

## An Analytic Generalization of the Path Model of Teacher Cognition: Evidence from a Case Study on the Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

**Mohammad Tamimy**

Alborz University

Qazvin, Iran

Tel: +98-936-588-3633

Email: mohammad.tamimy@gmail.com

**Abstract.** This instrumental-comparative case study examines the beliefs and classroom practices of three English teachers in Iran. The participants were observed for two consecutive classroom sessions and interviewed two times afterwards; the first time two days after the final observation and the second time, in the form of stimulated recalls when the data from their observations were analyzed. The observations provided insights about their classroom practice, and the semi-structured interviews elicited their language teaching beliefs. The findings suggested that (A) learners' condition directs teachers' choice of methodology; (B) the washback effect of high-stakes discrete-point examinations along with the traditional ongoing societal beliefs, notwithstanding the sense of a good-will for helping learners to be successful in future, can misinform teachers' communicative practices; (C) pre-service teacher education in the form of graduate programs in TESOL seems to be not much effective in helping teachers to readily implement communicative classroom practices. These answers corroborated the statistical findings of the Path Model of Teacher Cognition (Nishino, 2012) within another context, and empirically justified the rationale for a move towards contextualized knowledge-base of teacher education.

**Keywords:** Teachers' belief, path model of teacher cognition; contextual factors; washback effect; teacher education

## 1. Introduction

It has always been a thought-provoking question why there are discrepancies between what teachers believe to be appropriate and what they actually do in their classes. The topic has been challenging enough to attract researchers' attention, and thus, today there is a multitude of research available. To judge whether the number of research is actually great or not, the size of review articles could be a good indicator because review articles can generally be authored only if there are sufficient original contributions. From 1981 to 2012, there have been at least six published review articles (viz., Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981; Pajares, 1992; Fang, 1996; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002; Borg, 2003; Basturkmen, 2012). In a simplistic statistical term, it means one review article per 5.1 years. There is no need to mention that each review article subsumes a good deal of original contribution (For example, Borg (2003) includes 64 studies). Although focusing on different aspects, these frequent studies are all similar in that they made sporadic contributions so that some factors like teacher experience are over-investigated and some others are under-investigated. Feeling this shared deficiency, Borg (2003) in his influential review proposed the Conceptual Model of Teacher Cognition and rightly stated that:

Such a framework is necessary for several reasons; it militates against the accumulation of isolated studies conducted without sufficient awareness of how these relate to existing work; it reminds researchers of key dimensions in the study of language teacher cognition (e.g., prior learning, professional education, context); and it highlights key themes and relationships and promotes more focused [*italics added*] attention to these (p. 105).

Despite the expectations for a more focused and framework-based approach towards the topic as a result of Borg's contention, things have not changed much today. And the studies are yet isolated and sporadic to the extent that Basturkmen (2012) again, in her review, calls for a focused approach: "Arguably, it is time to move the research agenda beyond description [and towards deduction]. Researchers might consider comparative studies" (p. 292). Simply put, there was once no consol-

idating framework, and now that such a framework is available, it is sometimes neglected (e.g., Harfitt, 2012; Li, 2013). As a result, exhaustive focus on some areas (for example, teacher's experience) overrode the attention towards the others including the role of teacher training or the ongoing societal ideologies.

The present paper takes both recommendations into consideration. On the one hand, it examines Nishino's (2012) path model of teacher cognition which is a statistically tested variation of Borg's (2003) conceptual model of teacher cognition with a specific focus on the less investigated aspects of teacher cognition including contextual factors and professional coursework. On the other, and in compliance with Basturkmen's (2012) recommendation for the move towards deduction making, this study does not report the heuristic findings, as arrived at through intrinsic case studies; rather, it opts for an instrumental-comparative design so that deduction drawing, inferring, and theory development are made possible. According to Grandy (2010), "the intrinsic case is often exploratory in nature, and the researcher is guided by her interest in the case itself rather than in extending theory or generalizing across cases" (p. 473), whereas instrumental case study is more theory-oriented in the sense that "the case itself is secondary to understanding a particular phenomenon" (Grandy, 2010, p. 473). Indeed, this paper, as an instrumental-comparative study, strives to further a consolidated understanding of the inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and practices through a process of analytic generalization of the current theory.

## 2. Purpose of the Study

This work is an attempt towards the analytic generalization of the Nishino's (2012) path model of teacher cognition, which is a statistically tested version of Borg's (2003) conceptual model of teacher cognition. Analytic generalization is a process through which the evidence for or against a theory from a different context is provided (Firestone, 1993). Analytic generalization is different from replication because it does not strictly follow the design and procedures of the original study. Indeed, it goes beyond the probability theory and empirically evaluates the scope of the application for a particular theory in an independent

study. Contrary to sample to population extrapolation, analytic generalization can not only support a theory, but it can also add some dimension to it (Yin, 2012).

