

## From Beliefs to Actions: How Teachers' Mindsets Impact Classroom Practices (Revisited)

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### Abstract:

This paper examines how teachers' beliefs affect their practices during their professional performances. This study is based on the assumption that teachers' beliefs powerfully guide their classroom practices and daily teaching routines. What teachers do in the classroom is largely determined by the nature of the beliefs they hold about pedagogical challenges and situations they constantly encounter. This study adopts a concurrent mixed-methods design, combining a theoretical review with an empirical survey of 35 EFL teachers at the University of Biskra, Algeria. The questionnaire examined: personal experience, professional experience, personality traits, and educational-based principles. Results indicate that 68.6% of teachers draw often on personal experiences, 80% base methods on evidence-based principles, and 82.9% perceive alignment between their beliefs and practices. However, 54.3% reported experiencing conflicts, primarily due to exam-oriented systems and overcrowded classrooms.

**Keywords:** Teachers' beliefs, teacher cognition, mixed-methods research, EFL, belief-practice alignment.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The need to understand teachers' beliefs has gained considerable interest among scholars and researchers because it helps in the conception and implementation of the most optimised teaching methods. It is a necessity to deeply explore teachers' beliefs and their classroom materialization to improve teaching practices. In this prospect, this paper is devoted to discussing concepts related to beliefs in pedagogical settings and their relationship with actual teaching practices. It also reports on a survey of 35 EFL teachers to examine how their beliefs translate into classroom actions.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What sources of beliefs (personal experience, professional experience, personality, or educational principles) do EFL teachers report as most influential on their teaching practices?
- **RQ2:** To what extent do EFL teachers perceive alignment between their core beliefs about teaching and their actual classroom practices?
- **RQ3:** What conflicts emerge between teachers' beliefs and their practices, and how do teachers resolve these conflicts?

## **2. What Are Beliefs?**

First, it is necessary to address the significance of the word "belief," which is the "mental acceptance of and conviction in the truth, actuality, or validity of something" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. B738). In reality, there is no agreement about one universal

definition of beliefs. Borg (2000, p. 186) suggested the following features when considering any definition:

- **The truth element:** A belief is a mental state that has as its content a proposition accepted as true by the individual holding it, although the individual may recognize that alternative beliefs may be held by others.
- **The relationship between beliefs and behavior:** Most definitions propose that beliefs dispose or guide people's thinking and action.
- **Conscious versus unconscious beliefs:** Some maintain that consciousness is inherent in the definition of belief; others allow for an individual to be conscious of some beliefs and unconscious of others.
- **Beliefs as value commitments:** Many definitions recognize an evaluative aspect, originating from the Aryan word *lubh*, meaning "to like or to hold dear."

In brief, beliefs are true ideas about something held consciously or unconsciously and supported by emotional engagement to guide actions and thinking. As Richardson (1996, p. 103) notes, "beliefs are thought of as psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true." Through all these theoretical notions, it can be noticed that it is quite difficult to conceptualize beliefs into a comprehensive universal term because beliefs are referred to by means of a plethora of terms.

### **3. The Characteristics of Beliefs**

It is evident from the outset that agreeing on a universal definition of "belief" is not an easy task. This difficulty arises not only from the presence of overlapping concepts but also from the numerous factors and details that must be considered. One could argue that the products of the mind are subtle, complicated, and elusive, and therefore not easily investigated. Pajares (1992, pp. 324-326) outlines the following

characteristics of teachers' educational beliefs when planning a belief-based study:

- Beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling, or experience.
- Individuals develop a belief system that houses all beliefs acquired through cultural transmission.
- The belief system has an adaptive function in helping individuals define and understand the world and themselves.
- Knowledge and beliefs are inextricably intertwined, but the potent affective, evaluative, and episodic nature of beliefs makes them a filter through which new phenomena are interpreted.
- Thought processes may well be precursors to and creators of belief, but the filtering effect of belief structures ultimately screens, redefines, distorts, or reshapes subsequent thinking.
- Epistemological beliefs play a key role in knowledge interpretation and cognitive monitoring.
- Beliefs are prioritized according to their connections or relationship to other beliefs or other cognitive and affective structures.
- The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter.
- Belief change during adulthood is a relatively rare phenomenon.
- Beliefs strongly influence perception and behaviour.

