4.
The effective Teacher of English: Beliefs of Indian Teachers

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Introduction

There is extensive evidence that our beliefs as teachers are an important part of our cognition, and an influence on our practice, albeit in complex ways (Borg, 2018; Richardson, 1996). However, there has been surprisingly little research conducted in India regarding the beliefs of teachers, both in language teaching and education in general (Brinkmann, 2015). This paper reports on a study conducted with the help of teachers within the AINET community using an original qualitative survey tool to produce a "shared beliefs" prototype of the effective Indian teacher of English. This is compared to studies conducted both in India and internationally, and implications are discussed.

The distinction between "espoused beliefs" (those that we express when asked) and "theories-in-use" (the deeper beliefs and opinions— sometimes subconscious—that govern our actual practices) is followed here (e.g., Borg, 2018). This study investigates espoused beliefs only.

Literature review

International studies

Twenty-two prior studies, quantitative and mixed methods, were found investigating in-service teachers' beliefs concerning effective teaching and/or effective teachers (ETs), 11 involving language teachers, and 11 in the general literature. See Figure 1 for a visual summary of the findings. While some beliefs seem to be fairly universal,

Figure 1 presents a rotated comparison table. Reading the column headers (diagonal labels) left-to-right:

Authors · Year · Language teaching? · Country · Sample Size[1] · School context[2] · Methodology used[3] · Survey origin · Cares for/loves learners · Considers learners · Engages learners · Is respectful/fair/prioritises equality · Planning/preparation important · Has required knowledge · Has passion/enthusiasm/enjoyment · Classroom management/instr./dedication · Uses appropriate instr. strategies · Provides safe learning environment · Interaction with Ls important · CLT important (LT only) · Meaningful comm important (LT only) · Is organise(d)/has good organization (LT only) · Assessment and monitoring important · Motivates learners · Collaborate learners · Prioritises authentic materials (LT only) · Is proficient in language (LT only) · Creativity important (LT only)

Authors	Year	LT?	Country	Sample Size	School context	Methodology	Survey origin
Bell	2005	Y	USA	457	All	quan	Own
Brosh	1996	Y	Israel	200	?	MM	Own
Brown	2006	Y	USA	49	Ter	quan	Bell 2005
Carmel & Badash	2019	Y	Israel	167	All	MM	Own
Clark-Gareca & Gui	2019	Y	China	124	Ter	MM	Gu 2010
Ganjabi	2011	Y	Iran	16	Ter	quan	Brown 2006
Gu	2010	Y	China	625	Ter?	MM	Own
Park & Lee	2006	Y	Korea	169	Sec	quan	Own
Shishavan & Sadeghi	2009	Y	Iran	59	ST	MM	Park & Lee 2006[5]
Tajeddin & Alemi	2019	Y	Iran	25	?	MM	Stronge 2007
Zabitgil G. et al.	2016	Y	Turkey	100	PS	quan	Williams 2010
Totals for language teaching:		11					
Alqahtani et al.	2016	N	KSA	30	Sec	quan	Stronge 2007
Bozkus & Tastan	2016	N	Turkey	373	PS	quan	Stronge 2007
Devine et al.	2013	N	Ireland	126	PS	MM	Own
Kyriakides et al.	2002	N	Cyprus	14	Pri	MM	Own
Liu & Meng	2009	N	China	29	Sec	MM	Own
Meng et al.	2016	N	China	352	Sec	quan	Williams 2010
Munoz et al.	2013	N	USA	76	Pri	quan	Williams 2010
Murphy et al.	2004	N	USA	22	PS	MM	Tuckman 1995
Perry & Rog	1992	N	USA	35	PS	MM	Weinstein 1989
Weinstein	1989	N	USA	74	PS	quan	Own
Williams	2010	N	USA	70	Pri	MM	Stronge 2007
Totals for non-language teaching:		11					
Combined totals:							

Figure 1. Comparison of prior studies in language teaching and mainstream education.[1]

such as the belief that ETs consider learners' needs carefully, plan comprehensively, and engage learners well (e.g., Meng et al., 2016; Park & Lee, 2006), others are subject-specific, including a belief in communicative language teaching (CLT) and collaborative learning among language teachers (e.g., Bell, 2005; Brown, 2006). In the more general literature, beliefs in the importance of caring for one learners, and showing them respect, and dedication (e.g., Alqahtani et al. 2016) were more prominent than among the language teaching literature.

