

# Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs about English Language Learning Strategies and their Preferred English Language Teaching Strategies at Secondary School Level

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## ABSTRACT

Beliefs play an important role in driving the actions. Teachers' beliefs about English language learning strategies and their preference of English teaching strategies is almost an unexplored area in Pakistani context. This study was designed to investigate teachers' beliefs about English language learning strategies and their preferred English language teaching strategies at secondary school level. Four hundred and thirty-four secondary school teachers participated in the study. A questionnaire was developed by adapting scales from two widely used instruments BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory) and TPSQ (Teachers' Preferred Strategy Questionnaire). Various statistical techniques i.e. descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test, and ANOVA were used to analyse the data. The results showed significant relationships between teachers' beliefs about English language learning strategies and their preferred English language teaching strategies. No significant gender differences were revealed in the beliefs as well as their preferred English language teaching strategies.

**Keywords:** *Language Learning Strategies, Teachers Beliefs, Language Teaching Strategies,*

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## Introduction

Globalization has rendered the importance of English language knowledge as critical for survival for students across the globe. Due to its increased demand, English language has become a subject of scrutiny to ensure that the best medium and facilities are provided to students to garner English's accolades (Ali, 2012). According to Griffiths (2004), language learning strategies are pivotal for teachers to impart the essence of a language effectively. The better the strategies used by teachers to impart English language knowledge, the easier it becomes for students to actually learn and grow from it. Wenden and Rubin (1987) defines language learning strategies as "any

set of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information". In order to better aid the process of learning, a teacher should be adequately knowledgeable in strategies involving learning enrichment.

Unfortunately, however, due to improper setups and no defined infrastructure, Pakistan faces a big challenge of generating certified trained teachers with excellent proficiency in English (Aslam, 2010). The student capability of inheriting sufficient knowledge about a language is dependent upon teachers' beliefs about language learning strategies and their preferred language teaching strategies use

language learning strategies. Mutual agreement between a learner and a teacher in conscious selection of strategies based on the teaching style, become a comprehensive toolkit for purposeful, active and conscious learning (Oxford, 2003).

For the purpose of this research, Teachers' beliefs about language learning strategies referred to the ideas which guide language teachers to adopt their teaching strategies to manage their daily language teaching challenges. These beliefs were operationalized in terms of the beliefs about difficulty in language learning, foreign language aptitude, and the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, motivation and expectation.

This research also explored English language teaching strategies in terms of the knowledge learned from surrounding environment that can be categorically used to enrich others concept. The language teaching strategies referred to teachers' interactive strategy preference, the focus of teachers on pupil centered approach, their knowledge building, tolerance and cultural awareness and teachers' act of encouraging students to memorize different things.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of this study were

1. To explore teachers' belief about English language learning strategies.
2. To explore preferred English language teaching strategies of teachers.
3. To explore the relationship between teachers' beliefs about English language learning strategies and their preferred English language teaching strategies.
4. To investigate gender differences in teachers beliefs about English language learning strategies.
5. To investigate gender differences in teachers' preferred English language teaching strategies.

### **Research Questions**

This study focused on following research questions

1. What are the beliefs of teachers about English language learning strategies?
2. Which English language teaching strategies are preferred by teachers?
3. Is there any relationship between Teachers' beliefs about English Language Learning strategies and their preferred English language teaching strategies?

4. Are there significant differences in the beliefs of male and female teachers about English language learning strategies?

5. Are there are significant differences in preferred English language teaching strategies of male and female teachers.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research provided information about English teachers' beliefs about English language learning strategies and their preferred English language teaching strategies. Beliefs of teachers' may suggest which sort of changes and improvement is necessary to make the process of teaching and learning more productive and fruitful. What modifications are needed in the process of teaching and learning to make it more beneficial, understanding the beliefs about English language learning strategies and preferred English language teaching strategies by teachers will help language teachers in cultivating beliefs that leads to efficient use of learning strategies in addressing said believes through obstructive learning . This study may contribute to understand learning variables that are critical to learning itself and educating English as a medium in Pakistan. These findings can be useful for varying stakeholders like master trainers, teachers, curriculum designers, students, and educationists. This research also highlighted various learning and teaching strategies and beliefs for academics of Pakistan thus suggesting how teachers and students can be helped in modifying and understanding their language beliefs about strategic learning along with teaching capabilities in light of developing English practices.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Teachers' beliefs***

A belief is a notion, a sentiment that encompasses individual's thought process towards a desired behavior either through conscious or subconscious entanglements (Borg, 2001, Borg, 2006). Over the past decades, teachers themselves have become integral to improve English language proficiency other than their own provided material and methodology (Freeman, 2001; Richards & Nunan, 1990). This has shifted the balance towards the need of individual learners instead of language instruction. Additionally, teachers have realized that language teaching is a process and a teacher is catalyst to facilitate that process. This has become

central focus of recent studies involving learning strategies and associated factors (O' Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Several studies have centralized the importance of a teacher's beliefs in language learning strategies suggesting that the students should be encouraged by teachers' effective use of strategic resources given their importance involved in the teaching process ( O'Malley and Chamot 1990;). This is being illustrated by the fact the belief has become a core element in research studies surrounding the teaching parameters of English language.