### 3. Literature Review

Reviewing literature on the relations between teachers' beliefs and practices, one cannot easily ignore Borg's (2003) influential literature review because it suggests a road map for the future studies. Borg (2003) came up with a conceptual model of teacher cognition (Figure 1) which he believed can be taken as a starting point for research consolidation: "[such a framework] militates against the accumulation of isolated studies conducted without sufficient awareness of how these relate to existing work" (p. 105). As illustrated in Figure 1, Borg's (2003) model comprises "schooling" (prior learning experiences), "professional coursework" (teacher education programs), "contextual factors" (socioeducational conditions), "classroom practice" (in reality teaching) and "teacher cognition" (beliefs and attitudes about teaching, learning, student, subject and curricula). Borg advocated that, with an exception for contextual factors, all the other factors affect classroom practice indirectly and through teacher cognition. According to him, contextual factors have both direct and indirect impacts on classroom practice. Borg did not go any further and did not mention how strong different impacts might be.

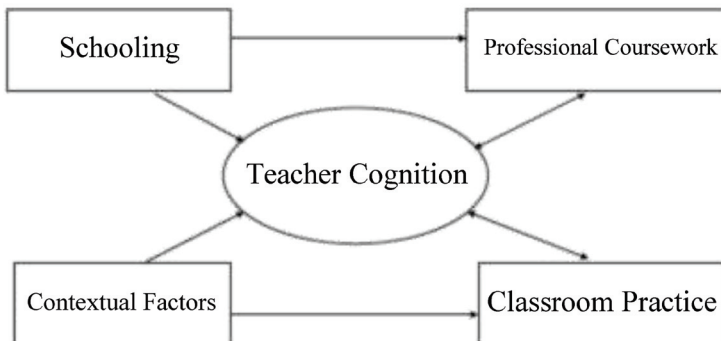


Figure 1. Borg's (2003, p. 82) conceptual model of teacher cognition

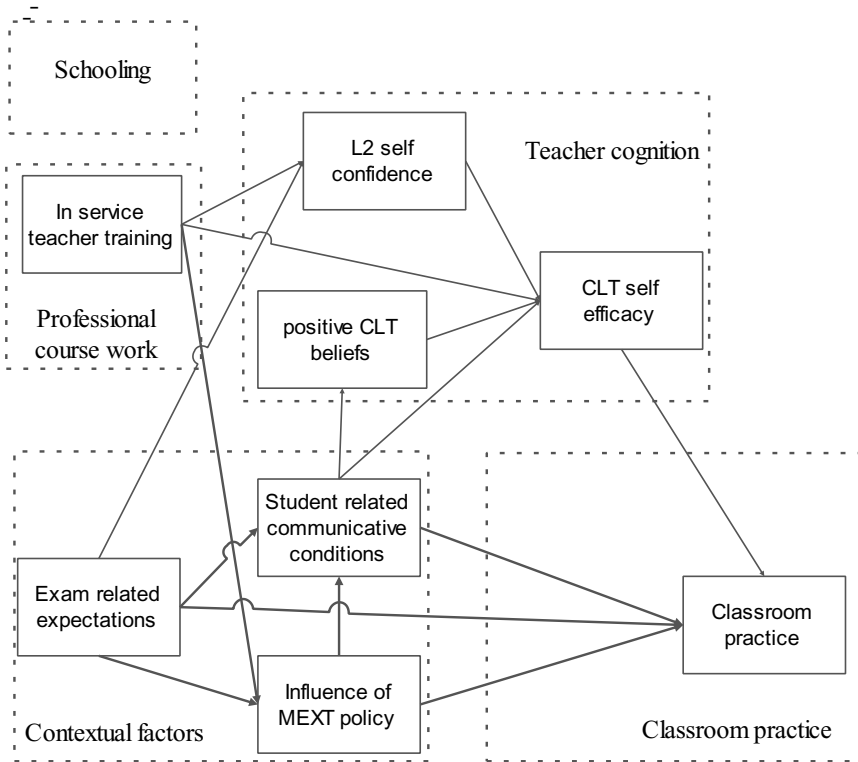
Borg's conceptual model has not been statistically tested until recently, partly due the context sensitive nature of teachers' cognition. Nishino (2012) statistically tested the conceptual model of teacher cognition within the Japanese ESL context (Figure 2). Japanese ESL context could be described as one in which the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has been assiduously making diferent, but not much successful attempts to promote communicative language education since 1980s (Nishino, 2012). Given the gap between communicative policy but still non-communicative classroom practices, Nishino (2012) applied Borg's (2003) conceptual model to incorporate communicative language teaching (CLT) and then tested it statistically to understand what factors affect the transfer of communicative policy to the real class. Although Nishino's (2012) path model of teacher's beliefs and practices has different components, the present paper will focus on the contextual factors and professional coursework.

Nishino (2012) found that the more students are willing for communication in class, the more consistent teachers' beliefs and practices are, and thus, the more communicative they are. She averred that "when teachers perceive that students' expectations for communication and their ability to engage in pair and group work are high, teachers are likely to use communicative activities" (pp. 387-388).

