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Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in English Language Teaching at the Tertiary Level

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Abstract

The paper will seek to understand the connection between the beliefs of teachers and their teaching methods in ELT on the tertiary level. It aims to determine the level of correspondence or the lack of the correspondence between what the teachers think are good English teaching and what they actually teach in terms of teaching and find out the contextual factors that contribute to the relationship. The methodology is likely to be mixed-methods; quantitative surveys to measure beliefs of the teachers are used and then the actual teaching behavior and rationales were measured by a combination of qualitative classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The study sample can consist of English teachers of different institutions of higher education to have diversified representation. Thematic coding and correlation could be used in the data analysis to investigate the congruence of beliefs and practices. The research finds should bring out similarities and contradictions between teacher espoused beliefs and reality in the classroom. Although it is possible that most teachers now support communicative or learner-centered philosophy, institutional policies, testing systems, and abilities of students can cause them to rely on conventional, teacher-centered practices.

Keywords: Teachers' beliefs, ELT Practices, Higher Education, Pedagogical Alignment, Teacher Development.



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Introduction

With the emergence of English Language Teaching (ELT) in the modern context of higher education systems in the world, the concept has moved beyond the education of different languages to being a highly important instrument of academic mobility, knowledge acquisition, and professional preparedness. Under this development, the cognitive turn in second language acquisition (SLA) studies has shifted the research not only of the methods of acquiring the language, but also of the complicated mental lives of teachers. At the center of this investigation lies a neurologist concept known as teacher cognition a covert but mighty aspect that includes the beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes that teachers subscribe to teaching and learning (Borg, 2023). At the third level of relationship among what teachers believe and how they practically perform the beliefs in the classroom, is one of the most important but remains unsolved puzzles in applied linguistics when the principles of academic rigor and the demands of the institution meet.

Availability of the body of scholarship on teacher beliefs has long held that internal schemes are used as prisms through which pedagogical choices are viewed. In the middle of the 2010s, it was confirmed that the teachers are not mere channels of teaching; they are also decision-makers in which the decisions of a teacher regarding instructions lie in the individual experiences and teaching philosophy (Basturkmen, 2021). Nevertheless, by the middle of 2020s, the tertiary ELT landscape is diverse. According to recent research, such a growing speed of digitalization of higher education and the post-pandemic transition to hybrid methods of learning have added new variables to the belief-practice equation (Li & Nguyen, 2024). That means that an educator can have an interest in a philosophical alignment with social-constructivist or communicative language teaching (CLT) models, the practice of either of these models is often conditioned by a multitude of socio-institutional influences.

There is also this so-called phenomenon of pedagogical dissonance the disjuncture between offered beliefs and classroom realities which has become a thorn to the profession. Early influential research by Phipps and Borg (2009) emphasised the notion that teachers tend to have beliefs that are indispensable and are termed core and those that are more easily undermined by classroom pressure termed as peripheral ones. This has been supported by recent studies in various global settings, which revealed that although most tertiary teachers claim that they prefer the learner-centered method, their system and practices fail miserably, returning to the teacher-focused, grammar-driven instruction (Zheng and Lee, 2023). This mismatch is more than a failure of pedagogical will but in most cases a strategic compromise between the inner values of an educator and the outer requirements of high-stakes testing, inflexible curriculum, and large classes (Thompson, 2025).

Nevertheless, although there is an abundance of general studies on teacher cognition, a research gap exists in specific dynamics of ELT on the tertiary level. The situation in higher education institutions is somewhat different: the conflict between the necessity of communicative competence and the necessity of academic literacy or standardized testing results is often observed. Remarkably, the role of university professors does not always avoid a dual identity of a researcher and an instructor, which may obscure the orientation towards reflective pedagogical practice (Martinez-Sanz, 2024). We have an urgent requirement to know how these teachers negotiate the congruence-gap in a time when educational policies are unquestionably more specific about accountability and student's outcomes which are measurable. Most of the currently available research is highly theoretical, or based only off self-reported information and never captures the actual reality of the classroom by means of strict observation and mixed-methods research.