It is obvious that according to long list, different scholars approached beliefs in educational setting from different perspectives depending on their situational backgrounds.

#### **4. Types of Beliefs**

So far the discussion has been on the difficulty to agree on one universal definition of beliefs; the same issue can be discussed how to set types of beliefs as different definitions are available in the literature: Oliver and Koballa (1992, cited in Mansour, 2008, p. 2) found eight categories of beliefs, including beliefs equated with

knowledge, beliefs that precede attitudes and behavior, beliefs as personal convictions based on observation or logical reasoning, and beliefs as acceptance or rejection of a proposition. Concerning teaching beliefs, Calderhead (cited in Thomas, 2013, p. 2) classified beliefs into four areas: (1) beliefs about learners and learning, (2) beliefs about teaching, (3) beliefs about the subject, and (4) beliefs about self and the teaching role.

## **5. Research on Teachers' Beliefs: Historical Overview**

Although recent approaches champion learner-centeredness, the interest in the teacher has never waned. Research on teachers' beliefs started in the 1960s, with a major turning point at the 1975 national education conference in the United States, which stressed the importance of studying this field. As the conference concluded:

"It is obvious that what teachers do is directed in no small measure by what they think. If teaching is done by human teachers, the question of relationships between thought and action becomes crucial." (Borg, 2009, p. 1)

Borg (1999) summarized the nature of teacher cognition as follows:

- Teachers' cognition can be powerfully influenced by their own experience as learners.
- These cognitions influence what and how teachers learn during teacher education.
- They act as a filter through which teachers interpret new information.
- They may outweigh the effect of teacher education in influencing classroom practices.
- They can be deep-rooted and resistant to change.
- They interact bi-directionally with experience (beliefs influence practices, but practices can also lead to changes in beliefs).

## **6. Development and Change in Teachers' Beliefs**

To understand the change in teachers' beliefs, it is better to understand the change in the teachers' education throughout the course of their career. Understanding teacher change means understanding its nature, how it occurs, and, more essentially, how it affects beliefs. Richards et al. (2000, p. 1) presented assumptions concerning the relation between beliefs and teacher change:

- Teachers' beliefs play a central role in the process of teacher development.
- Changes in teachers' practices are the result of a change in teachers' beliefs.
- Teacher change is multidimensional and triggered both by personal factors and professional contexts.

Fives and Buehl (2012, p. 16) discussed belief change in practicing teachers, stating that professional development programs can lead to belief changes to varying degrees.

## **7. The Aspects of Second Language Teachers' Beliefs**

Teachers' beliefs come to be described in many ways considering their conceptualization and actualization, but in general, they are considered personal and social; implicit and explicit; practical and theoretical; dynamic and resistant; complex and systematic entities including many aspects. Gabillon (2012, pp. 192-195) synthesized teachers' beliefs aspects as follows:

- **Personal and social:** Teacher beliefs are both personal and social/cultural entities.
- **Practical and theoretical:** Neither merely practical nor purely theoretical reflections.
- **Implicit and explicit:** Can be both subconscious and consciously held.
- **Dynamic and resistant:** Subject to ongoing reappraisal but can be resistant to change.

- **Complex and systematic:** Organized in ways that link beliefs to practices.

## 8. The Sources of Teachers' Beliefs

According to Kindsvatter, Willen, and Ishler (1988) and Abdi and Asadi (2011, cited in Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 3), the sources of teachers' beliefs are:

1. **Teachers' experience as language learners:** Previous learning experiences form early beliefs about teaching.
2. **Experience from teaching:** Classroom experience is the main source of belief development.
3. **Teachers' personality:** Personal characteristics influence preferred teaching methods.
4. **Education-based or research-based principles:** Educational research studies constitute a springboard for developing beliefs.

Four main sources of teachers' beliefs have been discussed. The first is **personal experience**, which significantly shapes beliefs. The second is **professional experience**, where teachers can potentially achieve the best results. The third is **teachers' personality** — a psychological aspect that guides behaviors and attitudes, including beliefs. Through experience, teachers gain time to try different teaching methods and observe their effects while performing pedagogical tasks. The fourth and final source is **education-based or research-based principles**, meaning that educational research studies serve as a springboard for teachers to develop their beliefs.