Evidence was also found that studies were often influenced by quantitative tools used. Figure 1 also indicates how studies drawing on a prior author's questionnaire often replicated their findings, yet others did not (e.g., those based on Bell, 2005). This strongly suggests that surveys seeking to explore teachers' beliefs without influencing them or overlooking important areas should, as much as possible, involve open, qualitative items.

Studies in India

Two studies that shed some light onto the beliefs of Indian primary school teachers (not English specialists) were conducted by Brinkmann (2015) and Sriprakash (2012). Brinkmann (2015) found that teachers whose practice she classified as more "learner-centred" held beliefs in the teacher's role as facilitator of learning and in the importance of the overall development of the child to transform him/her into "a good human being". She found that teachers whose practices were classified as less learners-centred believed in more transmissive practices, and in controlling learners through fear and discipline. Sriprakash (2012) categorised her participants' vision of a "good teacher" into four dimensions: personable (they should have patience, creativity, and should engage learners), democratic (they should respect learners opinions and treat them equally), maternal (they should look after and love children) and reflexive (understand yourself and continue learning).

Method

This study aimed to investigate the following research questions among members of the AINET English language teacher community:

1. What are the espoused beliefs of teachers and teacher educators within the community concerning the practices, personal attributes and values of an imagined effective teacher of English working in a government secondary school in India?

2. What composite "effective teacher prototype" emerges from an aggregation of the most commonly described features of the teacher among responses?

3. How does this prototype compare to prior research conducted both in India and internationally, including both language teaching and non-subject-specific studies?

A parallel methodological aim was to avoid influencing respondents' opinions through the survey tool used. As such, it adopted an exploratory inductive design, with a qualitative questionnaire that asked respondents to imagine and describe an example lesson and resultant learning of an effective teacher. They were asked to reflect on differences between this teacher and a "normal" teacher, to describe the teacher's personality, sense of purpose, and beliefs, and also how the teacher coped with the challenges typically found in Indian state school contexts.

After pre-piloting and pilot study stages, the questionnaire was distributed among the AINET community, and 75 valid responses were received and analysed inductively using CAQDAS software, and Thomas's (2006) general inductive approach to data coding.

Findings

Respondents

The majority of respondents had extensive teaching experience (74% over 10 years; 19% 4-10 years). Most (77%) identified as secondary teachers and worked in either government or government-aided schools (only 17% selected "private"), with a fairly even distribution between urban (36%), semi-urban (24%) and rural (40%) contexts. 63%

of respondents worked in non-English medium contexts (i.e., vernacular-medium schools).