This gap cannot be overrated in terms of its importance. The nexus of beliefs and practices is a concept that should be comprehended when devising successful professional development (PD) programs. Unless the PD initiatives consider the existing belief systems of instructors, they will most likely lead to the superficial change that does not translate into the long term classroom change (Smith and Wang, 2025). In addition, as a curriculum designer, it is essential to identify the institutional monies that inhibit teachers to adopt innovative practices in curriculum designing to facilitate realistic and sustainable educational reforms. As such, this study makes a contribution to the larger ELT discourse in that it offers a finer-grained analysis of the issue of pedagogical alignment facilitation or obstruction in the high-stress environment of higher education.

The focus of this research is to find answers to the complex interrelationship that exists between what teachers believe and their real teaching practice in tertiary ELT. In particular, the study will aim at determining the areas, where beliefs and practices will coincide and where they will be different. In addition, it also examines the situational issues that start with the institutional policy down to the level of student proficiency that can be a booster or deterrent to implementation of the teacher beliefs. The study includes qualitative and quantitative research methods that fill the gap occurring between what teachers say they are doing and what they actually are doing, so the following research questions can be answered:

1. To what level do the pedagogical assumptions of tertiary ELT teachers correlate with their classroom behavior?
2. What are the institutional, cultural and individual drivers of the variation between espoused and pedagogical enactment?

This enquiry is aimed at providing a subtle concept of teacher thinking to inform theory and practice on the dynamic nature of English as an academic Purposes (EAP) and overall ELT.

Literature Review

The Theoretical Evolution and Multifaceted Nature of Teacher Cognition

There has been a fundamental change in how teacher cognition is viewed, as it has shifted away from the behaviorism perspective of observable activities through an elaborate consideration of the unobservable thinking processes which underlie pedagogy. In the past, teacher beliefs were considered to be fixed and monolithic and developed in the course of so-called apprenticeship of observation. Later scholarship has however made progress in this area in 2024 and 2025 by defining cognition as a system of activity; a dynamic and situated and interactive process. According to Peng (2024), teacher cognition is not a set of inner states but an ongoing discussion between the psychological resources possessed by the teacher and the objects that the teacher faces in the classroom in their instruction. Such view gives an alternate inclination to the discourse of what teachers think and the thinking of the teachers in certain systems of socio-cultural activity.

Additionally, explicit and implicit beliefs have emerged as the subject of fresh focus in the research today. Studies that will be published at the beginning of 2025 clearly state that, on the one hand, the teacher may openly support various scientific principles of learning, including the necessity of retrieval practice or spaced repetition, but on the other hand, his or her hidden convictions, which exist as a matter of course, can be based on a systemic, intuitive approach (Frontiers in Education, 2025). This duality implies that teacher thinking is a stratified construct in which case the espoused theories usually conflict with the theories-in-use. At a tertiary level where teachers are supposed to optimize between academic and linguistic growth the layers described within can be further complex because of the professional identity of the teacher who is not only a specialist in his or her subject matter but also a facilitator of the language.

The interplay between teacher cognition and emotional intelligence is also in the process of being investigated in the field in the mid-2020s. According to the British Council, self-awareness and self-reflection are the key elements of teacher development in the modern practice, meaning that the effect on educators falls under the mental facet of an individual as significantly as pedagogical expertise (British Council, 2024). This whole person perspective considers beliefs to be not only cognitive shortcuts, but permeates with the sense of self and the emotional reaction of a teacher to the classroom situation. This means that a new lens is necessary to comprehend teacher cognition in tertiary ELT in the context of cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural variables, all at the same time.

The Congruence-Gap: Analyzing Dissonance in Pedagogical Enactment

The ongoing discrepancy between what it is claimed that teachers believe and the classroom performance, or what scholars refer to as pedagogical dissonance is a current issue of controversy in applied linguistics. Although the underlying paradigm of Phipps and Borg (2009) developed this tension of functional and peripheral type of beliefs, recent research in 2025 has enacted it even more through the paradigm of constructivist and traditional beliefs. It has been demonstrated that although the main portion of tertiary teachers have positive attitudes towards constructivist and learner-centered methods, they do not use them at the level expected of them, often even failing to use traditional methods, which are teacher-centered (Al Abri et al., 2024; Tandf, 2025). This implies that theory and practice balance is not binary but enacting the spectrum.