Concerning exam related expectations, Nishino (2012) found ambivalent effects on classroom practice: a negative direct one and an indirect positive one. In a logical comment, she explained these mixed effects in terms of the washback effects of two university entrance exams in Japan namely, Niji and Center Test:

We can speculate that the direct negative impact of Exam-Related Expectations on Classroom Practices was partly a reflection of traditional beliefs about English for examinations that still worked as far as Niji examinations are concerned, whereas the indirect positive impact in part reflected changes in the Center Test. (Nishino, 2012, p. 388).

Japanese high-school students usually need to sit two exams in order to enter prestigious higher education institutions. The first one is Center Test which is communicative and incorporates listening tasks. And the second is Niji which is adminestered by universities and comprises mostly



**Figure 2.** Nishino's (2012) statistical model of teacher cognition (p.389)

discrete-point grammatical translation items (Nishino, 2012). Nishino observes that Niji's negative washback is of a greater influence than the positive effect of Center Test on communicative classroom practice.

The influence of MEXT policy is the other component of contextual factors in Nishino's (2012) study. MEXT policy denotes a set of decisions and practices devised by MEXT to promote communicative language education within the traditional grammar-translation dominant context of Japan. Nishino (2012) found a positive direct, but small effect ( $\beta : 0.15$ ) for MEXT policy on the classroom practice. She argues that :

It is likely that classroom practices may become more communicative if teachers-stimulated by MEXT's introduction of the listening section

on the Center Exam-attempt to employ more listening activities and if students see these activities as meeting their needs when studying hard to pass university entrance exams. (Nishino, 2012, pp. 388-389).

An investigative look at the  $\beta$  values in the model, especially those for exam-related Expectations-Classroom practice ( $\beta = -0.22$ ) and Influence of MEXT Policy-Classroom practice ( $\beta = +0.15$ ), reveals that ongoing societal ideologies inform teachers' classroom practices more than innovative policies. This interpretation can also be understood from her words that "in effect, MEXT's attempt to promote communicative innovations was unsuccessful in part because of the [preponderant] influence of the examination industry and the financial problems that some universities are facing" (Nishino, 2012, p. 388).

Finally and contrary to expectation, Nishino (2012) observed no strong and direct effect of teacher education on classroom practice. Actually, this can mean that teacher education whether pre-service or in-service does not promote innovation in classroom practice: "Both pre- and in-service training probably did not promote CLT practices among Japanese high-school teachers" (Nishino, 2012, p. 389).

#### 4. Iran's Context

There are a number of similarities between Japanese ESL, as presented by Nishino (2012), and the Iranian EFL context which can make the analytic generalization of Nishino's statistical model of teacher cognition reasonable. In both contexts, two parallel, perhaps contradictory, language education systems are available: one emphasizing Grammar Translation, and the other highlighting Communicative Language Teaching.

In Iran, two governmentally approved systems are available for language education: compulsory education and non-compulsory private language institutes. Compulsory education still abounds with traditional grammar-translation methods, or what Nishino (2012, p. 382) calls "yakudoku". On the other hand, private language institutes have welcomed modern language education, i.e., CLT, for at least 10 years.

In Japan, these two systems are also available. Although MEXT publicizes communicative language teaching, an abundance of course

books, practice books, and test books based on grammar translation are published and sold yearly (Nishino, 2012). Indeed, a typical Japanese ESL class can be depicted as one in which an amalgamation of grammar translation and communicative activities coexist.

In both Japanese and Iranian contexts, students must take high-stakes entrance examination to enter prestigious universities. In Japan, students usually go through Niji which is grammar-translation based (Nishino, 2012). Similarly, in Iran students take Konkoor which is mostly concerned with applicants' grammar and vocabulary knowledge (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009), rather than their communicative ability.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1. Participants

Four teachers from three private English as a Foreign Language (EFL) institutes, in which the research has previously worked, consented to participate in the study. These institutes were all located in Shahriar, a suburban area of Tehran, the Iranian capital, which is home to many domestic migrants of different cultural ethnicities. Parenthetically, it must be mentioned that the different roles of language in Iran and Japan, i.e., EFL and ESL, does not seem to affect the result of the study because the two contexts shared enough in terms of important educational practices and policies.

As shown in Table 1, Hamid and Ali were colleagues at the Persia institute teaching male learners at the intermediate level, respectively aged around 16 and 17. Zahra taught the same intermediate course to two different classes at the Darius institute. The classes were all female-based and the learners aged 20 on average, as the officials reported.

There were seven students in the first class (Zahra (a)) and eleven in the latter one (Zahra (b)). Although Saeed's case has been omitted due to the credibility concern, to be discussed later on in details, his case is described here. Saeed was teaching an intermediate boys class, 18 on average, at the Russel institute. One final note is needed on participants' marital status because it can impose further demands on the availability of their time. With an exception for Hamid, all other participants



were single at the time of the study. Hamid's marriage and its economic demands can also explain at least in part why Hamid simultaneously worked at three different places.