Questionnaire responses

Figure 2 displays the frequencies of code assignments from the data analysis, providing a quantitative overview of the most commonly mentioned beliefs.
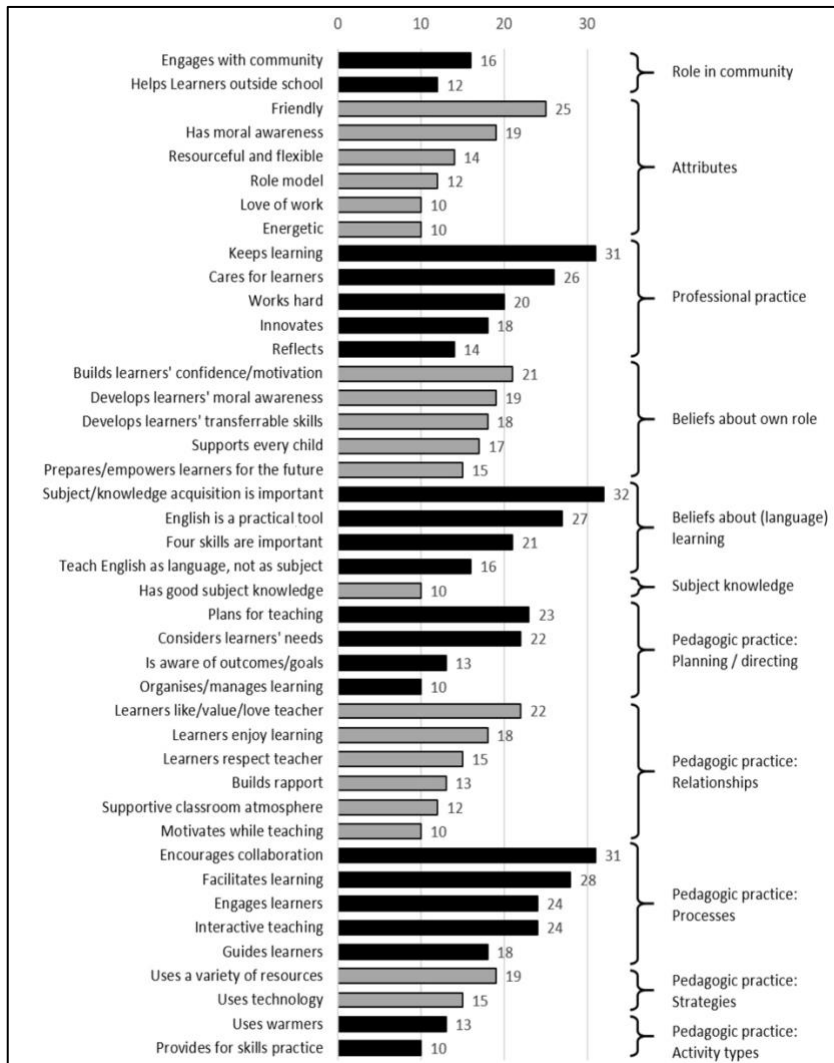

Figure 2. Frequencies of most commonly mentioned belief codings.[2]

To answer my first research question, I here discuss the most commonly expressed beliefs among respondents in each section of the completed survey. Quotes are provided verbatim. Numbers in brackets indicate the number of respondents who mention a belief.

When asked to describe what happens during the imagined lesson, 25 respondents made reference to collaborative learning (e.g., "pairwork" or "groupwork"), 14 noted that the ET's teaching would be "interactive", 9 that learners would be engaged, and a further 6 described the teacher "facilitating" learning. Commonly mentioned activity types included warmers (11), debates or discussions (6) and skills practice (5). Thus, descriptions of the pedagogic practices of the imagined ET tended towards constructivist and "learner-centred" approaches (Schweisfurth, 2013):

> The teacher plans the lesson as per the need and level of the learners. There is a good combination of group, pair and individual work. In the Indian context, where classes are mostly mixed ability classes, the teacher plans his/her activities, bearing this in mind. S/He uses L1 also to facilitate learning.

References to planning were fewer, but included noting that the teacher would assign importance to both planning (9) and evaluating learning (7), considering learners' needs (5) and building on prior knowledge (5).

Longer lesson descriptions generally indicated either 5-stage or occasionally 3-stage lesson involving a warmer, a presentation of some sort (especially language or literature), followed by an activity and a conclusion:

> In effective lesson plan, a teacher begins her class by connecting known to new and introduces the topic. Then he makes presentation of his topic mostly making the learners activated. Next doing practice or comprehension check to be done. Finally recapitulating the main idea and completing the class but never forgetting to add at least one energiser.