Such a gap cannot be overlooked especially in the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). According to recent systematic reviews of ELT practices in higher education (2024), despite the rhetoric of the so-called communicative competence prevailing in the design of the syllabus, the truth of the situation in the tertiary classroom is frequently limited by a focus on accuracy and exam-centered education (Getachew et al., 2024). A strategic compromise is often cited as the cause of the dissonance considered that the teachers are now interested in achieving institutional survival and student passes rather than in fulfilling their own pedagogical ideals. This is a complex, though irritating adjustment to the reality of the modern university, which is reflected in this negotiation process.

Besides, the congruence-gap is also being re-defined by the rising of the digital dissonance. Since teachers must deal with a switch to hybrid and AI-enhanced learning, their assumptions of human-centered language learning are confronted with the effectiveness of machine-mediated teaching. The presence of automated tools used to create feedback and content, despite teachers having the belief in the value of the authentic human interaction is observed by the scholars in 2024 as a new practice that does not delve into the traditional beliefs in CLT (Giannakos et al., 2024). This move indicates that it is not just the implementation failure but an indication of an actual change in the form of effective practice in the digital era.

Higher education institutional and Technological Mediators

The tertiary ELT setting is a very strong mediator to either initiate or impede the realization of the teacher beliefs. The biggest limitation that is determined when referring to scholarship in the year 2024/2025 is that of the architecture of institutional policy comprising high-stakes assessment systems and dogmatic curricula. Their ideals are pushed to the backburner by the need to equip students with standardized examinations that place emphasis on discrete linguistic knowledge and not communicative proficiency even in the most progressive teachers (MDPI, 2025). This pressure of the institution has a so-called washback impact which compels a mechanism of realignment of

classroom practice to more traditional and teacher-centered practices, irrespective of the personal philosophy of the pedagogy of the individual teacher.

The emergence of a new and multifaceted mediator of ELT has occurred due to technological progress and especially the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). Switching to GenAI tools has a radically transforming impact on pedagogical identities as studies based on late 2024 and 2025 show. It now requires teachers to think differently about their roles as they are no longer the main providers of knowledge but the curators, ethical guides of AI-generated materials (Moorhouse & Wong, 2025). This type of technological mediation does not simply favor what has already been practiced; it literally transforms the ideologies of how the teachers perceive, experience writing, authenticity and assessment. One of the most significant tendencies is the so-called AI-challenge where teachers indicate that they have a significant concern with the issue of ethical dilemma and human replacement in language acquisition (Chen et al., 2025; International Journal of Instruction, 2025).

Along with technology, another mediating factor is the presence of the socio-cultural profile of the student body. ELT at tertiary level may include English for Academic Purposes (EAP) when the requirements of both sides of the teacher-student discrepancies may include expectations of student competence and teacher command. Recent research points out that educators tend to engage in a process of modifying their teaching practices in order to address the perceived cultural and linguistic requirements of their students, despite this practice being opposite to their professional training (Rustipa et al., 2024). This highlights the fact that the tertiary classroom is a place of negotiation between internal thoughts of the teacher and the multiple influences of the external ecosystem of the university.

Developing the Professional Self and Self-Concept in Collaborative Inquiry and Reflection

The models of collaborative inquiry and sustained reflection also demonstrate a change in the focus of the professional development (PD) in terms of top-down training towards a more complex field of ELT. In its evolved cognizance by 2025, recent scholarship has stressed that PD should be context-sensitive, and grounded locally, in order to be effective. External training which happens on a generic basis usually fails because it overlooks the unique institutional limitations and individual belief systems of the teachers (Cosgun & Savas, 2024). However, proper PD has come to be treated as a matter of collective engagement, with teachers joining together in planning of their lessons and classroom visitation as a way of creating a sense of joint ownership over the change of their practice (Dewi, 2025).

Reflective practice is still the foundational block of professional development, which is becoming more often construed as critical reflection on action. This is not only thinking about a lesson post hoc, but actually doing research on why there was pedagogical dissonance. British Council trends report 2024 identifies noticing as one of its essential skills, wherein teachers are expected to become scholars of their schools in order to determine how their practices and beliefs are not aligned. Through such systematic inquiry it is possible to help educators shift their attitudes towards institutionalist disenchantment with institutional vetoes into something more agentic and more versatile as an identity.