## 9. Methodology

### 9.1 The Research Design

This study adopted a **concurrent mixed-methods design** (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), combining quantitative and qualitative data

collection to examine the relationship between EFL teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. The quantitative component used a structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items to measure the frequency and extent of belief-practice alignment across four domains derived from the literature: (1) personal experience, (2) professional experience, (3) personality traits, and (4) educational/research-based principles. The qualitative component used open-ended questions within the same questionnaire to capture teachers' narrative accounts of how their beliefs originated, how they manifest in practice, and what conflicts they experience.

The rationale for a mixed-methods design was twofold. First, teachers' beliefs are partly tacit and unconscious (Kagan, 1992), requiring qualitative exploration beyond what closed-ended items can capture. Second, quantifying the prevalence of beliefs and reported alignment allows for pattern identification across the sample (Borg, 2003).

## **9.2 Participants and Sampling**

Participants were 35 EFL teachers at the University of Biskra, Algeria, and affiliated secondary schools in the region. A convenience sampling method was used, as the researcher had institutional access to these teachers. Inclusion criteria were: (a) currently teaching English as a foreign language, and (b) a minimum of one academic year of teaching experience. Experience ranged from 1 to 22 years ( $M = 8.4$  years,  $SD = 5.2$ ). Teaching contexts included general EFL (23 teachers) and ESP courses (English for Accountancy, Science, and Law) (12 teachers). No demographic information (age, gender) was collected to focus on professional rather than personal variables.

## **9.3 Instrument**

A 19-item questionnaire was developed specifically for this study based on the theoretical framework of teachers' beliefs sources (Kindsvatter, Willen, & Ishler, 1988; Abdi & Asadi, 2011) and the



characteristics of beliefs outlined by Pajares (1992) and Borg (2003). The questionnaire consisted of five sections:

| Section                         | Focus                                                 | Item types                       |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A: Personal Experience          | Influence of prior learning, values, and background   | 4 items (2 Likert, 2 open-ended) |
| B: Professional Experience      | Influence of teaching roles, PD, feedback, challenges | 3 items (1 Likert, 2 open-ended) |
| C: Personality Traits           | Teaching style, adaptation, conflict handling         | 4 items (2 Likert, 2 open-ended) |
| D: Educational Principles       | Theories, evidence-based practice, balance            | 4 items (2 Likert, 2 open-ended) |
| E: Beliefs-Practices Connection | Alignment, conflicts, desired changes                 | 4 items (2 Likert, 2 open-ended) |

Likert-scale items used a 5-point frequency scale (1 = "Never/I do not" to 5 = "Always/I always do"). Open-ended prompts invited narrative responses (e.g., "Can you describe a personal experience that significantly shaped your teaching philosophy?").

The questionnaire was piloted with five teachers not included in the final sample to check for clarity, wording, and completion time. Pilot feedback led to minor rewording of two items. Completion time averaged 18 minutes. The internal consistency of Likert-scale items was acceptable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ).

### 9.4 Procedure

Data collection occurred over a three-week period in November 2024. The researcher distributed the questionnaire in digital (Google Forms) formats to the all English department teachers. All participants

received an attached description explaining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the guarantee of anonymity.

## **9.5 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from Likert-scale items were entered into jamovi (Version 2.3) for analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were calculated for each item. Inferential statistics included:

- A chi-square test of independence examining the relationship between years of experience ( $\leq 5$  years vs.  $> 5$  years) and reported belief-practice alignment.
- A Spearman's rank correlation assessing the relationship between teachers' reported use of evidence-based principles and their perceived alignment between beliefs and practices.
- An independent-samples t-test comparing belief-practice alignment scores between teachers who reported experiencing conflicts and those who did not.

An alpha level of  $p < .05$  was considered statistically significant.

### **9.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure.

**Familiarization.** All responses were read multiple times, with initial impressions noted to develop a preliminary sense of recurring patterns.