There are different terms and definitions of teacher's beliefs regarding language learning. Woods (1996) says teachers' beliefs are their assumption and knowledge and personal theories. Pajares (1992) stated teachers' beliefs are their action strategies and their rules of practice. Beliefs of the teacher are a pivotal factor in determining the effectiveness surrounding the instruction manual of learning strategies. Large number of studies has revealed that beliefs of teachers about language learning strategies plans are an indispensable factor on part of the teacher (Williams and Burden 1997).

### ***Importance of teachers' beliefs***

Heather and Carey (2009) state that teachers' beliefs are influential in promulgating and formulating teachers' consciousness, teaching policy and teaching attitude along with strong emphasis on their decision making surrounding the development and growth of a learner. Teachers' beliefs also shape their curricular planning so as to determine as in what should be taught and how it should be taught. Beliefs of teachers are critical in improving the educational process as the clear understanding of what needs to be done closely guide language instructors in adhering to strategies that can help them cope with their daily challenges surrounding language teaching and their wellbeing while shaping the motivational levels of the students and other learners (Xu, 2012). It also determines actual behavior of teachers towards their students. If teachers are able to identify level of student competence, they can accordingly develop strategies that would be fruitful for both students and teachers.

### ***Language learning strategies***

Language learning strategies are rendered as specified behaviors, actions and techniques which

are used for teaching in a desired context (Biggs, 1993). These strategies also involved tools which are aimed at involving students in self-sufficiency competence in developing their communication skills. These strategies are mostly considered as the top most layers which encompasses an environment of variable constructs such cognitive learning styles and instructional preferences (Curry, 2002). Under the aforesaid notion, language learning strategy, for this particular research, is defined as actions of consciously specific nature resourced by a learner for sole of purpose of educating.

Teaching learning strategies can help language instructors to guide students in encompassing a mastery over their language competency and attain their desired personal and professional goals regarding various cultural interactions. These strategies are the actions and thoughts of what we like to engage in either consciously or subconsciously though the main goal of this exercise is to help students master their conscious mind so that they may be able to control their learning process and can become more motivated, efficient and independent language potentials (Chamot, 1999).

The main aim of these strategies is to make more competent communicators of various languages. Once students start to garner their own learning potential and can have some control over it, they acquire a better position in taking responsibility for their learning there onwards, which is defined characteristic of successful learners, including those who are self-educated in this regard (Paris & Winograd, 1990). Students who learn and are strategic workers are more deviated towards motivational and innovational approach in achieving high sense of self efficacy and self-confidence, perceiving themselves as better in regards to academic success then their fellows who do not excel in these strategic work offs.

According to Wyse and Jones (2001) teachers should value their histories and status as users of language and restrict their own influence on a child's language development. Baker and Westrup (2000) state that students learn when making mistakes or correcting other students. Several taxonomies have been presented regarding strategies involving language learning but the most critical one is the Oxford's ( 1990) taxonomy who divided these strategies in to two main parts , direct and indirect Direct strategies are concerned with the

target language whereas the indirect ones are supportive learning phases like planning (Griffiths, 2004).

### Method

The basic focus of the present study was to explore the relationship between Pakistani teachers' beliefs about English language learning strategies and their preferred English language teaching strategies. The present study demanded the methods of research which furnished records in quantitative terms, to

recognize the intricate and inaccessible nature of beliefs. Therefore a quantitative survey research design was used.

All teachers (of grades 9 & 10<sup>h</sup>) of the government secondary schools of Lahore were the population of study. Lahore is divided into 5 Tehsils. Two Tehsils were randomly selected for this study (Lahore city & Model town). 74 schools (37 secondary schools for boys & 37 secondary schools for girls) were selected from sampled tehsils by using stratified random sampling technique.

**Table 1** Sample of the study

	Tehsil 1 (Lahore City)		Tehsil 2 (Model Town)	
	BSS	GSS	BSS	GSS
<b>Schools</b>	20	20	17	17
<b>Teachers</b>	104	116	99	115

486 teachers (238 male and 248 female) aged between 25 to 45 years participated in the study by completing the questionnaire.

### Instrument

To collect data for the study, a questionnaire was developed by adapting scales from two instruments i.e., Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1985) and Teachers' Preferred Strategy Questionnaire (TPSQ) developed by Kausar (2011). These instruments have been previously used for the study of teachers' beliefs and their preferred English language teaching strategies.

