

Exploring the Harmony between Jordanian EFL Teachers' and Students' Beliefs about Vocabulary Learning Strategies

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Abstract—The present study aimed to explore the harmony between teachers' and students' beliefs about strategies used in learning English vocabulary. The sample consisted of 133 EFL teachers and 306 ninth grade students in Irbid Third Directorate of Education during the academic year 2013-2014 who responded to the questionnaires. Two questionnaires were designed for this study, one for teachers and the other for students. Each questionnaire has fifty items about vocabulary learning strategies under five main categories. Results showed that there was a harmony between teachers' and students' beliefs about the process of teaching and learning vocabulary concerning rote learning, using multimedia using technology and dictionary and asking for help. However, there was no harmony between their beliefs about the process of teaching and learning vocabulary regarding guessing and contextualization.

Index Terms—teachers' beliefs, harmony, students' beliefs, vocabulary, vocabulary learning strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Beliefs are assumptions about the world and oneself held by individuals based on their experiences or external authorities (Athos and Gabbra, 1978). They act as strong filters of reality because they shape the way they perceive things (Arnold, 1999). They differ according to their importance to individuals, and the more important the belief is, the more difficult it is to be changed. Therefore, if a central belief is changed, other beliefs within a person's belief system are affected (Rokeach, 1986).

Teachers are highly influenced by their beliefs, values and views of the world. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes are important concepts in understanding their thought processes, instructional practices, and change in learning to teach (Williams and Burden 1997: 76). Their beliefs, therefore, are important considerations in conducting teacher education designed to help teachers develop their thinking and practices (Zheng, 2009). Moreover, teachers' beliefs play a critical role in shaping instruction because there is a lack of consensus about the best practice based on objective evidence (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1983). Teachers' beliefs also influence their perception and judgment, their classroom practices, and their improvements in classroom teaching practices and educational programs (Johnson, 1994).

Language learners' expectations are influenced and shaped by their beliefs. These expectations influence how learners respond to a new environment. They guide them in their conceptualizations of language learning and influence the approaches used to learn vocabulary (White 1999). Learners' beliefs play a critical role in choosing appropriate strategies needed to learn a foreign language (Oxford, 1994).

Understanding the role of learners' and teachers' beliefs may play a major role in learning and teaching experience, and have a reflective influence on learning behavior, as well as learning outcomes. Indeed, research shows that having positive and realistic beliefs increase learners' motivation and decrease frustration, and anxiety (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Therefore, we can conclude that an awareness of teachers' and learners' beliefs is central to the language-classroom pedagogy.

A. Statement of the Problem

Investigating the relationship between EFL teachers' and learners' beliefs about the process of teaching and learning vocabulary give important data to the English context. Their beliefs are very important in learning and teaching English language.

The researcher notes that learners have problems in using English vocabulary items appropriately in their learning. This could be a result of misconception between teachers' and students' beliefs about the process of teaching and learning vocabulary items. Such misconception may result in poor educational outcomes. The present study will explore the harmony between teachers and students' beliefs about vocabulary learning strategies. This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1-What are the Jordanian Teachers' beliefs about vocabulary teaching strategies?
- 2--What are the Students' beliefs about vocabulary learning strategies?
- 3-What is the extent of harmony between teachers' and students' beliefs about the strategies of learning vocabulary?

B. *The Significance of the Study*

The significance of the study stems from the following considerations:

1. The findings of the study may help teachers in understanding their learners' beliefs, what they want to learn and how they want to learn.
2. The study may motivate instructors as well as researchers to use different strategies in teaching English vocabulary.
3. The findings may assist teachers to use the proper strategies in teaching vocabulary to develop the quality of teaching English vocabulary.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Teachers' beliefs are very important in developing the processes of teaching and learning. Pajares (1992) proposed that exploring teachers' beliefs is essential to improve teachers' teaching practices. Similarly, Kagan (1992) concluded that the study of beliefs is essential to educational practice and necessary to understand how teachers approach their work. Golombek (1998) proposed that the study of teachers' beliefs forms a part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work. Richardson (1997) proposed that teachers' beliefs about learning will affect everything they do in the classroom, whether these beliefs are implicit or explicit.

