ANOVA, and Pearson Correlation were used to investigate the relationships between language learning strategies/ teaching beliefs toward EFL methodologies and factors of individual background.

4. Results

The non-English native speaking EFL in-service teachers' use of English language learning strategies was discussed in two steps. In the first step, the overall use of language strategies of EFL in-service teachers in the study was explored through descriptive statistical analysis (i.e., means, standard deviation, percentages, etc.). In the second step, the factors that may influence their uses of language learning strategies were examined via inferential statistical analysis (i.e., ANOVA, Pearson's Correlation, etc.).

4.1 Results of Learning Strategies of EFL In-service Teachers

The overall use of language strategies of EFL in-service teachers was discussed based on Oxford's strategy classification and her definition for the usage levels of language learning strategies. For the definition for the usage levels of language learning strategies, according to Oxford (1990), the use of English language learning strategies can be divided into three levels: (1) high frequency level (mean= 3.5 or above), (2) medium frequency level (mean=2.5 to 3.4), (3) low frequency level (mean= 2.4 or below). Although Vann and Abraham (1990) questioned the above definition as being oversimplified, it has been used and viewed meaningful in most language learning strategy research (e.g., Griffiths, 2003; Sheorey, 1999). Therefore, it was used here, too.

From Table 1, the results of the study indicated that the mean across overall strategy use was 3.62 (SD= 0.45). Among the six strategy groups, metacognitive strategies were most frequently used (M=4.02; SD=0.57) while affective strategies were least frequently used (M= 3.39; SD=0.85). The others in the order of frequency of use were compensation strategies (M=3.99; SD=0.51), social strategies (M=3.88; SD=0.75), cognitive strategies (M=3.83; SD=0.51), and memory strategies (M=3.53; SD=0.64). All the metacognitive, compensation, social, cognitive, memory strategies were at the high frequency level as defined by Oxford (1990), no one strategy was at the low frequency level. Only affective strategy was at a medium frequency level.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Six Group Language Learning Strategies

	Items	No. of items	M	SD
Memory	L01-09	9	3.53	.64
Cognitive	L10-23	14	3.83	.51
Compensation	L24-29	6	3.99	.51
Metacognitive	L30-38	9	4.02	.57
Affective	L39-44	6	3.39	.85
Social	L45-50	6	3.88	.75
Overall Strategies	L01-50	50	3.62	.45

Note: The range of the average means of the 50 items was from 2.57 to 4.61 on a five-point Likert scale.

For each individual strategy item, the results revealed that Item 29 (M= 4.61; SD= 0.58), one of the compensation strategies, was the strategy most frequently used whereas Item 43 (M= 2.57; SD= 1.50), one of affective strategies, was least frequently used by in-service teachers in the study. In addition, the results also revealed that 39 strategies (Items L1, L02, L03, L04, L08, L10, L11, L12, L13, L14, L15, L16, L18, L19, L20, L21, L22, L24, L25, L27, L28, L29, L30, L31, L32, L33, L35, L36, L37, L38, L39, L40, L42, L45, L46, L47, L48, L49, L50) were used at a high frequency level, and only eleven strategies (Items L05, L06, L07, L09, L17, L23, L26, L34, L41, L43, L44) were used at the medium frequency level. For further analysis, among these high frequently used strategies, six items were from the six items social strategies (100% of social strategies), eight items were out of 9 items meta-cognitive strategies (88.8% of meta-cognitive strategies), twelve items were out of 14 items cognitive strategies (85.7% of cognitive strategies), five items were from the six compensation strategies (83.3% of compensation strategies), five items were from the nine memory strategies (55.5% of memory strategies), and three were from the six affective strategies (50% of affective strategies). On the other hand, for medium frequently used strategies, three were in the six affective strategies, and four items were in the nine memory strategies, two items were in the cognitive strategies, one was in the compensation strategies and one was in the meta-cognitive strategies. In other words, from the perspective of the percentage of high and medium frequently used strategies, it was found that compensation, cognitive, social strategies, and meta-cognitive were more frequently used than memory and affective strategies.

In sum, the in-service teachers in the study used language learning group strategies at a high frequency level. In addition, they used compensation, meta-cognitive, cognitive, and social strategies more frequently than affective and memory strategies.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Variables

In order to inform the average performance of the teachers and distribution of their scores on each of the variables, I attempted to present the descriptive statistics parameters (Mean, Standard deviation, Minimum score, and Maximum score) in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum Score and Maximum Score

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Methodology	83.00	131.00	112.85	11.29
Strategy	135.00	230.00	181.26	22.83
Memory	15.000	43.000	31.78	5.84
Cognitive	34.00	66.00	53.69	7.22
Compensation	15.00	29.00	23.97	3.11
Metacognitive	23.00	45.00	36.26	5.16
Affective	11.00	29.00	20.38	5.12
Social	12.00	30.00	23.33	4.54

Table 2 presents the teachers' descriptive statistics in research variables. According to Table 2, the mean score of the Methodology is 112.85, the mean score of the Strategy is 181.26, the mean score of the Memory is 31.78, the mean score of the Cognitive is 53.69, the mean score of the Compensation is 23.97, the mean score of the Metacognitive is 36.26, the mean score of the Affective is 20.38, and finally the mean score of the Social is 23.33.

