An Overview of Practicality in Iran Educational Framework

Jafar Entezari*
Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Iran
*Corresponding Author: Entezari65@yahoo.com

Forud Gholami
Counseling Student in Islamic Azad University, Khomeynishahr Branch, Iran

Abstract

This study aimed at finding practicality of educational framework in Iran from teacher’s point of view. In order to find the answer, 10 Iranian male and female EFL teachers were chosen to be interviewed. The result of the interview showed that there is a gross distance between what syllabus says, what the students’ need, and what the teachers teach. It is notable to say that since the participants of this study were few, a word of caution must be taken, if we want to generalize the results. To tell the fact the authors as teachers, as well as students in Iran educational framework have experienced this shortcoming. From teachers’ point of view, to overcome this deficiency the cooperation among educational policy makers, syllabus designers, teachers and students is the corner stone.

Keywords: practicality, educational framework, teachers’ beliefs.
Introduction

One of the most important factors with which a curriculum is developed is to consider the idea of stakeholders and whoever engaged with the educational system, developing the second or foreign language curriculum is not an exception regarding the important role of stock holders. Teachers as important stakeholders of a sound pedagogical system, can provide valuable effect on the process of language learning by their beliefs and behaviors as well as their abilities and reasoning behaviors. Felder and Henriques (1995) states that teaching methods vary; some instructors lecture, others demonstrate or discuss, some focus on rules and others on examples, some emphasize memory and others understanding.

Teachers’ belief and behavior toward teaching which should be used beside specific ways to foster EFL learners’ learning process affect the knowledge of their learners. Method of teaching and practicality of educational framework is one of those issues which has perhaps been the focus of most debates in the field of teaching specifically foreign language teaching and that is why it has been a popular candidate for studies of teachers’ beliefs. A lot of educational reforms in language teaching which is very often at the core of the reform is some desire to change the way language teaching is conceptualized and to change the way language teaching is handled by teacher (Borg, 2012). That is exactly the point the present researcher was inspired to study how much the behavior of teachers and the ways in which teachers’ understanding along with their practical reactions in the class emerge in teaching language. Therefore, in the present study the researcher intends to find out the answer to the question in which a sound educational system is considered from Iranian EFL teachers' points of view.

Literature Review

In discussing the trends of language teacher education, Crandall (2000) states that language teacher education has experienced four major shifts which “derive from theory and practice in general teacher education” (p. 34). These include shifts (1) from transmission/product-oriented theories, to constructivist/process-oriented theories of learning, teaching, and teacher learning; (2) from decontextualized theory, to classroom-situated teacher cognition and practice; (3) from ignorance of the importance of teacher prior learning, to a recognition of the powerful role teachers’ prior learning experiences play in shaping their assumptions about effective learning and teaching; and (4) from viewing teaching as a craft, to viewing it as profession.

Corresponding to these shifts, the orientations of language teacher education have also shifted from a focus on training and, later, education, to an increased emphasis on teacher development. Crandall (2000) points out, a training orientation emphasizes the development of skills and an education orientation addresses the development of knowledge. She argues that in both these orientations a teacher is viewed as „a passive recipient of transmitted knowledge” and „omitted is any understanding of the role that language teachers play in their own development” (p. 36). In contrast, a teacher development orientation, Crandall holds, stresses “a life-long process of growth which may involve collaborative and/or autonomous learning, but the important distinction is that teachers are engaged in the process and they actively reflect on their practice” (p. 36). While acknowledging both training and education orientations have their role to play in teacher education, a development notion is strongly recommended to be integrated and maintained in a teacher education program (Mann, 2005).
Teacher professional development is “increasingly viewed as something which is self-directed, inquiry-based, and directly relevant to teacher’s professional lives” (Burns & Richards, 2009, p. 6), with the aim of developing teachers’ multi-dimensional awareness” and „the ability to apply this awareness to their actual contexts of teaching (Tomlinson, 2003).

The study of teachers’ “mental lives” is driven by the desire to improve teacher education and to promote teacher development, with the ultimate goal of enhancing teaching and learning (Borg, 2006; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). Johnson (2006) explains the importance of research on teacher cognition to the field of L2 teacher education:

For Johnson many factors have advanced the field’s understanding of L2 teachers’ work, but none is more significant than the emergence of a substantial body of research now referred to as teacher cognition (Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002; Woods, 1996). This research has helped capture the complexities of who teachers are, what they know and believe, how they learn to teach, and how they carry out their work in diverse contexts throughout their careers (p. 236).

Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung (2007) synthesis of teacher professional learning and development indicates that teaching practice is based on a coherent and integrated set of beliefs and values held by the teacher. However, these beliefs and values are often tacit to teachers and hard to change. To facilitate teacher learning and to bring about changes to teaching practice, it is necessary to engage teachers in evaluating the effect of their tacit knowledge and routines. Moreover, as Bransford et al. (2001) point out, teachers, just like others, come to learning with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are being taught, or may learn them superficially and revert to their preconceptions in real situations (cited in Timperley, et al., 2007, p. viii). Teacher cognition research, with its focus on the study of teachers’ mental lives, can help raise the awareness of their tacit knowledge and provide insights into the processes of teacher development, which can in turn lead to improvements in teacher education and professional development.

In discussing the teacher cognition research, Freeman (2002) points out that the exploration of teacher learning and teacher knowledge is central to the understanding of teacher cognition, with efforts to answer the following questions: (1) How do teachers learn content and teaching practices? (2) How are teachers’ mental processes conceived? (3) What is the role of prior knowledge in learning to teach? (4) What is the role of social and institutional context in learning to teach? Freeman takes these four questions as four themes to map out the research on teacher cognition conducted in the period from the 1970s to 2000, and explains: the first question addresses the theme of what and how of learning to teach, the second is about the theme of thought processes involved, which has to take into consideration the third theme – teacher’s prior knowledge, and the fourth theme – how context shapes teachers’ learning and thinking processes (Freeman, 2002, p. 3). By isolating these four themes Freeman in fact presents a framework for teacher cognition research.

Johnson (1994) and Numrich (1996) shed light on how prior experience relates to classroom practice. Johnson found that preservice teachers’ instructional decisions during a practicum
were based on images of teachers, materials, activities, and classroom organization generated by their own experiences as second language (L2) learners. She concludes that:

preservice ESL teachers’ beliefs may be based largely on images from their formal language learning experiences, and in all likelihood, will represent their dominant model of action during the practicum teaching experience (p. 450).

Working with novice teachers, Numrich (1996) also found that teachers decided to promote or to avoid specific instructional strategies on the basis of their positive or negative experiences of these respective strategies as learners. For example, 27% of the teachers reported in their diaries that they attempted to integrate a cultural component into their teaching because they had found learning about the L2 culture to be an enjoyable part of their L2 learning experiences. In contrast, the teachers noted that they avoided teaching grammar or correcting errors because their own experiences of these aspects of L2 instruction had been negative. With respect to the latter, Numrich reports that:

Error correction was most often cited as a technique that had been used by their language teachers and that had inhibited them from speaking. In some cases it had even turned them off to language learning because they had felt so humiliated and uncomfortable being corrected. Because of negative experiences of being corrected, several teachers chose not to interrupt their students’ flow of speech in the classroom to correct errors (p. 139).

Participants

A sample of convenience was used for the present study. The population sample consisted of Iranian EFL teachers who were teaching English language in different institutes and their teaching experience varied from 10 to 18 years and their age varied from 34 to 47. Out of 10 participants, 3 were female teachers and 7 were male teachers.

Procedure

This study attempted to find the answer of the questions through an interview. In so doing, a set of questions were prepared for the interview. Therefore, participants interviewed directly in the institutes and each interview took about 15 minutes.

Result and Discussion

In this part answers to the questions of the interview were summarized and discussed.

1. How can an EFL teacher motivate his students?

As I observed my motivated students and always they outperformed each task in the classes, so I do believe motivated students are a lot better than the others. I strongly believe that motivation plays a critical role in academic learning in general and in the sustained process of mastering a second language like English, in particular. Being crucial a critical variable in student learning, motivation provides learners with a driving force, by which they can overcome the hurdles of language learning. Thus far most of the motivation research has
focused on well-adjusted students who are successful in school. However, successful students differ from their less-successful peers in many ways.

As an English teacher, I often find that in the language-learning classrooms, quite a few students are motivated and the rests seem to be unwilling to get involved in learning tasks. Accordingly, it can be stated that in addition to the factors that positively influence motivation, there are also certain demotivating factors that negatively affect the target goals. So, the lack of motivation can be specific external forces that diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action. That’s why I think a demotivated learner is someone who initially has had motivation to fulfill a goal or to engage in an activity and has lost the motivation to do so.

Maybe the best solution in which we can motivate our student is to have some tips to teach them, and make the classes more excitement than ever. In lots of cases I have seen that teaching one or two taboos in one sessions makes my students motivated enough to follow the class in a sharp manner. And I do believe it really works.

In one of my BA course book I have read that there are two kinds of motivation one is called internal which is the student idea about the subject matter itself, when this kind of motivation is in a student’s mind you can lead him better to understanding but the lack of it will make the situation a little difficult for a teacher to teach and the other one was external motivation in which students are learning English for a purpose like traveling abroad or as they want to use the language in their job and the like. But the thing which crystal clear here is that even by teaching well and behaving well a teacher can motivate students to gain a good internal motivation, and as they trust their teacher and gain the internal motivation we can move further and make them aware of the English use in their future jobs and how it can help them in different way in their education and employment.