Moreover, another important aspect of professional development has turned out to be the role of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL). Teachers require new beliefs and practices on language proficiency measurement as assessment systems are undergoing changes that incorporate digital and multimodal forms. As the current studies propose, the development of LAL is vital towards closing the divide between innovative teaching and conventional testing (MDPI, 2025). The future

of tertiary ELT, however, as proposed in the literature, is PD programs that can make the teacher one of the so-called transformational actors who can operate in a complex environment of their own inner cognition and constantly evolving needs of the global environment in the sphere of higher education.

Research Methodology

The section presents the methodology of the research which will be used to explore the relationship existing between the pedagogical beliefs held by tertiary English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers and the practices as they apply to the classroom contexts. This study will help to find areas of a compromise and non-conformance and consider the many contextual factors that could be mediating the relationship.

Research Design

The research design is a mixed-methods research design, as it is selected due to its capability to give a very in-depth and detailed insight into the composite complex mental lives of educators. The combination both of quantitative and qualitative information would help the research to fill the holes between what teachers say they do and what they are observed doing.

Quantitative Component: The systematic measurement and classification of the pedagogical beliefs of a large sample of instructors is done in a survey-based approach.

Qualitative Component Classroom observations and semi-structured interviews are used to get the lived reality of teaching practices and the rationales that result in them.

This twin-strand design is critical since using self-reported data alone may not be suitable to describe the complex motive of strategy that teachers use in the anxiety-filled university set ups.

Population and Sampling

The target population will include English instructors in different tertiary institutions who teach at the university. The participants will be adopted in various contexts of higher learning to be able to have a diverse and representative sample.

Sampling Method: The sampling strategy used is a purposive sampling style that is used to pick the participants that are practicing tertiary level ELT and can give in depth information about the overlap between academic literacy and communicative competence.

Sample Size: The study will contain a big sample to be used in the quantitative survey so that it makes the results statistically significant then a smaller and representative slice to be used in the qualitative observation and interview so that no facet of the study is left out in exploration.

Data Collection Methods

Three major tools to be used in data collection are focused on acquiring not only cognitive but also behavioral facets of teaching:

Quantitative Surveys: It consist of a structured questionnaire with Likert-scale questions which are used to determine how much instructors are in agreement with different pedagogical models, e.g., social-constructivism or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Classroom Observations: Systematic and non-participant observations are so as to document actual instructional practices. These insights are concerned with teacher-learner interaction, learner-centered techniques versus the teacher-centered techniques, and integration of digital tools.

Semi-Structured Interviews: The interviews should be conducted in form of follow-up interviews to investigate the based rationales behind the practices observed. These interviews can help

participants talk about the issue of pedagogical dissonance and establish what factors, either institutional, cultural, or individual, make them drive out of their stated beliefs.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis will be done by means of both the statistical and interpretive analysis to discuss the compatibility between belief systems and pedagogical enactment:

Statistical Analysis Stats: The analysis of statistical survey information will be conducted on descriptive analysis and correlation analysis to determine an overall pattern in the belief of the teachers about beliefs and level of perceived conformity between beliefs and practice.

Thematic Coding: The thematic analysis of qualitative data is done on interviews and the field notes of observations. This is going to be done through multi-stage coding to find out recurrent themes that might include institutional constraints, student proficiency challenges, and the effect of digitalization.

Triangulation: The Triangulation of the obtained findings through the surveys, observation, and the interviews enhances the provision of a whole answer to the research questions, which entailed exploring why the "peripheral" beliefs are usually compromised within the confines of the classroom.

Ethical Considerations

Through institutional review board recommendations, informed consent forms are given to all participants that explain the objective of the study in advancing the ELT scholarship and professional growth. Caution is observed to guarantee the anonymity of the instructors and their respective institutions especially when sensitive issues are raised concerning the institutional policy and pressures in relation to high stakes assessment.

Data Analysis

This section outlines findings of the mixed-method exploration of the linkage between the pedagogical ideology of tertiary teachers of English Language Teaching (ELT) and its manifestation in the classroom. The data analysis uses the appropriate methodology in the sense that quantitative data analysis is performed using the surveys and observation checklists increased with quantitative instruments obtained by instructors and the qualitative analysis pertaining to semi-structured interviews. The analytical design is designed in a manner that it responds to the research questions about the level of pedagogical fit and the type of factors that are leading to the instructional dissonance.