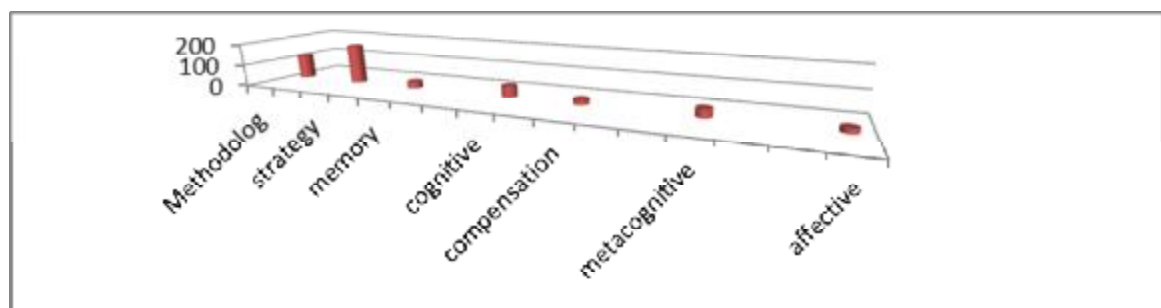The data obtained from Table 2, has been illustrated in the Figure 1 in a bar graph.

Figure 1. Teachers' Mean Scores in Research Variables

4.3 Results of Beliefs toward Teaching Methodology

The information of Table 3 indicated that the overall mean of the 28 questionnaire statements for teaching beliefs was 3.90 (SD =0.34). When the total average mean of the 14 items of the Audiolingual Method (M=3.52, SD=0.41) was compared to the total average mean of the 14 items of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (M= 4.28, SD=0.38). Using a two-way repeated-measures ANOVA, it was found that the difference was significant, Wilk's Λ= 0.20, F (1,292) = 1142.44, p<.001, multivariate $\eta2$=.80. In other words, the EFL in-service teachers considerably preferred CLT to the Audiolingual Method.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Audiolingual Method and CLT

Methodologies	Items	n	M	SD
Audiolingual-		14	3.25	0.41
Language theories	T1-6	6	3.73	0.51
Curriculum Design	T13-19&27	8	3.37	0.48
Communicative-		14	4.28	0.38
Language theories	T7-12	6	4.42	0.44
Curriculum Design	T20-26&28	8	4.17	0.43
Overall Beliefs	T1-28	28	3.90	0.34

5. Findings

With regards to the first research question, "What kinds of language learning strategies do Iranian in service teachers hold?", as Table 4 presenting the teachers' descriptive statistics in research variables indicates, the mean score of the Memory is 31.78, the mean score of the Cognitive is 53.69, the mean score of the Compensation is 23.97, the mean score of the Metacognitive is 36.26, the mean score of the Affective is 20.38, and finally the mean score of the Social is 23.33.

Table 4. Mean, Standard deviation, Minimum score and Maximum score of different groups of learning strategies adopted by in-service teachers

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Memory	15.000	43.000	31.78	5.84
Cognitive	34.00	66.00	53.69	7.22
Compensation	15.00	29.00	23.97	3.11
Metacognitive	23.00	45.00	36.26	5.16
Affective	11.00	29.00	20.38	5.12
Social	12.00	30.00	23.33	4.54

Table 4 shows the results of different groups of learning strategies adopted by in-service teachers. As it shows cognitive strategies with the mean score of 53.69 got the highest position. The data obtained from the Table 4, has been illustrated in the Figure 2 in a bar graph.
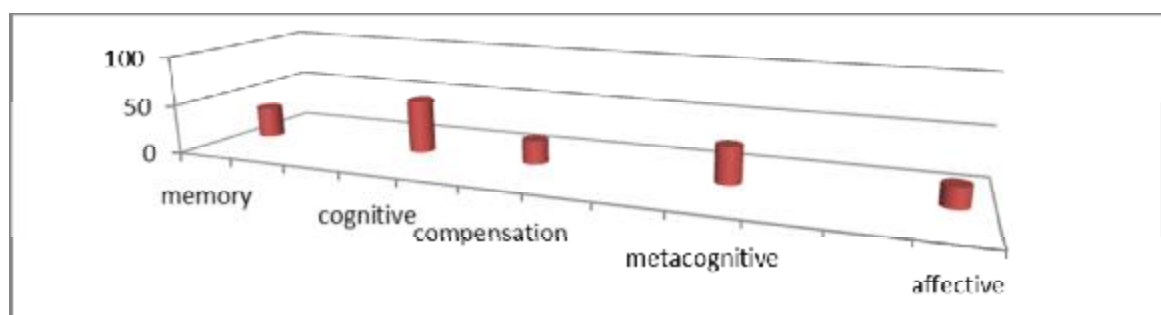