**Table 1:** Participants (all pseudonyms)

Participant (pseudonym)	Hamid	Ali	Zahra (a) & Zahra (b)	Saeed
<b>Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers at <i>Persia</i> private inst.</li> <li>• Teacher at public school</li> <li>• Tour guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher at <i>Persia</i> private inst.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher at <i>Darius</i> private inst.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher at <i>Russel</i> private inst.</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching Experience</b>	14 yrs.	2 yrs.	4 yrs.	6 yrs.
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A in Farsi Literature</li> <li>• B.A in English Translation</li> <li>• M.Sc. in Clinical Psychology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A in English Translation</li> <li>• M.A in TEFL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A in English Translation</li> <li>• M.A in TEFL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A in TEFL</li> </ul>
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	Single	Single	Single

## 5.2. Data collection

In order to strengthen the credibility of the research, an attempt was made to use data from different sources so that a naturalistic image is arrived at as far as possible. Data were triangulated, through class observation (videoed), semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

### 5.2.1. Observation

At first, each class was to be observed and videoed for four consecutive sessions by the researcher himself so that the Hawthorne effect was minimized. However, some inconveniences occurred when it came to practice. Firstly, since Zahra was teaching in a girls-only institute, the gatekeeper did not allow the researcher, a man, to personally attend the classes to have them observed and only fixed cams were used. Secondly, the researcher needed to reduce the observations to only two consecutive sessions due to a lack of resources, especially the high price of outdated analogue Hi8 video tapes and the costly process of analogue to digital conversion. In the cases of Hamid and Ali, two consecutive sessions were both videoed and observed from the beginning till the end. Zahra's classes were just videoed. The researcher opted for the "observer as participant" (Gold,1958, as cited in Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010) role during the observations so that research ethics were not violated. However, this choice increased the Hawthorne effect, and that was why more extended observations were suggested. More details on the observations and description of the classroom layout can be found in Appendix A.

To compensate for the unwelcome Hawthorne effect, another step was taken. The institutes' principals were asked to elicit and report the students' feedback on the observed sessions to the researcher so that any deviation from the typical daily class could be identified. Ethically speaking, the teachers were previously told that the feedbacks would be gathered. In the case of Saeed, his performance during the observed classes was more energetic and productive than before, as reported by the students' feedback. So, Saeed's case was omitted to protect the credibility of the study. The principal of the institute where Saeed worked (Russel Institute), through a phone call reported: "students came to me and said: 'Oh Sir, Mr. Saeed was fantastic today' ".

### 5.2.2. Interviews

Retrospective individual interviews were conducted with participants two days after the second observation to avoid the immediate transfer of practice to beliefs. Semi-structured interviews were drawn on to provide

in-depth information about the teachers' beliefs. To provide as naturalistic a story as possible, probes were frequently employed throughout the interviews, especially the first round. A glance at the interview durations (Appendix B) buttresses the probing nature of interviews. The second round of interviews was carried out after the first stages of data analysis and included stimulated recall events. The intention of the second interviews was to illuminate the relationship between participants' beliefs and practices. The interviews were conducted in Farsi (participants' L1) and audio recorded so that no idea was left unvoiced or forgotten due to the English (L2) proficiency or memory limitations respectively.

The interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. Afterwards, the translations were returned to the participants for member check to assure the credibility. Participants carefully read the renderings and commented on them for improvement.

**5.2.3. Document analysis** Teaching materials, attendance lists and lesson plans if available were drawn on to enrich the findings.

### 5.3. Data analysis

The interview data were coded into Categories with the help of *MAXQDA<sup>TM</sup>* 11. The category development for the first case, namely, Hamid was inductive and deductive afterwards. In other words, the Categories generated from the first case were used to code the data from the other cases. Green (2010) defines inductive category development as a process in which "the researcher approaches data analysis without a preset list of Categories and analyzes the data to identify analytic units that conceptually match the phenomenon portrayed in the data set" (p.71). Participants' answers to the interview questions were categorized topically: teacher's role, student's role, student -teacher interactions and relations, error correction, less adept students, group work, individual differences, class management, role of syllabus, classroom evaluation, important skills, accuracy or/and fluency, affective factors, culture, views towards language development, and homework.

The categorized interview data were returned to participants in a tabulated format for member check to assure that the researcher has not misinterpreted the participants' intentions. The participants confirmed

the credibility of almost all the categories. The categories suffering any degree of credibility concern (e.g., homework, group work, and views towards language development) were improved by the participants.

Likewise, the researcher deductively categorized the other datasets arrived at through videoed observations, field notes and material analysis into the above categories. It is noteworthy that not all the categories were used for a specific video. Video categorization was facilitated using the time stamping feature of MAXQDA 11.