**Generating initial codes.** Each questionnaire was systematically coded by assigning descriptive labels to meaningful text segments



(e.g., "negative teacher model," "exam pressure"). Coding was inductive, with codes emerging from the data rather than pre-existing categories. This yielded 47 initial codes across the 35 questionnaires.

**Searching for themes.** The 47 codes were sorted into potential themes by identifying clusters of related codes. For instance, codes such as "students expect teacher to lecture" and "cultural respect for teacher authority" were grouped under a provisional theme of "negotiating authority."

**Reviewing themes.** Candidate themes were checked for internal coherence (do coded extracts form a meaningful pattern?) and external validity (does the theme reflect the full dataset?). Themes with insufficient support were merged or discarded.

**Defining and naming themes.** Final themes were precisely defined in terms of scope and core concept, and names refined for clarity (e.g., "Empathy through Negative Modelling").

**Writing up.** Themes were written into the narrative results with illustrative quotes.

**Reliability.** A second coder independently coded 20% of responses (7 questionnaires). Inter-coder agreement was 84%, calculated as the percentage of segments where both coders assigned identical or semantically equivalent codes. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and joint reference to the raw data until consensus was reached.

## 9.6 Ethical Considerations

All participation was voluntary, and data are reported anonymously, with participant quotes attributed only by numbered ID (e.g., T12).

## **10. Results**

### **10.1 Quantitative Findings**

#### **10.1.1 Personal Experience**

As shown in Table 1, over two-thirds of teachers (68.6%) reported drawing on their personal experiences "often" or "always" when designing teaching methods. Similarly, 80% reported that their personal values have "high" or "very high" impact on their interactions with students.

**Table 1:** Teachers' Use of Personal Experience in Teaching

| Response       | Percentage |
|----------------|------------|
| I rarely do    | 5.7%       |
| I sometimes do | 22.9%      |
| I often do     | 42.9%      |
| I always do    | 25.7%      |

Note: N = 35. "I do not" received 0%.

#### **10.1.2 Professional Experience**

Nearly two-thirds of teachers (62.8%) reported incorporating feedback from colleagues "considerably" or "extensively" (see Table 2).

Table 2: Incorporation of Colleague Feedback

| Response     | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|
| Not at all   | 8.6%       |
| Slightly     | 2.9%       |
| Moderately   | 28.6%      |
| Considerably | 45.7%      |
| Extensively  | 17.1%      |

10.1.3 Personality Traits

A majority of teachers (60%) reported adapting their teaching methods to align with their personality to a "high" or "full" extent (see Table 3). Additionally, 80% believed their personality traits "mostly help" their ability to connect with their students.

Table 3: Adaptation of Methods to Personality

| Response            | Percentage |
|---------------------|------------|
| Minimal adaptation  | 8.6%       |
| Moderate adaptation | 31.4%      |
| High adaptation     | 48.6%      |
| Full adaptation     | 11.4%      |

10.1.4 Educational Principles

As shown in Table 4, 80% of teachers reported basing their teaching methods on evidence-based principles "often" or "always."

**Table 4:** Use of Evidence-Based Principles

| Response       | Percentage |
|----------------|------------|
| I sometimes do | 17.1%      |
| I often do     | 57.1%      |
| I always do    | 22.9%      |

Note: "I do not" and "I rarely do" received 0%.

### 10.1.5 Beliefs-Practices Connection

Table 5 shows that 82.9% of teachers perceived their teaching practices as aligned with their core beliefs "often" or "always." However, as shown in Table 6, over half (54.3%) reported having experienced concrete conflicts between their beliefs and practices.

**Table 5:** Perceived Belief-Practice Alignment

| Response  | Percentage |
|-----------|------------|
| Sometimes | 17.1%      |
| Often     | 60.0%      |
| Always    | 22.9%      |

Note: "Never" and "Rarely" received 0%.

**Table 6:** Experience of Belief-Practice Conflicts

| Response    | Percentage |
|-------------|------------|
| Yes         | 54.3%      |
| No          | 42.9%      |
| No response | 2.8%       |



10.1.6 Inferential Statistics

A chi-square test of independence revealed no statistically significant relationship between years of teaching experience ( $\leq 5$  years vs.  $> 5$  years) and reported belief-practice alignment,  $\chi^2(1) = 2.98, p = .084$ . However, the observed trend suggested that more experienced teachers (91.3%) were somewhat more likely to report alignment than less experienced teachers (66.7%), though this difference did not reach significance, likely due to the small sample size.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between teachers' reported use of evidence-based principles and their perceived belief-practice alignment. There was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables,  $\rho(33) = .47, p = .005$ . Teachers who more frequently based their methods on research were more likely to report that their practices aligned with their core beliefs.