Learners' beliefs play a vital role in developing the strategies used in learning English language. Wenden's (1987) asserted that learners' beliefs affected the strategies used in their learning, criteria needed in assessing the efficiency of learning process. Researchers found that learners' beliefs about learning a foreign language and its culture influence their strategies towards that language and cooperate in increasing their motivations (Csiz  & Drnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1979, 2001a, 2001b; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

A number of researchers found that in certain domains teachers' beliefs bore little relationship to students' beliefs (Banya & Cheng, 1997; Peacock, 1998, 1999; Siebert, 2003; & Davies, 2003). Kern (1995) argued that this diversity produces a gap, and might result in tensions in the classroom practices. He suggested researchers to find innovative ideas to deal with the gap since it can affect learners' motivation and efforts, and the types of activities they choose to engage in (Schultz, 1996).

A small number of studies investigated the harmony between teachers' and learners' beliefs. Kern (1995) surveyed 288 students of French as a foreign language and 12 instructors in the US. Results showed a congruence between learners' beliefs and their instructors. However, he found somewhat troubling the fact that the learners in his study seemed to be over-optimistic or unrealistic about the length of time it takes to become fluent in a foreign language.

Peacock (1999) surveyed 202 EFL learners and 45 teachers using both questionnaires and interviews. The researcher noted a number of significant discrepancies among learners' and teachers' beliefs. Learners placed a significantly greater emphasis on vocabulary, grammar learning, and excellent pronunciation than did their teachers, and had a greater preference for practice in a language lab.

Davies (2003) investigated the mismatch of 18 teachers' and 97 learners' beliefs in a tertiary institution in a small territory of Macao. He reported strong differences between the two groups. He concluded that students sought a more structured and safer approach, basing their views on a different theoretical underpinning from that of their teachers, and thus essentially supporting very different classroom practices.

Siebert (2003) explored the beliefs of 156 ESL students and 25 teachers about language learning at institutions of higher education in the Northwest region of the US. Results revealed that students placed strong emphasis on pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary learning and translation. He also noted that learners' beliefs were different from their teachers' beliefs about language learning methods.

Zhang (2008) conducted a study to investigate teachers' knowledge about vocabulary instruction. Results indicated that Chinese EFL teachers have well-developed content knowledge of vocabulary, deep-rooted belief systems about teaching, and learning English vocabulary. Furthermore, their beliefs are consistent with their practices. In addition, teachers' knowledge about vocabulary instruction is derived from formal EFL education and teaching practices.

Al-Jabari (2011) conducted a study to investigate the congruence between the Jordanian EFL learners' beliefs about the oral skills instruction and the actual classroom practices. The findings revealed that there was no congruence between the Jordanian EFL learners' beliefs about the oral skills instruction and the actual classroom practices. In addition, it revealed a statistically significant difference in learners' beliefs about the oral skills instruction due to their gender, in favor of female students. Moreover, the findings indicated a statistically significant difference in the degree of the actual teaching practices due to the learners' level of achievement in English, in favor of students with a fair degree of achievement in English.

Hoang (2011) explored EFL teachers' perceptions of vocabulary acquisition and instruction and identify their use of vocabulary learning strategies. The findings revealed that most of the participants used guessing unknown words from context and monolingual dictionary in their learning. The participants believed that vocabulary, vocabulary learning strategies, and dictionaries play extremely important roles in language learning. Additionally, regarding prominent issues in vocabulary learning and teaching, the participants generally showed a strong consensus on three major points. First, they perceived that reading is a powerful method to increase vocabulary. Second, they considered guessing new words from context to be an excellent strategy for vocabulary acquisition. Third, they believed that technology can greatly help students to learn vocabulary; thus, it should be integrated into the classroom to enhance students' lexical

learning outcomes. Finally, the results showed that the participants reported using all the vocabulary teaching techniques surveyed with varying degrees of frequency.