The questionnaire for the current study comprised of three main sections. First section consisted of the statements that are relevant to the demographic background of teachers. Second section of the questionnaire consisted of 34 statements related to the beliefs about language learning strategies of teachers. These statements were grouped under five categories namely: *foreign language aptitude, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, motivation and expectation, difficulty in language learning*. Third section comprised of 27 statements about teachers'

preferred English language teaching strategies. These statements were grouped under five categories namely; *teachers centered approach, pupil centered approach knowledge building, tolerance and cultural awareness, encouraging memorization*. Participants were required to give their opinion about each statement on a five (5) point Likert scale. They were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements on five options from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" and "I never use it" to "I always use it".

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, items of the instrument were reviewed by two experts in the field of education and English language teaching. The instrument was also pilot tested with 25 teachers in order to resolve any language and conceptual issues in the instrument. The value of Cronbach Alpha was 0.754 which showed that the questionnaire had an acceptable level of reliability.

### Data Collection

The data for the study was personally collected by the researchers by administering the questionnaire to 486 teachers of government secondary schools of Lahore City and Model Town. Code of ethics was followed in the present study. Before distributing the questionnaires, researcher explained to the participants about their voluntary participation without any constraints. The privacy and confidentiality of the participants were assured and it was explained that the data collected from them will be used only for research purposes.

### **Data Analysis**

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version- 21 was used for data analysis. Descriptive (mean and standard deviation) as well as inferential statistics (Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and t-test) were used for data analysis.

### Teachers Beliefs bout Language Learning Strategies

Thirty four questions related to teachers' beliefs about English language learning strategies were grouped under five main categories namely:

*foreign language aptitude, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, motivation and expectation, difficulty in language learning.* The results of responses to different categories are presented in table 2.

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics for teachers' beliefs about English language learning

Sr. no	BALLI (Factors)	Mean	SD
1	Foreign Language Aptitude	3.54	4.27
2	The Nature of Language Learning	3.55	2.79
3	Learning and Communication Strategies	3.52	3.23
4	Motivation and Expectation	3.95	2.26
5	Difficulty in Language Learning	3.62	2.87

The mean scores for the all categories were well above the scale mid points (participants scored between one to five) indicating that the teachers generally reported a high level of functioning in the respective beliefs about language learning strategies. **Teachers' preferred English language teaching strategies.**

Twenty seven Items about teachers' preferred English language teaching strategies were grouped under five categories namely: *teachers centered approach, pupil centered approach knowledge building, tolerance and cultural awareness, encouraging memorization.* The results of descriptive statistics are presented in table 3

**Table 3** Descriptive Statistics for teachers' preferred English language teaching strategies

Sr. no	Categories	Mean	SD
1	Teachers centered approach	3.71	3.57
2	Pupil centered approach	3.72	3.18
3	Knowledge building	3.75	2.20
4	Tolerance and cultural awareness	3.68	3.481
5	Encouraging memorization	3.94	3.003

The mean scores for the all categories were well above the scale mid points (participants scored between one to five) indicating that the teachers generally reported a high level of functioning in the respective language teaching strategies. However the mean score was highest (3.94) for the strategies that encouraged memorization and lowest (3.68) for the

strategies focusing on tolerance and cultural awareness.

### Correlation between teachers' beliefs about English language learning strategies and their preferred English language teaching strategies

The relationship between teachers’ beliefs about English language learning strategies and their preferred English language teaching strategies was

explored by using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4** Intercorrelations between teachers’ language learning beliefs and preferred language teaching strategies

Language Learning Beliefs	Language Teaching Strategies				
	Teachers centered approach	Pupil centered approach	Knowledge building	Tolerance and cultural awareness	Encouraging memorization
Foreign Language Aptitude	.378**	.289**	.196**	.273**	.336**
Nature of language learning	.057	.125**	.319**	.250**	.287**
Learning and communication strategies	.196**	.213**	.041	.113*	.218**
Motivation and expectation	.314**	.378**	.413**	.278**	.347**
Difficulty in language learning	.311**	.199**	.204**	.258**	.294**

Note. \*\*Correlation is significant at the level 0.01(2 tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at the level 0.05(2tailed)

Teachers’ beliefs were positively correlated with their preferred language teaching strategies

According to Pallant (2010), the value of correlation coefficients can be from -1 to +1 (positive & negative), and the strength of relationship can be small (r = .10 - .29), medium (r = .30 - .49), large (r = .50 to 1.0). As shown in table 4 the strength of the relationship was of moderate level. These values indicated that teachers scoring high in foreign language aptitude preferred to use the teaching strategies related to, teacher centered approach, pupil centered approach, knowledge building, tolerance and cultural awareness, and encouraging memorization. The same is true for teachers who scored high in nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, motivation and

expectation, and difficulty in language learning preferred to use the strategies related to teachers centered approach, pupil centered approach, knowledge building, tolerance and cultural awareness, and encouraging memorization. Learning and communication strategies share a small strength relationship with knowledge building. However, the teachers who have high beliefs related to motivation and expectation gave preference to use the strategies related to knowledge building.