Penultimately, the instances within each category, from both sources, i.e., observations and interviews, were marked either as modern or traditional. Semiotically speaking, each symbol including these labels is prone to be equivocally interpreted by different people unless the association conventions between forms and meanings are clearly presented. This study draws on Kohonen (1992, 2006) to differentiate between traditional and modern language education. Kohonen (1992) operationalizes traditional and modern as Behaviorism and Constructivism respectively. Further, he contrasts the instances of these two models in terms of ten Categories: a) view of learning, b) power relation, c) teacher's role, d) learner's role, e) view of knowledge, f) view of curriculum, g) learning experiences, h) control of process, i) motivation, and j) evaluation. Besides, Kohonen (1992) seems to be more inclined towards social constructivism in his definition of the modern model of language education.

Finally, the corresponding categories from different sources, i.e. interview and class observation, were compared for consistency. When inconsistencies were observed, the position of the seeker (e.g. 01:05:46-01:07:35) along with the respective belief were taken note of to be shown to the participant later on. The instances of inconsistencies were marked on the videos using MAXQDA so that they can be easily replayed. In the second interview, each participant was shown salient instances of inconsistencies individually and his/her comments were sought and audio recorded. Details on the interview dates, times, and durations could be found in Appendix B.

## 6. Research Questions

The reader might be surprised why this section, i.e., Research questions follows the Procedure section. Indeed, this study was not originally conducted to answer the following questions; rather it was originally an intrinsic case-study to shed light on the inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and practices. However, after the data analysis the researcher found that the findings could better contribute to the analytical generalization of Nishino's (2012) path model, and therefore, the researcher chose to report the findings as an instrumental case study. Stake (1995), as cited in the Grandy (2010), states that an intrinsic case study is guided by the researcher's interest whereas the instrumental case study is conducted to extend a theory. This arrangement for Research question section attempts to suggest that the present study was initially an intrinsic one and thus mainly unaffected by the biases in the theoretical framework, i.e., findings by Nishino (2012).

The following topics found to be investigable using the findings of this study:

**Q.1:** Does students' willingness for modern teaching, i.e., CLT, promote modern classroom practices among teachers?

**Q.2:** Can the washback effect of high-stakes university entrance examination challenge teachers' choice of modern methodology in class?

**Q.3:** Can the ongoing societal ideologies outweigh the institutional, sometimes governmental, innovations towards communicative language teaching?

**Q.4:** Can teacher education, a higher academic degree, improve teachers' classroom practice?

## 7. Findings and Discussion

### Answer to Q.1:

During the class observations, two phenomena were observed which can be interpreted as a positive answer to this question. Firstly, the students' willingness for communicative activities pushed the teacher to

abandon the traditional practices and initiate communicative ones (Narrative 1). Secondly, student's unwillingness turned a totally communicative activity, initiated by the teacher, into a non-communicative one (Narrative 2). These findings not only corroborate that "when teachers perceive that students' expectations for communication and their ability to engage in pair and group work are high, the teachers are likely to use communicative activities" (Nishino, 2012, pp. 387-388), but they also extend it in the sense that learners' unwillingness, for any reason whatsoever, can spoil a communicative activity as actually did in Zahra's case.

### *Narrative 1*

Hamid writes an idiom on the whiteboard and then makes a story in which the word is used to make the meaning clear to the students. Hamid's descriptions and stories are long, including some difficult words and mostly unsuccessful. Learners unwillingly make some sporadic wild guesses of the idiom's meaning in their L1. Hamid himself invariably provides the exact translation of the word because of the considerable passivity on the part of the learners. This process is repeated for three or four other idioms and during the process the learners are terribly silent. They just take notes of the idioms and their Farsi equivalents once presented by the teacher. Indeed, learners do not write anything about the stories or their guesses, they wait for the definite translation from the teacher. Two boys who had left the class to photocopy some pages of a book for the classmates are now back. The teacher distributes the copies to the students; each one. The copies are few pages from a book named "VOA Breaking News", published in 2007. A compilation of old-enough VOA breaking stories presented as transcriptions and readings which comes with an Audio CD containing listening files as originally broadcasted by VOA. Hamid asks the students to look at their copies: "Please open your pamphlets here [shows the page to students]. We would like to translate together about the meaning. And next to this you will learn new words using your dictionaries" (07:41). He is aware that the pace of the authentic news broadcast is much higher than learners can feel at ease with so he tells them that the listening