When asked to consider student learning in the lesson, respondents made reference to both content learning (37) and non-content learning (32). Among 25 references to explicit knowledge "learning"/"understanding", learning of lesson vocabulary (i.e., lexical

learning) was most common. Learning of the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) was mentioned by 12 respondents only. Most commonly mentioned aspects of non-content learning were cognitive/thinking skills (11), soft/social skills (8) and confidence-/motivation-building (7). The emphasis among responses tended to range between two polarities, with learning of content at one end (often discussed rather transmissively) and learner-centred facilitation of skills development at the other, although some respondents balanced awareness of both areas of learning:

> They learn to collaborate with each other, help each other. They learn the target language, structures of the grammar or composition through which they learn to decode the language, generalise it and create their own. They learn to express their views, listen to other's views etc.

The most commonly mentioned personal attribute was friendliness (20), although discussion of both moral awareness (10) and teacher as role model (9) were prominent, often linked to engagement with the community (13) and helping learners outside school (11). Areas of professional practice discussed include the teacher's desire to continue learning (14), to reflect (8) and innovate (8), as well as "good" subject knowledge (8) and care for the learners (9):

> An effective teacher knows that he/she has to work systematically. He needs to be a goal setter and motivator. He understands the importance of CPD. He knows and understands how the learners learn and what comes in the way of their learning. He is friendly, professional, and understanding. He is a good human being.

When asked to compare the ET with a "normal" teacher, responses focused on two areas: engagement in continuing professional development (18) and aspects of pedagogic practice, including considering learners' needs/nature (9), and the ability to build rapport (7), engage learners (6), teach interactively and facilitate learning. There were also references to personal attributes, including caring (8) and supporting every child (7):

> Keep himself/herself updated with the latest in his/her own field and also with a bit in other fields also. S/he makes sure s/he 'knows'

every student completely and individually and respects their individuality as learners.

When asked to consider the ET's perceived purpose/goal of their job, most respondents referenced a moral imperative driving the ET, such as a belief in building "good citizens" or "human beings" (15), and preparing learners for the future (8). Language used often implied empowerment of learners:

> An effective teacher's purpose or goal would be to ensure that each and every learner is able to understand and avail the knowledge related to life skill so that they can fit in the society with their head high.

A number of respondents noted that the ET would believe in teaching English "as a language and not as a subject" (14), reflecting influential Indian policy documents (e.g., NCERT, 2011) by stressing the importance of prioritising skills over knowledge about language or literature:

> English is a language; and not a subject to teach, learners need skills (LSRWC) first then gradually to develop aesthetic sense towards literature

Related to this, 18 respondents believed that the ET would see English as a practical tool for use "in day-to-day life". Eleven made specific reference to the role of English as a global language:

> English is globe language for the effective communication, understanding, employment, and research and it's a need of 21st century.

Discussion of how the ET deals with the challenges presented by working in an Indian government secondary school, specific strategies were most evident, including the need to use a variety of resources (6), work hard (6), solve problems (5) and to make creative use of technology (4). Resourcefulness (6), positivity and resilience were three notable personal characteristics mentioned by several respondents each:

> 1. Resources – make best use of the resources available, use alternate resources. 2. Technology – Try to make it possible as per the need of the lesson and the skill to be developed….

I feel the two strong weapons which every Indian teacher in government sector should carry with her are: Be able to Camouflage & learn the art of resilience.

The effective teacher prototype

In order to answer my second research question, I drew upon a construct developed by Sternberg and Horvath (1995), in which they produced a "prototype" of an "expert teacher" based on a "family resemblance" that emerged from their dataset. In a similar fashion, I here provide a summary prototype of the effective Indian secondary teacher of English based on the consensus of beliefs among my respondents. It attempts to balance among the features of the ET that are most frequently mentioned above (see Figure 2), while also retaining some of the terminology and expressions that were used by respondents to ensure that the prototype is as transparent as possible to readers working within Indian ELT:

The effective secondary English teacher is dedicated both to her learners and her profession. She is a morally responsible individual who cares for all her learners, and recognises the importance of developing their moral awareness and building their self-confidence. She also perceives it important to develop the necessary practical skills that the learners will need to function in the world, balancing the more general transferable skills (specifically, thinking skills and interpersonal skills) with the subject-specific knowledge (including vocabulary and grammar knowledge) and skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) required to learn and make use of English in the future. She plans for teaching carefully, aware of her learners' needs and her intended outcomes. In the classroom she is a facilitator of learning more than a transmitter of knowledge, who is friendly, engages and interacts with the class, and encourages collaboration when possible through the use of pairwork and groupwork. Her learners value their teacher and enjoy their English lessons. As a professional she has an "unquenchable thirst" for learning, is interested in "updating" her practice and in innovating in her own classroom, especially when context-specific challenges require

resourcefulness or flexibility. She works hard, reflects on her practice, engages with the local community around the school, and is often willing to help learners whenever needed.

Discussion

To answer the third research question, I compare the above findings to prior research and then go on to discuss potential implications for English language teacher education.

Similarities between my respondents' beliefs and those of teachers Brinkmann (2015) categorised as "high-LCE" include a vision of a teacher with high moral integrity and a belief in developing learners as future citizens. Brinkmann's high-LCE teachers also convey constructivist, teacher-as-facilitator perceptions of effective teaching, and emphasise the friendly, caring nature of a teacher with a high level of professional commitment. Comparing the prototype with Sriprakash's (2012) findings, three of the four dimensions of the "good teacher" she identifies are evident; the strong emphasis on friendliness and engagement in her Personable dimension, the caring role in her Maternal dimension, and the emphases on self-awareness (i.e. reflection), moral standards and "learning continuously" (Sriprakash, 2012, p. 74) in her Reflexive dimension. Four of the most commonly shared features within the international literature are also prominent in the prototype: care for one's learners, consideration of learners' needs, engaging lessons and careful planning (e.g., Meng et al., 2016). Dedication to one's work, and motivation of learners were also frequently found in the international literature (e.g., Alqahtani et al., 2016).

Fewer similarities are found to prior studies of beliefs among language teachers. Only two areas are notable: a belief in collaborative learning, and (some) recognition of the importance of skills practice (e.g., Brown, 2006; Clark-Gareca & Gui, 2019). However, in contrast to this literature, none of my respondents mentioned CLT, and while several described lessons broadly consistent with the "'weak' version" of CLT (Howatt 1984, p. 279), a larger number of respondents described lessons more consistent with frameworks from mainstream teaching. It is thus notable that perceptions of the effective English language

teacher among respondents have more in common with those in the non-subject specific literature than those in the language teaching literature. This may be explained by the strong literature focus (English as Subject) and the comparative lack of awareness of language learning (ESL/EFL) theory and practice among many English teachers in India. As Chattopadhyay (2020, p. 21) notes:

> In India, 'ELT' is a slippery term. Only a few universities offer courses in English language teaching. Almost all teachers of English have studied British, American, Indian and other literatures in English; as a result, they have no understanding of theories of language learning and language skills development techniques when they come to teach English, whether in primary or secondary schools.

The strong moral imperative in the prototype, both in the teacher's own personality and behaviour, and in her role in developing such "moral awareness" in her learners, while notable in other studies from India, is less evident in the international literature. It may originate in recent policy initiatives—Sriprakash (2012, p. 183) discusses a "Hindu revivalist agenda" in the early 2000s—or may trace its origins further back to colonial and even Brahmanical ideals (Kumar, 2005).

Likewise, flexibility is only occasionally mentioned as a characteristic of the ET in the international literature, and both resourcefulness and resilience rarely. As such, the emphasis on resourcefulness, flexibility, resilience and innovation as responses to contextual issues is also of note, and likely to result from the specific challenges of a developing country such as India. Frequent references to "keeping calm", "being positive", and even "be[ing] able to camouflage" among responses all indicate a perceived need for effective Indian teachers to "learn the art of resilience" to cope with the challenges involved. As another respondent put it, "Think positive. Use resources in the best possible way. Focus on result."

The most noticeable feature of the prototype teacher that is not prominent in the wider literature on teachers' beliefs regarding effective teaching, yet was also noted by Brinkmann (2015) is the prototype teacher's awareness of the importance of practical, transferable skills that the learners will need to function in the future.