An independent-samples t-test compared belief-practice alignment scores between teachers who reported experiencing conflicts ( $n = 19, M = 3.8, SD = 0.71$ ) and those who did not ( $n = 15, M = 4.2, SD = 0.56$ ). The difference was not statistically significant,  $t^*(32) = 1.78, p = .084$ , though there was a trend toward lower alignment among teachers who acknowledged conflicts.

Table 7 summarizes the inferential statistical findings.

| Test              | Variables                            | Result                       | Interpretation                |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Chi-square        | Experience $\times$ Alignment        | $\chi^2(1) = 2.98, p = .084$ | No significant relationship   |
| Spearman's $\rho$ | Evidence use $\times$ Alignment      | $\rho = .47, p = .005$       | Moderate positive correlation |
| t-test            | Conflict (Yes/No) $\times$ Alignment | $t(32) = 1.78, p = .084$     | No significant difference     |

## **10.2 Qualitative Findings**

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed four major themes across the five survey sections.

### **10.2.1 Theme 1: Empathy through Negative Modelling**

The most frequent theme (mentioned by 18 teachers) was that negative experiences as students created lasting empathy for learners. As one teacher (T04) wrote:

"I struggled when teachers overlooked questions. That experience made me prioritize patience, active listening, and creating space for every student's voice."

Another teacher (T22) shared:

"I was not encouraged by my teachers to ask questions. I devote enough time for my students to ask as many questions as they wish."

### **10.2.2 Theme 2: The Primacy of Patience and Flexibility**

Across personality trait responses, "patience" was the most frequently mentioned trait (18 teachers), followed by "flexibility/adaptability" (15 teachers). A representative quote from T31:

"Patience helps me support learners at different paces. Creativity keeps lessons engaging. Assertiveness maintains respect and focus. These three traits work together."

### **10.2.3 Theme 3: Research-Informed but Context-Adapted**

While 80% of teachers reported using evidence-based principles, the qualitative data revealed that teachers adapt these principles to their specific contexts. T14 explained:

"I use research as a flexible guide rather than a rigid formula. I start with what evidence says works best, then adjust to make it accessible for my specific learners."

The most frequently cited theories were Communicative Language Teaching (18 teachers), Constructivism (15 teachers), and Task-Based Learning (10 teachers).

10.2.4 Theme 4: Conflicts and Compromise Strategies

Among the 54.3% of teachers who reported conflicts, three primary sources emerged:

| Source of conflict                                 | Number of mentions |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Exam-oriented systems vs. student-centered beliefs | 12                 |
| Overcrowded classrooms vs. interactive methods     | 10                 |
| Time constraints vs. desired depth                 | 6                  |

Teachers reported several resolution strategies. The most common was compromise and balance. T27 stated:

"I believe in student-centered learning, but exam-oriented systems sometimes demand teacher-led instruction. I incorporate small-group tasks even within structured lessons."

Another strategy was scaffolding and gradual release. T33 explained:

"I strongly believe in a communicative, student-centered approach. But when teaching beginners, they lacked vocabulary for open tasks. I learned to scaffold: introduce key vocabulary, model dialogues, then open discussions."

A third strategy was prioritization. T19 noted:

"I stick to the program but add little activities that let students think more freely. I can't do everything I want, but I do what I can."

### **10.2.5 The Belief-Practice Paradox**

A notable finding was the apparent contradiction between high reported alignment (82.9% "often/always") and the fact that over half of teachers (54.3%) reported experiencing concrete conflicts. The qualitative data offered some resolution. Several teachers distinguished between overall alignment and specific tensions. As T08 wrote:

"My teaching practices are so far well aligned with my beliefs. However, I'm always open to refining them."

Another teacher (T35) added:

"Flexibility does not weaken one's teaching philosophy—it strengthens it by making it more realistic and responsive."