2. How should an EFL teacher treat his students?

Overcoming the obstacles of learning is the first step to be taken in the process of learning. The barriers with which the students usually encounter are of different kinds including physical, social, cultural, and economical and so on. In treating this problem, before any action to be taken, we have to recognize the source of barriers.

All we have in answer to this question is that there are different people from different families and cultures in classes and a good teacher should be one who is able to recognize this feature and some other students’ characters to know how to treat them. The best policies should be used to make the students as outgoing as possible. Because I have seen those students who are more outgoing can act better in classes and this is what exactly needed in class for student to have. To this end they should feel relax in class to express themselves but not like that they do in front of their close friends. Class is a setting in which a formal speaking and behavior is needed as well as some sense of humor to make the class a better place than all other boring places they go to learn.

So they should be treated in a way they can feel relax and also not to be afraid to express what they have in their mind in English because it’s an important factor to find students’ mistakes and correct them, and as the class is the best place to so, we should let them talk and express themselves, particularly the sentences they try to use new vocabularies and grammar, because
in that way we can find out what are their problem and if they use the correct structure and collocations while they utter something in English.

3. What is your world view as a teacher?

The answer to this question is a little different from others as it should be considered that teachers like all other people have different personalities and are having different ideas and visions. And I’m sure the aspects from which they are looking to the world are different. But I try to talk about my idea at first that what the ideal world view is for a teacher.

I think a teacher world view should be something a lot different and he or she should be open to new ideas and technologies because he is facing with new generations who are going to adopt themselves to new things a lot more than older people and within 15 years of teaching a teacher will face with at least three different generations with quite different way of thinking. Students need to be understood, and you should be accepted otherwise, your speech will be nothing to them but a set of boring words combined to be a sentence and make them crazy, and this is exactly the time you see them try to find a way to escape the present situation as it is not something they like. And also they think of you as a teacher whose ideas are like those fossils found. There is no use but to study and know about past and the best form and the most fruitful form of this things to them is the dead one.

The other fact that can be considered is how different the new generations are thinking as they are not able to analyze new things they sometimes declare something in classes about their own ideas and your mouth can take no shape but to be widely open. So even when you try to adopt yourself to what the new generations think about, you will still be surprised by some of reactions and thoughts. So this is human who is going to change on and on and change the history again. We as teachers should be aware of our rules to guide these new people as when you try to be effective and a friend beside a teacher, there will be a great impact on students from your speech. So after holding a close relation you should take care of the way you talk and behave. This is what will affect future of our own society.

4. What is a good student?

Traditionally a good student was a person who had better scores in final exams. But there are two other important factor we should consider rating students.

One of these factors which is the most important one to me is how much the theory and knowledge gained from books can be used in real life situation when the students are facing the reality. As in my classes I teach the structure of “would rather” and “would prefer” I’d like to see if they are capable of using these when facing with a situation in which they want to talk about they desire facing a choice. I strongly believe that students are not good at anything unless they are able to use it in real situations. They are not learning English but when they can understand a text, a listening within their level, and produce language in written and spoken form suitable for their level proficiency.

The second factor is the way they behave in the class as a student. I mean how much they try to be a polite guy or gal. beside the effort I made to be a good teacher and match myself as much as possible to them, I think it will be their turn to be a good student at least in the way they behave.

So using the knowledge in real situation and being polite will be two important factors beside the scores to consider a student as a good one.

5. What is important to you as a teacher?

This is a question I want to answer according to motivational factors for a student. The first and the most important factor is to be relax and have the least stress possible to focus on
the classes’ process and monitor the students’ developing. Being a good scaffold and correcting the students in classes are others to complete the first part but all these need others’ help like our family to understand our situation and also the government and other authorities who should consider the financial problems. I have seen several cases in which teachers are having second or even third job to have a normal life, and unfortunately they always blame themselves and put the blame on job and its income.

It seems as you talk about your job in our society as a teacher, people think it’s not a good job to face some noisy young guys who always try to bother older and misbehavior is something you will face always. To areal teacher it’s a god given gift to have a chance to be with young people teach them and guide them to the right way, some try to show the importance of a teacher as they talk about it as a job like what prophets did. And I think whatever we call it’s the future of our world and the man kind. Whatever it takes they should be taught in the best way. So I want to say the most important thing to me as a teacher is to teach as well as I can and guide my student with good tips beside their lessons. I hope to see all my students to be successful in their education and life.

Finally a good teacher is someone who really wants his students to be successful and try to find a way to motivate his students and make all his efforts to teach whatever needed. Students will understand who is teaching well and is trying to do his best. And then he will be satisfied by his students’ success and if there is a case in which a student needs to be taught more to clarify the subject or a point for him, he won’t stop till he or she get the positive answer to the question: is it clear?
References