**Gender differences in teachers beliefs about English language learning strategies**

Independent t-test was used to investigate the gender differences in teachers’ beliefs about English language learning strategies as shown in table 5.

**Table 5** Gender differences in language learning beliefs (at p <.05)

Category	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Foreign language aptitude	Male	205	31.85	4.30	-.30	43	.76
	Female	229	31.98	4.26			
Nature of language learning	Male	205	21.33	2.90	.16	43	.87
	Female	229	21.28	2.70			
	Male	205	28.00	3.24			

Learning and communication strategies	Female	229	28.30	3.23			
Motivation and expectation	Male	205	19.79	2.28	.042	432	.96
	Female	229	19.78	2.25			
Difficulty in language learning	Male	205	21.80	2.87	.444	432	.657
	Female	229	21.67	2.88			

There were no significant gender differences in the language learning beliefs of male and female teachers, indicating that beliefs were no influenced by gender.

**Gender differences in teachers’ preferred English language teaching strategies**

Independent t-test was used to investigate the gender differences in teachers’ preferred English language teaching strategies as shown in table 6

**Table 6** Gender differences in teachers’ preferred language teaching strategies (at  $p < .05$ )

Category	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Teacher centered approach	Male	205	26.23	3.51	1.34	42	.17
	Female	229	25.77	3.26			
Pupil centered approach	Male	205	26.54	3.17	.38	43	.70
	Female	229	26.42	3.21			
Knowledge building	Male	205	15.03	2.21	.16	432	.87
	Female	229	15.00	2.19			
Tolerance and cultural awareness	Male	205	18.56	3.42	.71	432	.47
	Female	229	18.32	3.53			
Encouraging memorization	Male	205	19.40	3.00	.25	432	.80
	Female	229	19.32	3.00			

The results showed no significant gender differences in the teachers’ preferred English language teaching strategies. Therefore it is concluded that that male and female teachers preferred similar strategies for teaching English.

**Discussion**

This study showed that teacher motivation is important for learning English language. It is important to have a grip on this language. A lot of stress was put on excellent pronunciation, a lot of practice, communication with others, and using audio-visual aids. This study reported that teachers believed that translation from native language, guessing, practice and repetition were important strategies to learn English language. Teachers claimed that they made word lists, charts and cards to help students memorize the new words. This study showed that teachers believed that they would like to have friends who can speak English well. Furthermore, they believed while communicating it

was all right to make errors. In this study teachers claimed translation, guessing words, making mistakes was important in learning a language

Chamot (1999) has suggested that encouragement is important for students in order to experience and learn a language. In line with Chamot (1999) this study also reported that teachers claimed to encourage their students to ask questions, to speak in English, do oral spellings, and discussions. Teachers marked that they tolerated students’ mistake while writing and speaking and encouraged them to make new sentences, guess words and encouraged them to consult the dictionary. According to Cummins (1981), visual support, verbal interaction and active participation are helpful in teaching a language. A majority of teachers, in this study also reported that they used audio-visual support to aid their teaching. They divided their class in pair, encouraged discussions with each other and asked them to read and ask questions from teachers

**Conclusions**

This study reported several beliefs about English language learning strategies. Teachers scored high in motivation and expectation, which means teachers, felt that learning English was important to get better job opportunities. Teachers wanted students to communicate in English. Teachers claimed that they use social, cognitive, compensation strategies in class. The results of the study showed that teachers preferred communicative, verbal, interactive strategies to teach in class with the support of audio-visual aid. The present study suggested that teachers preferred English language teaching strategies are affected by their beliefs about English language learning strategies. This study reported teachers' beliefs and strategies were positively and significantly associated. There existed a medium strength positive relationship between teachers' beliefs about English language learning strategies and their preferred English language teaching strategies.

### Recommendations

Following recommendations are made on the basis of the results of this study

1. Teachers need to arrange various tasks, such as, translations, word games, vocabulary learning to help students learn the language well.
2. Training sessions needs to be arranged for the teachers who feel hesitant or timid while speaking English language during instruction.
3. Teachers must expose their students to audio-visual aids during the period of their instruction in order to help them in pronouncing and speaking the words properly.
4. Teachers must tell their students about the importance of English language for better future and job opportunities.
5. Teachers must always start the new concept with reference of the past knowledge of students.

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