These comments suggest that teachers may define alignment not as perfect consistency but as working toward their ideals within constraints.

## **11. Discussion**

The survey results provide empirical support for the theoretical framework outlined in the literature review while also revealing important nuances and tensions.

### **11.1 Confirmation of Theoretical Claims**

The data strongly confirm Borg's (1999) claim that teachers' cognition is powerfully influenced by their own experience as learners. Over two-thirds of teachers (68.6%) reported drawing on personal experiences "often" or "always" when designing teaching methods.



Thematic analysis showed that teachers consciously replicate positive models and avoid negative ones from their own schooling, supporting Pajares' (1992) assertion that beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate. Similarly, Pajares' claim that beliefs strongly affect behavior was supported: 80% of teachers reported that their personal values have "high" or "very high" impact on their interactions with students.

## **11.2 The Role of Professional Development**

The finding that 62.8% of teachers incorporate colleague feedback "considerably" or "extensively," combined with numerous open-ended testimonies about training programs, supports Fives and Buehl's (2012) claim that professional development can influence belief change. However, several teachers noted that initial teacher education alone was insufficient; ongoing, context-sensitive professional learning was necessary.

## **11.3 Personality as a Filter**

The result that 60% of teachers adapt their teaching methods to align with their personality to a "high" or "full" extent supports Gabillon's (2012) assertion that teacher beliefs are personal entities. However, teachers also demonstrated professional flexibility: when personality traits conflicted with student needs, most reported adjusting their behavior through self-awareness or professionalism.

## **11.4 Theory-Informed Practice**

The finding that 80% of teachers base their methods on evidence-based principles "often" or "always" is encouraging. The most frequently cited theories (CLT, Constructivism, TBLT, Vygotsky's ZPD) are well-established in second language acquisition research. The moderate positive correlation between evidence-based practice

use and belief-practice alignment ( $\rho = .47, p = .005$ ) suggests that research engagement may support greater consistency between what teachers believe and what they do.

### **11.5 The Belief-Practice Paradox Resolved**

A central finding of this study is the apparent paradox: 82.9% of teachers reported that their practices align "often" or "always" with their beliefs, yet 54.3% reported experiencing concrete conflicts. This paradox can be resolved in several ways.

First, teachers may define alignment holistically rather than perfectly. As one teacher noted, flexibility in applying beliefs does not constitute abandonment of those beliefs. Second, the 17.1% who answered "sometimes" may represent more honest or reflective respondents, while the 82.9% answering "often/always" may be influenced by social desirability bias—a known limitation of self-report data (Pajares, 1992). Third, the t-test revealed that teachers who reported conflicts had only slightly lower alignment scores ( $M = 3.8$ ) than those who did not ( $M = 4.2$ ), and this difference was not statistically significant. This suggests that experiencing conflicts does not necessarily mean a teacher perceives overall misalignment.

This finding supports Borg's (1999) claim that beliefs and practices interact bi-directionally and that practices can lead to changes in beliefs. Teachers who experience conflicts may adjust their beliefs or their practices, or develop compromise strategies that satisfy core values even if specific practices deviate.

### **11.6 ESP-Specific Findings**

Among the 35 respondents, 12 reported teaching ESP courses (e.g., English for Accountancy, English for Science). These teachers more frequently cited Task-Based Learning and authentic materials as influences (75%, compared to 45% of general EFL teachers). They also reported higher rates of conflict between their beliefs and



available materials, noting that "textbooks rarely match students' professional fields" (T11). This suggests that ESP teachers face unique challenges in aligning beliefs with resources, consistent with the ESP literature on authenticity and needs analysis (Hyland, 2006).

### **11.7 The Socio-Cultural Mediators of Belief-Practice Dissonance**

A closer analysis of the qualitative data reveals that structural constraints such as overcrowded classrooms and exam-oriented systems are embedded within deeper socio-cultural variables specific to the Algerian EFL context. Three interlocking mediators emerged as particularly salient.