Ta'amneh (2012) investigated the congruence among teachers and students' beliefs about vocabulary learning strategies and teachers' classroom vocabulary teaching. Results showed that there was a little congruence between teachers' and students' beliefs about the process of teaching and learning vocabulary.

Ta'amneh (2014) investigated strategies used in learning English vocabulary by the first year students at Taibah University. The sample consisted of 98 learners during the academic year 2013-2014. Results revealed that students prefer to use the rote learning and ignore other strategies (guessing, applying images and sounds, and Dictionary) in learning English vocabulary.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Population and Sample

The population of the study, which comprised 200 EFL teachers and 1500 ninth grade students, consisted of all teachers students in Irbid Third Directorate of Education during the academic year 2013/2014. The sample consisted of 133 EFL teachers and 306 students with an average age of 14 (ninth grade) who responded to the questionnaires.

B. Instruments

The researcher developed two questionnaires; one for the teachers and the other for students. Each questionnaire has fifty items about vocabulary learning strategies under five main categories (see Appendix A). The teachers' questionnaire was developed to elicit their beliefs about the role of vocabulary in language learning and teaching, the role of vocabulary learning strategies, and their beliefs about how to teach vocabulary in the classroom. Whereas the students' questionnaire was developed to elicit the students' beliefs about vocabulary learning strategies to show the relationship between teachers' and students' beliefs about vocabulary learning strategies.

C. Validity and Reliability

To validate the instruments, a jury of seven EFL specialists was asked to examine them and provide their comments and suggestions. Experts' suggestions included deleting some irrelevant items, adding new ones, re-categorizing and editing some items. The researcher edited them accordingly. To establish the reliability of the teachers' questionnaires, they were tried out on 30 teachers and 30 students from the population but outside of the study. The reliability coefficient was computed using Cronbatch Alpha. Values which were 0.96 for teachers and 0.91 for students considered satisfactory to use these questionnaires to collect data and analyze it.

D. Design of the Study

The researcher used quantitative approach in this study. The responses of the teachers and students were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques (means and standard deviations).

IV. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Results of the first question were about the Jordanian teachers' beliefs about vocabulary teaching strategies. The means and the standard deviations were calculated. Table 1 presents the results.

TABLE 1:
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR EACH DIMENSION OF THE TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE.

	Dimension	Rank	N	Mean	S.D.
1	Rote learning	1	133	4.26	.70
4	Using Technology and Dictionary	2	133	4.19	.88
2	Guessing and Contextualizing	3	133	3.73	1.10
3	Using Multimedia	4	133	3.69	1.18
5	Asking for help	5	133	3.36	1.22
All	Teachers' questionnaire		133	3.85	1.01

Table 1 shows that the overall degree of the teachers' beliefs is high since the mean is (3.85). This result highlights the importance of teachers' beliefs in enhancing their classroom practices. It seems that in order to understand the teachers' instructional practices, their beliefs about these practices should be investigated because such beliefs may define their work in their classrooms. The following Table from the teachers' beliefs clearly indicate the teachers' beliefs about vocabulary teaching strategies(see appendix A for more information).

TABLE 2:
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR EACH ITEM OF THE TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE.