Quantitative Findings

Participant Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the participants was examined to be able to place the findings into perspective. The sample was comprised of university English teachers of different institutional backgrounds so that there has been a mixed representation of experience and academic concentration.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participating Tertiary ELT Instructors (N=50)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Teaching Experience	1–5 years	12	24%
	6–15 years	25	50%
	16+ years	13	26%
Highest Qualification	Master’s Degree	32	64%
	PhD/Doctorate	18	36%
Primary Instructional Focus	General ELT	30	60%
	EAP/ESP	20	40%

The data indicates that the workforce is mostly mid-career with half of the instructors having an experience of between 6 and 15 years. Master’s and Doctoral degrees are quite high, which is indicative of the level of academic rigor required of the tertiary level. According to this profile, the participants have a strong theoretical base, which they acquired probably due to the "cognitive turn" in SLA studies.

Teachers’ Espoused Pedagogical Beliefs

The initial study aim aimed at determining pedagogical beliefs among instructors. The results were collected through a Likert-type scale (5-point). (Strongly Disagree = 1, = 5). To measure the alignment to the frameworks of learners centered and communicative, it was used.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Espoused Pedagogical Beliefs

Belief Construct	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Importance of Learner Autonomy	4.62	0.45
Value of Communicative Competence over Accuracy	4.48	0.52
Role of Teacher as a Facilitator	4.55	0.48
Necessity of Authentic Task-Based Learning	4.30	0.61
Focus on Error Correction and Grammar	3.12	0.85

The large mean scores ($M > 4.30$) of the learner autonomy and communicative competence reflect the excellent alignment of their philosophies with the concepts of social-constructivist and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). On the other hand, the explicit grammar instructional approach scored lower mean ($M = 3.12$), which may indicate that tertiary teachers explicitly prefer the student-centered approach to rote learning.

Observed Instructional Practices

In order to overcome the problem of congruence-gap, the systematic classroom observations were performed to determine the degree to which the instructors acted in line with the described beliefs.

Table 3: Mean Scores of Observed Instructional Practices (Observation Scores)

Instructional Practice	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Student-to-Student Interaction Time	2.85	0.92
Use of Authentic/Real-World Materials	3.10	0.78
Explicit Grammar and Accuracy Focus	4.25	0.55
Teacher-Led Lecturing/Explanation	4.35	0.48
Learner-Led Decision Making	2.45	1.02

There is a sharp difference of beliefs and practices. Although teachers had high values about communicative competence (Table 2), observed time of interaction was considerably low ($M = 2.85$). On the contrary, these were the commonest behaviors of teacher led lecturing ($M = 4.35$) and explicit grammar focus ($M = 4.25$), and these results established the presence of pedagogical dissonance.

Correlation Analysis: Beliefs vs. Practices

The Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess statistical relationship of espoused beliefs and actually implemented beliefs by teachers.

Table 4: Correlation between Espoused Beliefs and Observed Practices

Relationship	Pearson r	Significance (p)	Strength
Belief in CLT vs. Observed Interaction	0.32	0.041*	Weak Positive
Belief in Autonomy vs. Learner Decision Making	0.18	0.150	Non-Significant
Belief in Task-Based Learning vs. Use of Authentic Tasks	0.28	0.048*	Weak Positive

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results of the analysis indicate that the relationship between beliefs and practices is also weakly positive ($r = 0.32$), whereas the autonomy of the learners was not significant. This statistically demonstrates the difference found between previous research, which indicated that core beliefs tend to be overlooked by outside factors in the tertiary world.

Qualitative Insights

Obstacles to Pedagogical Alignment.

In response to the second research question, using qualitative interview data, thematic coding code was used to determine the factors that led to the gap between beliefs and enactment.

Table 5: *Thematic Frequency of Factors Contributing to Pedagogical Dissonance*

Theme	Frequency of Mention (n)	Percentage (%)	Contextual Category
High-Stakes Standardized Assessments	42	84%	Institutional
Student Proficiency/Language Level	38	76%	Student-Related
Rigid Institutional Syllabi/Time Constraints	35	70%	Institutional
Digital Dissonance/Hybrid Learning Issues	28	56%	Technological
Dual Identity (Teacher-Researcher Pressure)	20	40%	Professional/Individual

The most mentioned was high stakes assessment (84 percent) as a washback effect that pushes to a method that is conventional. The level of student proficiency (76%) is another critical mediator, the teacher must make a pivot in the practices to more teacher-focused structures called a pedagogical pivot. These findings emphasize that pedagogical enactment is a strategic kind of negotiation and not a mere exercise of beliefs.