Figure 2. Teachers' Mean Scores in Research Variables

With regards to the second research question, "What kinds of Beliefs toward Teaching Methodologies do Iranian in service teachers hold?", as the information of Table 5 indicates, the two methodologies, considering Audiolingual method and CLT, were analyzed in terms of language theories and curriculum design. The differences between the Audiolingual and CLT were significant, for language theories, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.36$, $F(1,292) = 517.53$, $p<.001$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .64$, and for curriculum design, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.30$, $F(1,292) = 681.67$, $p<.001$, multivariate $\eta^2 = .70$. In other words, from the perspectives of language theories and curriculum design, these Iranian in-service teachers also would like CLT rather than the Audiolingual Method.

Table 5. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Audiolingual Method and CLT

Methodologies	Items	N	M	SD
Audiolingual-		14	3.25	0.41
Language theories	T1-6	6	3.73	0.51
Curriculum Design	T13-19&27	8	3.37	0.48
Communicative-		14	4.28	0.38
Language theories	T7-12	6	4.42	0.44
Curriculum Design	T20-26&28	8	4.17	0.43
Overall Beliefs	T1-28	28	3.90	0.34

With regards to the third research question, "Is there a meaningful relationship between the teachers' language learning strategy and their beliefs toward methodology?", Pearson correlation was utilized. The data obtained from this test is presented in the Table 6.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation between Methodology and Strategy

		Strategy	memory	cognitive	compensation	metacognitive	affective	social
Methodology and Strategy	Pearson Correlation	.699**	.714**	.546**	.633**	.312**	.372**	.688**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 6 shows the results of the correlation between language learning strategy and the belief toward methodology of the teachers. Based on the data obtained from this table, it can be stated that there is a meaningful correlation between language learning strategy and belief toward methodology of the teachers (r=0.70, P<0.01). The highest correlation is between the elements of Memory and Methodology (r= 0.71).

6. Discussion

In this study we attempted to assess the relationship between language learning strategies and teachers' beliefs toward language methodology. As the results of this study show, there is a meaningful correlation between teachers' language learning strategies and their beliefs toward methodologies. This finding is in parallel with the study in which Bailey et al. (1996), analyzing seven teacher-learners' autobiography assignments and journal entries, concluded that pre-service teachers' teaching beliefs and methodology had been shaped by their language learning experiences from their previous teachers and from the learning process in teacher education.

Emphasizing the key role of language learning strategies on teacher's methodology, Moran (1996), through understanding a female Spanish teacher's internship experience via analyzing five papers, three classroom observations, and six hour-long interviews based on the grounded theory, found that there were interactive relationships among three variables – learning Spanish, teaching Spanish, and learning to teach Spanish. In other words, each variable affected the other variable reciprocally. These reciprocal variables can be classified under the heading of cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

In another study by Chen (2005), working on 293 participants, the relationship between pre-service teachers' language learning strategies and their teaching beliefs was examined. This study showed that there were statistically significant correlations between language learning strategies and their teaching beliefs and methodology. The results showed that positive relationships existed between learning strategies and teaching beliefs and methodology. In other words, like the results of the present study, the study showed that learning practice would influence the teaching beliefs and methodology of teachers.

7. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

Throughout the history of language teaching different factors have been considered as effective on teaching process. To cover these factors, a lot of methods have been presented through different methodologies. But these methods have been formulated according to theoretical findings in linguistics and psychology. However, little attention was paid to the practicality of those theories. Moreover, this study showed that there were no significant differences for overall language strategy use although the uses of some individual strategies were significantly different.

This study, presenting different usages of language learning strategies in language learning and language teaching, bolds the key role of teacher's experience. Considering status quo, teachers should give heed to their personal experiences not just theoretical findings. It also can be useful for policyholders of institutes to make teachers record their experiences in different contexts for logical adaptation of materials.

Further, it may be necessary to create an oral English environment for in-service teachers to continuously upgrade their English performance. English environment may influence the language learning strategy use of in-service teachers. In-service teachers' learning strategy use is positively related to their English performance.

Their English performance may affect the success of English teaching under the approach of CLT. In other words, creating an English environment, especially an oral English environment, for these in-service teachers to practice their English continuously might be necessary to achieve the goal of increasing students' communicative competence.

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