	Rote learning		Guessing			Multimedia			Dictionary			Asking		
	M	S.D		M	S.D		M	S.D		M	S.D		M	S.D
1	4.16	.747	11	3.80	1.057	21	3.92	.831	31	4.17	.790	41	3.77	1.180
2	4.30	.639	12	3.64	.964	22	3.20	1.694	32	4.30	.476	42	4.03	.969
3	4.25	.667	13	3.98	1.118	23	4.65	.630	33	4.10	.936	43	4.18	.860
4	4.09	.679	14	3.83	.909	24	3.68	1.215	34	3.73	1.473	44	3.51	1.312
5	4.14	.664	15	3.14	1.585	25	2.44	1.411	35	4.14	.664	45	3.03	1.537
6	4.38	.531	16	3.74	1.273	26	3.16	1.646	36	4.55	.499	46	4.04	.874
7	4.52	.670	17	3.89	.902	27	4.52	.670	37	4.40	.662	47	3.56	1.138
8	3.88	1.045	18	3.16	1.236	28	3.21	1.472	38	4.17	1.169	48	4.02	.969
9	4.36	.655	19	4.23	.867	29	4.11	.956	39	4.01	1.215	49	3.23	1.660
10	4.47	.669	20	3.92	1.128	30	3.96	1.227	40	4.32	.892	50	3.01	1.717

Table 2 shows the most common beliefs among teachers about rote learning strategies in teaching vocabulary. Teachers believe that repeating, categorizing words in groups, skipping unfamiliar words which seems inessential for adequate comprehension of a passage are very useful in learning new vocabulary items. Besides, they believe in the importance of using translation and keeping a vocabulary notebook. In addition, they think that in order to enhance students' memory and connect a word to a personal experience, teachers should motivate students to read and write words many times, paraphrase the word's meaning and use physical action in teaching vocabulary. It also shows the most common beliefs among teachers about guessing and contextualizing strategy in teaching vocabulary. Teachers believed that students should learn the meanings of the most common affixes and understand the meaning of unfamiliar English words by looking at the context and the topic of the whole paragraph. According to these beliefs, the teacher is an organizer who helps students to make use of knowledge of the topic when guessing the meaning of an unknown word and replace it with the guessed meaning to check if the sentence makes sense. Furthermore, the teachers believe that students should be able to look for any word, expression or definition in the passage that supports their guesses about the meaning of a word and check if the part of speech of the guessed meaning is the same as that of the unknown word.

According to using multimedia in teaching English vocabulary, the Table gives us an idea about teachers' beliefs about this strategy in teaching vocabulary. They think that teachers should encourage their students to create their own mental image of a word's meaning and visualize the spelling of the word in their heads. They also believe that teaching a word with a picture of its meaning and listening to tapes/CDs of word lists may facilitate the learning of new words. Besides, teachers think that students should associate a new word with a known English word that sounds similar and imagine the written form through remembering its location on the page or on the board. In addition, it shows that the most common beliefs among teachers about using technology and dictionary.

Teachers agree that students should use dictionaries to look up words that are crucial to the understanding, confirm their guesses about the meaning of a word whenever they meet new words and pay attention to other aspects of word knowledge, such as its pronunciation, its derivatives, frequent contexts of occurrence. Moreover, they believe that teaching students to use the appropriate dictionary properly and reading the sample sentences illustrating all the senses of the word may help students to be aware of the slight differences that may exist in meaning, connotation, or usage between words and recycle the new vocabulary at short intervals. Finally, Table 2 shows the agreement among teachers in using collaborative learning and asking for help strategy in learning vocabulary. They believe that teachers should motivate their students to ask their classmates for the meaning of new words. In addition, they feel that promoting students to ask the teacher for an explanation may facilitate the process of learning vocabulary in addition to collaborative working in learning vocabulary.

The results of the first question showed the positive beliefs of the participants to most of the items in the questionnaire about vocabulary teaching strategies. This result agrees particularly with Zang (2008) and Hoang (2011) and Ta'amneh (2012).

Results of the Second question

The second question was about the students' beliefs about vocabulary learning strategies. In order to answer this question, the means and the standard deviations were calculated. Table 3 presents the results.

TABLE 3:
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR EACH DIMENSION OF THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE.