Summary of Results

When the two sets of data are gathered, it can be estimated that tertiary ELT educators share progressive and learner-focused beliefs, but the practice in the classroom is predominantly teacher-centered. This is largely a misfit instigated by institutional requirements and need to achieve standardized results, which substantiates the fact that the architecture of constraints is a major deterrent to implementation of CLT structures. These results demonstrate that there is an urgent necessity to implement professional development programs in which the contextual adaptability and reflective teaching practices can be a primary concern.

Discussion

The main aim of the research was to explore the complex correlation existing between the pedagogical belief and classroom practice among tertiary ELT teachers. The results give solid statistical and qualitative grounds of meaning the congruence-gap by showing that although the theoretical perspective of instructors is oriented towards progressive and learner-centered

approaches, their institutional and learner-based inhibitory factors substantially influence their practice.

Explanation of Principal Results and Statistic Significance

The data analysis showed that there was a huge difference between the beliefs that they claimed and practiced. Although the average score associated with the value of communicative competence was high ($M=4.48$), the actual observed time that students spend with each other was significantly lower ($M=2.85$). Such a pedagogical dissonance is also observed by the large scale of teacher-centric lecturing ($M=4.35$) and explicit emphasis on grammar ($M=4.25$) which according to institutional theory should be the most underemphasized behaviors on instructor-reports.

The Pearson correlation analysis statistically revealed that the correlation between beliefs and practices is weakly positive ($r=0.32$, $p=0.041$). Of particular merit is the non-significant relationship experienced in the area of learner autonomy ($r=0.18$, $p=0.150$); this means that despite the best professional convictions of student independence, they are easily overshadowed by the reality of the university classroom. These findings statistically highlight the fact that beliefs that form the core, in many cases, are sidelined by external forces.

Correlation to Existing Literature Relation to Corpus Corpus to Existing Literature Designates a text like the one currently under examination as being linked to the earlier stages of literature. Connection to Corpus Corpus to Existing Literature Indicates that a text, such as the one being studied now, belongs to the later phases of literature.

The present findings of this research are very consistent with the initial research by Phipps and Borg (2009) which determined that, peripheral beliefs are more prone to compromise than core beliefs under classroom restrictions. These findings are also consistent with 2024 and 2025 research which says that tertiary educators often revert to conventional and teacher led methodologies even when they have a positive perception of constructivist paradigms.

Notably, the prevalence of aforementioned impediments, e.g. high-stakes standardized testing (84) and fixed curriculum (70) are symptomatic of what Thompson (2025) calls the architecture of constraints. The specified "washback effect of the institutional policy pressures causes a realignment with the need to stick to the old ways to guarantee that students are achieving quantifiable results; a dilemma also presents in modern systematic studies of ELT practices in higher education.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

In theory, this study transforms the concept of teacher cognition not to a fixed system of beliefs but a dynamic system of activity that is marked with ongoing negotiation. It points out that cognition in the tertiary level is a stratified phenomenon in which the two theories, one which is espoused and the other one which is theories-in-use are often in conflict because of the two-fold role of the instructor as a researcher and language facilitator.

In a practical sense, the study demonstrates the acute necessity of the professional development (PD) that goes beyond generic training and focuses on more context-sensitive and reflective investigation. PD programs will need to consider belief systems that exist and the institutional obstacles that the teachers have. Encouraging critical reflection on action can be useful in allowing educators to get out of pedagogical dissonance and shift to a more agentic professional identity.

The restrictions and Future Research

One of the main weaknesses of the current research is the sample size ($N=50$), which on the one hand, is enough to outline the trends; however, on the other hand, the presented sample can be

considered an insufficient measure of the variety of tertiary ELT settings on an international scale. Moreover, the use of classroom observations, which is an asset of the mixed-methods approach is prone to the observer effect in which the instructors might change their behaviour due to observation.