is so fast and they are just going to have translation practice rather than listening comprehension. He plays a short part of a news story about a political issue (Iraq war) two times and then he himself reads it loud right from the book. He then marks some words and asks the students to find the meanings from their dictionaries. Meanwhile, the class atmosphere is more like a lecture hall with the students silently and confusedly looking at the teacher or exhaustedly leafing through their dictionaries. Even when the learners found the meaning of the word, they just read it loud right from the dictionary and were uninterested to reflect upon the definition. Students are more like search engines rather than intelligent humans. The students are so passive that Hamid sees no way but translating the whole sentences himself and the students are busy taking notes of their teacher's translations. Hamid is not happy with some of his students because they have closed their dictionaries and are just looking at him all the time. After 8 minutes on the activity, a student asked: "Sir, what is this about? What is the topic?" (22:25). Finally, the teacher leaves the activity half way through and unfinished because of students' inattentiveness: "All right, thank you so much for translating this." (23:36). The teacher opens the main course book, namely *Interchange 1* 3rd edition at a given page and gives learners five minutes to read and understand a conversation so that they can have a spontaneous role play in pairs. Now the amount of student talk significantly increases and there is no silent passivity. Students talk with their peers about the conversation. Students are now actively participating. When they come across a new word, they look it up themselves without being asked to do so. Learners are now smiling and sometimes laughing while practicing their roles. When the practice time is up, they start the performance. Most of the learners volunteer for performance and some of them even get annoyed when their performance is interrupted by the teacher. As the last class activity the teacher asks his students to make a conversation of their own based on the one in the book with their peers. Students are actively engaged. Some of them ask for some words. Some of them invite the teacher to preview their conversation. Being called upon, the teacher joins some peers and friendly talk take place about the conversation and its theme namely, while at a

restaurant.

*Narrative 2*

After the roll call, Zahra opens the course book namely, Interchange 3, to pursue the daily lesson plan. But she encounters great resistance and unwillingness from the students: “a student begs: Teacher, don’t teach today please. we are tired!”, “another one clamors: For the sake of God!” or “Can we have just speaking practice today?”. Finally, the teacher stands up and agrees upon their request: “ok, free discussion!”. And suddenly, students cheered all together: “hurray!”; A student told: “Teacher, I love you”. While the teacher was asking the learners for a preferred discussion topic, students talked annoyingly all together in their L1 to the extent that Zahra snapped her fingers frequently, knocked the marker on the board and clapped. Futile was all the teacher’s effort to solicit a topic from students for discussion so she introduced a topic herself namely, A Good Teacher. And asked the learners to discuss the topic with each other. But that was when a student told: “Oh no! This is worse than the usual lesson plan!” (10:26). Accordingly, the teacher gets a bit provoked: “Discuss! Discuss this topic!”, she shouts while tapping the marker on her palm repeatedly. Then she sits with her arms clenched. Meanwhile, the learners were talking in a lower tone to find a volunteer to start the discussion: “A student told: First Atie [=name of one of her classmates]” (10:36). After a silence, Zahra raises some questions to encourage participation from the students but her attempt is almost unsuccessful. During the free discussion which lasted about half an hour the teacher changes the discussion topic because it is not welcome enough by the students. In almost all this 30 minutes, the students are gabbling all at the same time in their L1 about everything but the topic. Given Zahra’s dissatisfaction with the discussion, she abandons it and returns to the daily lesson plan, vocabulary about world problems.

**Answer to Q.2:**

A couple of observations, especially in Ali’s case, compel us to accept that washback effect can considerably overshadow the communicative activities to the advantage of grammar translation. While working on Ali’s case, that is comparing his beliefs with his classroom practice, some con-



spicuous inconsistencies were observed. Unlike his beliefs elicited during the first interview, his classroom practice was more traditional. Ali in his first interview criticized memory-based didactic grammar and vocabulary teaching. He maintained that quizzes should promote cognition and reflection rather than sole memorization. Somewhere else, he stated that vocabulary should be contextually introduced if it is to be learned. Moreover, grammar teaching should be an inductive practice which ends in a deductive wrap-up as a touchstone against which students can check their grasps, as he argued.

In classroom practice, however, he teaches vocabulary differently and drill-like. He reads each entry of a specific lesson from the vocabulary book (504 Essential Words) loud and students pronounce the words after him. This was repeated five or six times for each entry. Then he translates each word to Farsi (students' L1). He tells learners that they are going to have a vocabulary quiz next session. During the quiz, he asks students individually the verbatim synonym of the vocabulary items as appearing in the book.

As far as grammar teaching is concerned, he assigns a student a unit of a grammar book (Grammar In-Use) as a project. Actually, the nominee should study the unit at home and lecture on the topic next session. During the second observation, the student starts lecturing while the teacher is busy searching his book for something. The other students are not following the lecture at all. Done with the search, Ali listens to the lecture but he interrupts the lecturer and starts teaching grammar not only deductively but also in Farsi (students' L1). Ali even uses some linguistic jargon in his presentation of the grammar. Meanwhile the nominee student is standing silently beside the board.

In examination of these inconsistencies through stimulated recalls, Ali's arguments revolved mainly around the washback effect of the Iranian national university examination, i.e., Konkoor. He said that his students are all high school students and they are already used to the grammar-translation method of schools and if he does not teach grammar and vocabulary, students will feel they have not been taught at all. He also pointed that they are highly investing on Konkoor because they all want a better job and future; and Konkoor is really demanding

in terms of grammar and vocabulary. In response to the question why the other teachers did not mention washback effect as a reason for the inconsistency between their beliefs and practices as obviously as Ali did, it must be mentioned that Ali's students were aged around 17 and were going to take Konkoor in about a year. Hence, it must not be surprising that they are much more concerned with Konkoor than the other teachers.