	Domain	N	Mean	S. D.
1	Rote learning	306	4.20	0.77
4	Using Technology and Dictionary	306	4.15	0.92
3	Using Multimedia	306	3.78	1.09
2	Guessing and Contextualizing	606	2.31	1.47
5	Asking for help	306	3.66	1.03
ALL	Students' questionnaire	306	3.62	1.06

Table 3 shows that the mean for the students' questionnaire is 3.62. It is noticed that using dictionary, rote learning and applying images and sounds got high means and so higher ranks. Whereas guessing and contextualization got the lowest mean (2.31). The researcher also calculated the means and the standard deviations for each item of the students' questionnaire as follows in Table 4:

TABLE 4:
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR EACH ITEM OF THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE.

	Rote learning		Guessing			Multimedia			Dictionary		Asking			
	M	S.D		M	S.D	M	S.D	M	S.D		M	S.D		
1	4.17	.778	11	2.44	1.561	21	3.97	.839	31	4.17	.796	41	3.70	1.255
2	4.11	.881	12	2.45	1.471	22	2.89	1.716	32	4.13	.738	42	3.85	1.003
3	4.13	.841	13	2.48	1.595	23	4.73	.580	33	4.03	.932	43	4.14	.847
4	4.07	.679	14	2.13	1.321	24	3.71	1.167	34	3.98	1.144	44	3.64	1.266
5	4.07	.821	15	2.00	1.474	25	2.41	1.421	35	4.06	.710	45	3.12	1.550
6	4.24	.692	16	2.12	1.368	26	3.55	1.409	36	4.00	1.239	46	4.25	.777
7	4.62	.567	17	2.54	1.419	27	4.65	.559	37	4.18	1.029	47	3.64	1.145
8	3.94	.948	18	2.27	1.428	28	3.28	1.478	38	4.32	.997	48	3.91	.928
9	4.23	.718	19	2.16	1.494	29	4.24	.734	39	4.16	.943	49	3.22	1.639
10	4.41	.797	20	2.50	1.558	30	4.27	.965	40	4.49	.707	50	3.12	1.667

Table 4 shows the most common beliefs among students about rote learning strategies in learning new vocabulary. They think that students should repeat new vocabulary items, classify them in a group with other items, skip unknown words which seems inessential for adequate comprehension of a passage and write it repetitively. They both believe that translation and keeping a vocabulary notebook may facilitate vocabulary learning. As well, they believe that connecting a new word to a personal experience, writing words many times, paraphrasing their meanings and using physical actions while learning new vocabulary may enhance students' memory (Ta'amneh2014). According to their beliefs about using multimedia strategy in learning vocabulary, they agree that students should create their own mental image of a word's meaning and visualize the spelling of the word in their heads. They believe that learning a word with a picture of its meaning and listening to tapes/CDs of word lists may motivate them to learn new vocabulary. Besides, they think that they should associate a new word with a known English word that sounds similar and imagine the written form through remembering its location on the page or on the board.

Table 4 also shows the most common beliefs among students about using technology and dictionary. Students agree that they should use dictionaries to look up words that are crucial to the understanding, confirm their guesses about the meaning of a word whenever they meet new words. Students also think that they should pay attention to other aspects of word knowledge, such as its pronunciation, its derivatives, frequent contexts of occurrence. In addition, it shows students' beliefs about asking for help strategy in learning vocabulary are: students should ask their classmates for the meaning and usage of new words. In addition, they should also ask their teachers for an explanation. Concerning guessing and Contextualizing strategy in, Table 4 shows that students had poor beliefs about this strategy since the mean was very low (2.31). The results of Siebert (2003), Ta'amneh (2012) and Ta'amneh (2014) confirm the results to which the present study ends up.

Discussion results of the third question

The third question asked about the harmony between teachers' and students' beliefs about vocabulary learning strategies. The researcher found that it is useful to compare the teachers' beliefs as stated in their answers to the items of the teachers' questionnaire with their students' beliefs as stated in their answers to the items of the students' questionnaire to look for the existence of harmony between them. Teachers and students showed harmony in all dimensions of the questionnaires except the guessing and conceptualization strategy as illustrated in Table 5:

TABLE 5:
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR EACH DIMENSION OF THE TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRES.