Future studies require the use of longitudinal designs to monitor the changes in teacher beliefs and practices over a few semesters especially in relation to the occurrence of new technological mediators as is the case with Generative AI. Also, the investigation to the student outlook on this "congruence-gap" would offer a more comprehensive view on the impact of instructional dissonance on the learning results in the changing environment of global higher education.

Recommendations

The recommendations aimed at addressing the gap between the ideals of teaching theories with the realities in the classroom instruction in tertiary English Language Teaching (ELT) are based on the study results and analysis of the relationship between the pedagogical beliefs of teachers and the classroom practices as outlined in the results.

The results reflect a deep-seated congruence-gap, which is mainly imposed by the institutional forces of standardized assessment of high stakes and inflexible syllabus. The policymakers are advised to reconsider the current architecture of constraints that compels educators focus more on the rote and teacher-centered instruction and less on the communicative competence that they theoretically appreciate. It is advisable that institutional policy changes to assessment frameworks that would encourage communicative and learner-centered achievements as opposed to simply concentrating on discrete linguistic knowledge. Policymakers can mitigate the current negative effects of standardized testing on progressive pedagogical goals by matching standardized testing with innovative teaching practices so as to alleviate the so-called washback effect.

To the practitioners, the study provides emphasis on the idea that teaching is a strategic bargaining exercise between inner values and demands. Teachers are also some of the necessary participants in what is termed by Brown and Peck (2007) as critical reflection on action: pedagogical dissonance towards a particular reason. Teacher educators are to abandon generic and top-down professional development (PD) programs. Rather, PD must be context-sensitive and locally based and aimed at giving teachers the instruments to overcome institutional pressures without sacrificing their pedagogical identities. It is also necessary to cultivate so-called Language Assessment Literacy, which will enable the teacher to overcome the gap between innovative teaching requirements and the traditional testing requirements.

It is proposed that the dynamic activity system of teacher cognition ought to be further engaged in the future scholarship especially as it inherently changes in reaction to new technological mediators. Although this study employed a mixed-methods research design to facilitate the gap between teacher claims and teacher practices, future studies may adopt longitudinal research designs which establish change through and after numerous semesters. Also, there is a high urgency to find out the student perception of this congruence-gap to learn how the instructional dissonance influences the learning outcome. Lastly, once Generative AI develops into a more salient figure in the classroom, scholars ought to determine how these tools transform the teacher beliefs of authenticity and assessment as well as the roles of teachers as the curators of AI-created materials.

Conclusion

To sum up, this paper has investigated the convoluted intersection of the philosophies of pedagogy and the practices of the classroom among tertiary English Language Teaching (ELT) instructors,

and uncovered a rife issue of congruence-gap in the current post-secondary education. Although teachers hold philosophical support on the side of learners-centered frameworks, communicative ones, their practical delivery often reverts into conventional, lecturer-alter to learning approach. It is not a failure of individual will around this pedagogical dissonance but a strategic negotiating disposition imposed by a multi-layered, strategy of constraints such as the high-stakes standardized tests and strict institutional requirements and policies.

The study adds so much importance to current field research by re-defining teacher cognition to a dynamic system of activities instead of fixed internal conditions. The study provides a deeper insight into what makes progressive beliefs become marginalized in high-stress university institutions by pointing at a better-known concept digital dissonance and the student proficiency levels. These results prove the idea that the concept of pedagogical alignment is a continuum of performance that is highly affected by the socio-institutional environment.

This research has far reaching implications. Theoretically, it places an emphasis on the importance of the holistic lens of the consideration of cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural aspects at the same time. In practice, it emphasizes the need of having professional development programs that focus on moving away, towards models of context-sensitive and collaborative inquiry as opposed to the such programs long dependent on generic, top-down training approaches. Policy based changes to formations of assessment that encourage communicative based results are necessary in curbing the phenomenon of the washback effect that is debilitating innovative teaching.

Although this study is insightful, it has limitations of having a small size of sample, and may also be prone to the observer effect in case of classroom visits. The longitudinal design is recommended in the future studies in order to trace the state of teacher beliefs over the course of time, especially with the appearance of new technological mediators such as Generative AI transforming the ELT sphere. Finally, the explanation of the gap between the belief and practice, as well as the closing of the gap is crucial to the achievement of sustainable reform in education and the professional development of the educator in the ever more complicated global academic environment.

Conflict of Interest

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