### **Answer to Q.3:**

We can draw an analogy between MEXT policy in Japan and the educational policies of the Persia Institute in Iran, where Hamid and Ali were working, in that both are grappling with ingrained traditional language education practices. The retired geography teacher about 50 who founded and manages the Persia institute has a sincere faith in modern education. Despite all the official warnings, he is resisting sex segregation, called for by the Iranian Ministry of Education. As an aficionado of formative assessment, he, notwithstanding the bold role of achievement tests, criticizes summative assessment and, accordingly, no great weight is given to the achievement tests in the Persia institute. Indeed, achievement tests have a marginal share of 30% of the students' overall score as the institute's policies are concerned. The policies of the Persia institute really encourage a greater focus on listening and speaking. For example, teachers are given enough freedom to devise their own personal activities or use their preferred supplementary materials for the purpose of communicative language teaching. The Persia institute has also defined its syllabus so that teachers are not pressed for time at all.

Policies of the Persia institute, as indicated in its principal's words, are actually not very successful in the sense that they could not resist the ongoing expectations about learning and achievement. As illustrated in Narrative 1 and Ali's classroom practices (see the discussion for the Q.2), all the goodwill of the Persia institute's principal, i.e., modern policies, are not reflected in the teachers' practice (Hamid and Ali). Here, in explanation of the attempted transfer of the institute's policy into classroom practices, we can conclude that traditional dogmas are so entrenched that innovative reforming attempts will not be able to succeed,

as it was with the MEXT policy in Nishino (2012). In other words, the policies were not transferred into the classroom practice because the rationale behind it was irrational: Why should teachers have invested on communicative language teaching when it could not be of great help to the students' success in their studies, evaluated by their place on the Konkoor or Niji? This implies that a change in the wider context is necessary if the new language education policies are meant to be effective. As Johnson and Johnson (1996) noted, "the value systems exist as a hidden curriculum beneath the surface of school life. This curriculum with its hidden values permeates the social and cognitive development of children, adolescents, and young adults" (p.63). As a conclusion, the following recount from the principal of the Persia institute, heard during a personal communication, clearly shows an instance of interference between the 'ongoing' societal common beliefs and educational innovations:

Given my thirty-year experience as a teacher at schools, I have always been unhappy with the achievement tests because they were encouraging laziness among students. Students who have not studied during the year could cram right before the exam day and pass the exam. So I have decided to give portfolio assessment a major role within my institute. Indeed, I was to put the achievement tests aside. In the first semesters of my experience as the institute manager, I have received many complaints from the learners' parents indicating that there is no procedure to check the students' knowledge within the institute. They believed that we do not test the students because we do not want to lose some students and put our financial benefits at risk. But, actually we have implemented a normative portfolio assessment based on which each student was assigned a score. What prevented me to achieve my ideal, that is eradication of achievement tests, was this resistance from the parents. For the moment, I have acquiesced to give portfolio assessment just a 70% share of the overall score.

There is no need to mention that ongoing societal expectations and beliefs again were influential because they could militate against the principal's deep desire for a more formative orientated assessment in his language institute. In fact, this finding, while supporting Nishino's

(2012) claim that ongoing societal beliefs can outweigh innovative policies, also reiterates that “the question of how teachers are socialized cannot be addressed adequately without linking the processes of teacher education to ongoing [emphasis added] patterns of schooling and to the social, economic and political context” (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, p. 10).

#### **Answer to Q.4:**

When data analysis was almost finished, the researcher surprisingly found that Hamid’s classroom practice was interestingly more modern than Zahra’ and Ali’s. Zahra and Ali, unlike Hamid, never used or even attempted group/pair work in their classes. Secondly, teacher talk constituted a considerably higher amount of class time for Zahra and Ali. Zahra and Ali monologically talked for at least 80% of their class time whereas Hamid dedicated no more than 50% of his class time to monologues. Thirdly and more importantly, not even a single instance of experiential learning was observed in Zahra and Ali’s classes. However, Hamid at least minimally encouraged the students into active learning processes like personalization and role-plays (See Narrative 1).

It was surprising that Hamid had not been in direct contact with teacher education for long. In comparison with Zahra and Ali, his graduate study was not directly related to education. Clearly, clinical psychology is not much related to language education as TEFL/TESOL. On the other hand, he is more pressed for time than Zahra and Ali to afford self-study because he works at three places. His marriage imposes even more demands on his time. Another factor to consider is the fact that he has left university for a longer period (six years earlier) in comparison with Zahra and Ali who are recent graduates. These pieces of evidence together with Zahra and Ali’s less modern classroom practice compel us to accept Nishino’s (2012) argument that teacher education, i.e., Master’s program Zahra and Ali have recently attended, is of no considerable service to the more modern classroom practice.