	Rote M	S.D	Guessing M	S.D	Multimedia M	S.D	Dictionary M	S.D	Asking M	S.D
Teachers	4.26	.70	3.73	1.10	3.69	1.18	4.19	.88	3.63	1.22
Students	4.20	.77	2.31	1.47	3.78	1.09	4.15	.92	3.66	1.03

With reference to Tables 2, 4 and 5 it seems possible to infer that both teachers and students believed in the importance of rote learning in teaching and learning vocabulary properly. They believed that repeating a word loudly, putting it in a group with other items, skip an unfamiliar word which seems inessential for adequate comprehension of a passage and writing it repetitively may facilitate vocabulary learning and make the process of teaching easier. Moreover, they agree that using translation in teaching vocabulary and keeping a vocabulary notebook may motivate students to learn. In addition, they think that paraphrasing the word's meaning and using physical action in teaching vocabulary may enhance students' memory. Such behavior can be explained in light of the researcher's observation that the teachers were fully aware of the students' needs to build a vocabulary competence which may help them later to learn the language. It can be also observed from comparing the above tables that both teachers and students believed in encouraging students to create their own mental image of a word's meaning and visualize the spelling of the word in

their heads. They also believed that teaching a word with a picture of its meaning and listening to tapes/CDs of word lists may facilitate the learning of new words. In addition, they agreed that associating a new word with a known English word that sounds similar and imagining the written form through remembering its location on the page or on the board may activate the process of teaching and learning. The researcher found it is acceptable to conclude that the teachers were able to show harmony between their beliefs about multimedia strategy in teaching vocabulary and their students' beliefs.

The above tables show positive beliefs of teachers' and students' about using technology and dictionary strategy in the process of teaching and learning vocabulary. They asserted that using the dictionary to look up words that are crucial to the understanding, confirming their guesses about the meaning of a word and paying attention to other aspects of word knowledge, such as its pronunciation, its derivatives, and frequent contexts of occurrence may facilitate the learning of new words. In addition, it seems possible to infer that both teachers and students believed in the importance of collaborative learning and asking for help in teaching and learning vocabulary. They believed that teachers should encourage their students to ask their classmates for the meaning of new words and motivate them to ask the teacher for an explanation. This result agrees with Banya and Chen (1997) and Ta'amneh (2012).

The absence of the harmony between teachers' and students' beliefs about the guessing and contextualization strategy in learning English vocabulary

Table 2, 4, and 5 show the teachers' complete acceptance of beliefs stated in the teachers' questionnaire concerning teaching vocabulary through asking students to use the guessing strategy and reveal the students' poor beliefs when learning new vocabulary. By investigating the actual situation, the researcher found that teachers themselves found the guessing as a difficult strategy to be taught and to be practiced. The researcher interpreted the absence of the needed harmony between teachers' beliefs about guessing strategy in teaching vocabulary and their students' beliefs in light of the fact that students had a tendency to learn vocabulary through using ready translation found in some books or depending on explanations given by their teachers, and they did not like to spend a lot of time when learning new vocabulary and answering the teacher about the meanings and pronunciations of new words regardless of the benefit which their students might get from their teaching. In addition, students may not be able infer the meaning of new words because they do not know the meaning of other words in the contexts to guess the meaning of new words (Ta'amneh, 2014). In addition, the Jordanian students' inability to use the new words in proper contexts may force teachers to avoid using this strategy. The results of Banya and Cheng (1997), Peacock (1998, 1999), Siebert (2003), Davies (2003) and Ta'amneh (2014) confirm the results to which the present study ends up.

V. CONCLUSION

This study explored the harmony among teachers' and students' beliefs about strategies used in learning vocabulary. Results showed that there was a harmony between teachers' and students' beliefs about the vocabulary learning strategies in all dimensions the questionnaires except guessing and contextualization. They believed that rote learning, using technology and dictionary, using multimedia an asking for help strategies are good strategies to learn English vocabulary items.

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