#### **▪ Culturally inscribed authority relationships**

Several teachers described tensions arising from culturally expected teacher-student roles. In contexts where the teacher is traditionally positioned as the primary knowledge transmitter, student-centered approaches can encounter resistance rooted in epistemological expectations about what constitutes "real teaching." As T18 noted, "When I organize group work, some students complain that I am not teaching—they expect me to explain everything from the front." The teacher wishing to enact learner-centered beliefs must therefore negotiate not only internal convictions but external role expectations grounded in cultural models of education (Gabillon, 2012).

#### **▪ Societal expectations and the instrumentalisation of English**

A second variable concerns the perceived purpose of English education. In Algeria, English is increasingly positioned as a gatekeeper to economic opportunity and professional advancement, privileging measurable outcomes—grades and certification—over the communicative competence many teachers endorsed. T12 captured this succinctly: "My students want exam results, not fluency. They see conversation activities as a waste of time." This creates socio-culturally generated dissonance: the teacher's process-oriented beliefs

conflict with a community value system that prioritises demonstrable, examinable results.

### ▪ **Institutional gatekeeping through high-stakes assessment**

The exam-oriented system functions as an institutional mechanism enforcing particular cultural values about knowledge and achievement. Several teachers noted that communicative assessment methods (portfolios, oral presentations) were either unrecognised or discouraged by institutional requirements. T29 explained: "I believe in continuous assessment, but students must sit a written exam that determines everything. They know this, so they prioritize what will be tested." This creates a cascading effect: assessment practices shape student expectations, which shape what teachers feel they can realistically enact, feeding back into beliefs as pragmatic accommodation.

### ▪ **Interaction and implications**

These variables interact synergistically: cultural authority relationships are reinforced by high-stakes examinations, while instrumental societal expectations are concretised through examination formats that operationalise success in narrowly measurable terms. Teachers must simultaneously manage their pedagogical beliefs, students' cultural expectations, and institutional demands for exam outcomes. The resulting dissonance is thus not merely an individual psychological experience but a socially constituted phenomenon. Teacher education programs that transmit research-based principles without addressing these socio-cultural realities risk intensifying rather than resolving belief-practice dissonance. As one participant noted, flexibility "strengthens" teaching philosophy "by making it more realistic and responsive" (T33)—but such flexibility requires institutional conditions that validate teacher agency within the socio-cultural context.



## **12. Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size ( $n = 35$ ) is modest and drawn from a single Algerian university context, limiting generalizability to other settings. Second, the study relied entirely on self-report data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Teachers may over report alignment between their beliefs and practices because they believe this is expected. Third, the cross-sectional design captures beliefs and practices at a single time point, precluding conclusions about causality or change over time. Fourth, the study did not include classroom observations or stimulated recall interviews, which would provide more direct evidence of the belief-practice relationship. Fifth, demographic variables (age, gender) were not collected, preventing analysis of their potential moderating effects. Future research should address these limitations by including larger, more diverse samples, observational data, and longitudinal designs.

## **13. Conclusion**

This study examined how teachers' beliefs guide classroom practices, integrating theoretical literature with empirical data from 35 EFL teachers. The findings confirm that teachers' beliefs are shaped by four interconnected sources: personal experience as learners, professional experience and development, personality traits, and educational/research-based principles. These four sources interact dynamically to produce teaching practices that are generally aligned with teachers' core beliefs.

However, the study also reveals persistent tensions. Exam-oriented systems, overcrowded classrooms, and time constraints create conflicts between student-centered beliefs and teacher-centered realities. Teachers navigate these tensions not by abandoning their beliefs but through compromise, scaffolding, and selective adaptation. The moderate positive correlation between evidence-based practice

use and belief-practice alignment ( $\rho = .47, p = .005$ ) suggests that research engagement may support greater consistency.

For teacher educators and policymakers, the findings suggest that supporting teachers' belief development requires more than transmitting research-based principles. It requires creating conditions—smaller classes, flexible curricula, collaborative professional development—that allow teachers to enact their student-cantered beliefs. Without such conditions, the belief-practice gap will persist, and teachers will continue to resolve conflicts through compromise rather than full alignment.

As one teacher respondent wrote: "*Teaching is subject to improvement when the teacher uses previous learning and professional experiences. Flexibility does not weaken one's teaching philosophy—it strengthens it by making it more realistic and responsive*" (T33).

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