

The Gap Between English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices



Source of Research: Rahman, G., Ali, S., & Iqbal, M. (n.d.), *The Dialogue*, X(3), 296-311.
Additional Reference: Pica, T. (1994). Questions from the language classroom: Research perspectives. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28. pp.49-79.

What is this research about?

This research investigates the extent to which English Language teachers practice their beliefs about language learning.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers collected data from 32 teachers, whose experience ranged from 4-20 years, in order to determine beliefs about language teaching and learning. Next, data was collected from 182 students of the same teachers to determine the extent to which teachers' beliefs were manifested in their practice. Survey questions were developed based on Pica's (1994) second language acquisition theory, focusing on:

- ♦ the nature of language taught and learnt;
- ♦ instructional strategies;
- ♦ patterns of classroom organization;
- ♦ language used in class;
- ♦ grammar instruction;
- ♦ the role of the teacher;
- ♦ instructional materials used in class.

What you need to know...

The authors noted that the study had “pedagogical implications to indicate potential areas of improvement for language teachers in order to make sure teaching” (p. 309) is in align with their beliefs. It is suggested that this study might help teachers to see the gap between their beliefs and practices and thereby “evaluate their own performance” (p. 309).

What did the researchers find?

One of the most significant gaps between beliefs and practice were related to structures used in classrooms. For example, 88% of the teachers believed that group work was helpful in advancing understanding and that they were of the view that students should work in groups to enhance learning of the English language. Students reported that only 14% of the teachers actually assign tasks in which group work is required.

Another gap was related to the importance of both production and comprehension. The researchers found that 88% of the teachers believed that both were important for learning whereas only 44% of the teachers focused on these aspects of language learning in their classroom practice.

A 44% gap was found between teachers' beliefs about their role in the learning environment. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the teachers believed that they should take on the role of facilitator and participant in the class and that students should be active participants as well, while reports about their actual classroom practices (50%) showed teachers played a role more closely aligned with behaviourist approaches.