Finally, it should be noted that our finding is not necessarily contradictory to those of Akbari and Dadvand (2011) because, firstly, they found graduate programs in TESOL more effective than the undergrad-

uates' only in terms of pedagogical thought or theoretically justifiable beliefs, not the real class practice. Secondly, they themselves were well aware that master holders produced more academic beliefs in explanation of their classroom practice possibly because of "their expertise in articulating their thoughts [as a result of] their access to the related discourse resulting from their academic experiences" (Akbari & Dadvand, 2011, p. 55). Thirdly, Akbari and Dadvand (2011) have only provided frequency lists of the pedagogical thoughts, i.e, theoretically justifiable beliefs , and voiced no word of their quality, whether they were more modern or more traditional.

## 8. Conclusion

This study as a response to the call of Nishino (2012) that "the Final Path Model of Teacher Beliefs and Practices should be tested with a new sample" (p.394) takes at the same time the frequent invitations (Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 2003) for a more focused attention to the issue, i.e., relations between teachers' beliefs and practices, into consideration. The findings of this qualitative study corroborate those of the Path Model of Teacher Beliefs and Practices (Nishino, 2012) within the context of Iranian English language teaching (ELT). The present study found that online aspects of classroom especially learners' willingness for communicative activities directly affect teacher's practice. Learners' willingness can easily make the teachers change their behaviors. The present researcher also observed that the washback effect of high-stakes discrete-point examinations along with the resulting traditional ongoing societal beliefs can misinform the teachers' communicative practices through the sense of good-will for helping learners. As apropos of professional coursework, it was unexpectedly discovered that the pre-service teacher education was not successful in its attempt to encourage modern/communicative insights into the teachers' classroom practice. Future studies, whether naturalistic or experimental, are strongly recommended to investigate why pre-service teacher training is unable to inform classroom's real practice. These responses, highlighting the crucial influence of the local context, are actually reminiscent of Freeman and Johnson's (1998) argument about the knowledge base of teacher education. They

propose a move from the decontextualized bodies of knowledge to the knowledge that is contextualized in teachers' classroom practice if less inconsistency is expected to be observed.

We believe that teachers must understand their own beliefs and knowledge about learning and teaching and be thoroughly aware of the impact of such knowledge and beliefs on their classrooms and the language learners in them. We believe that teachers must be fully aware of and develop a questioning stance toward the complex social, cultural and institutional structures that pervade the professional landscapes where they work. (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).

## References

- Akbari, R. & Dadvand, B. (2011). Does formal teacher education make a difference? A comparison of pedagogical thought units of B.A. versus M.A. teachers. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95(1), 44-60. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.2010.01142.x
- Basturkmen, H. (2012). Review of research into the correspondence between language teachers' stated beliefs and practices. *System*, 40(2), 282-295.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81-109. doi: 10.1017/s0261444803001903
- Fang, Z. (1996). A review of research on teacher beliefs and practices. *Educational research*, 38(1), 47-65.
- Farhady, H. & Hedayati, H. (2009). Language assessment policy in Iran. *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 29(1), 132-141.
- Firestone, W. A. (1993). Alternative arguments for generalizing from data as applied to qualitative research. *Educational researcher*, 22(4), 16-23.
- Freeman, D. & Johnson, K. E. (1998). Reconceptualizing the knowledge-base of language teacher education. *Tesol Quarterly*, 32(3), 397-417. doi: 10.2307/3588114
- Grandy, G. (2010). Instrumental case study. In A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of case study research*, 2, 473-475. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Green, D. O. N. (2010). Categories. In A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of case study research*, 2, 71-72. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Harfitt, G. J. (2012). An examination of teachers' perceptions and practice when teaching large and reduced-size classes: Do teachers really teach them in the same way? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(1), 132-140.

Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, R. T. (1996). Cooperative learning and traditional American values: An appreciation. *NASSP bulletin*, 80(579), 63-65.

Kane, R., Sandretto, S., & Heath, C. (2002). Telling half the story: A critical review of research on the teaching beliefs and practices of university academics. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(2), 177-228.

Kohonen, V. (1992). Experiential language learning: Second language learning as cooperative learning education. In D. Nunan (Ed.), *Collaborative Language Learning and Teaching*: Cambridge University Press.

Kohonen, V. (2006). Experiential language learning: second language learning as cooperative learner education. *Anthology*, 45.

Li, L. (2013). The complexity of language teachers' beliefs and practice: One EFL teacher's theories. *The Language Learning Journal*, 41(2), 175-191. doi: 10.1080/09571736.2013.790132

Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtler, K. H. (2010). Methods in educational research: *from theory to practice Research methods for the social sciences*, 2, 13-16. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nishino, T. (2012). Modeling teacher beliefs and practices in context: A multimethods approach. *The Modern Language Journal*, 96(3), 380-399. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.2012.01364.x

Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307-332. doi: 10.3102/00346543062003307

Yin, R. K. (2012). Case study methods. In H. M. Cooper (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology*, 2, 141-155. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Zeichner, K. M. & Tabachnick, B. R. (1981). Are the effects of university teacher education 'washed out' by school experience? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(3), 7-11.