This emphasis may originate in an awareness of the importance of going beyond the predominantly exam-focused instruction often documented in India (e.g., Padwad & Dixit, 2018) to enable learners to function effectively in future work environments after school, a challenge frequently mentioned in contemporary debates on education in India.

Implications for teacher education and development

As has often been noted (e.g., Borg, 2018; Richardson, 1996), teachers' beliefs and opinions influence their classroom practice, and should be considered when designing teacher education initiatives, particularly those intending to bring about change, whether this be in the classroom (e.g., through training workshops), through curriculum reform, or through bottom-up teacher development initiatives (see, e.g., British Council, 2016; Smith, 2020).

The above findings demonstrate that members of the AINET community have a clear understanding of, and belief in constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy. This espoused belief suggests they would be receptive to learner-centred education initiatives, such as cooperative learning, discovery learning, and project-based learning. Irrespective of whether initiatives are top-down (e.g., cascade projects) or bottom-up (e.g., teacher research projects), this finding is of significance and could provide guidance on potential areas of exploration for such projects.

The fact that neither CLT, nor the theories of learning underpinning it, were mentioned by respondents suggests that there is comparatively little awareness of it in contemporary Indian ELT, despite a large number of prior initiatives stretching back to Prabhu's "Communicational Teaching Project" in the 1970s (Prabhu, 1987). As such, careful exploration of both theoretical and practical aspects of CLT may need to be engineered into initiatives seeking to promote it in Indian language classrooms. A potential alternative that has been little explored in Indian contexts is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Given the strong literature focus evident in many Indian English curricula, teaching materials and exams, it may be that "soft CLIL" (i.e. with a language learning focus) is more compatible

with both beliefs and current materials than CLT per se, and would enable teachers to build on the strong lexical focus in their teaching referenced above, and also potentially help colleagues in other subject classes who are also increasingly being asked to teach through English as a medium of instruction (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2019).

A final implication of this study is that teacher qualification courses in India, both pre-service and at higher levels (e.g., MA), are likely to benefit from exploring aspects of language learning theory and practice, as Chattopadhyay (2020) suggests, to enable teachers to better understand such processes in the classroom, and be able to implement appropriate practices to facilitate them.

Limitations of this Study

It should be noted that respondents to this survey, as members of the AINET community, are likely to be more committed, better informed practitioners than the majority of Indian English teachers, for whom "efforts to initiate and support their own CPD are quite rare" (Bolitho & Padwad, 2013, p. 8). Secondly, as an "espoused beliefs" survey, responses should not be seen as indicative of actual classroom practices (Borg, 2018). Finally, while my choice to use a qualitative survey is likely to have reduced the influence of the instrument on responses, the lack of items focusing on the knowledge base or language-use practices of the ET many have reduced references to these two areas among responses.

Conclusion

This study found evidence that the espoused beliefs of Indian English language teachers regarding the nature, practices and cognition of an effective teacher are broadly consistent with models of learner-centred, constructivist pedagogy (e.g., Schweisfurth, 2013). Strong parallels also emerge with other studies from India, particularly concerning a strong moral imperative, a focus on practical transferrable skills, and resourcefulness and flexibility as attributes of the effective teacher. This study also documents low awareness of CLT among Indian English teachers and context-specific beliefs regarding

what English is, and how it might be taught effectively, further validating the importance of professional development initiatives in India that allow teachers to reflect upon, compare, explore and examine their own beliefs and practices in ways that are likely to lead to sustainable change through bottom-up initiatives involving teacher reflection, teacher research (Smith, 2020) and professional learning communities at grass-roots level (Padwad & Dixit, 2008).

Funding

Notes

1. Figure 1. In order to facilitate comparison, a maximum of 10 beliefs per study were included. These were the most popular or highest mean ranked responses for quantitative studies. For mixed methods studies, where qualitative beliefs were discussed separately, five from each (qualitative and quantitative) were selected so as to reduce bias towards either approach. Where studies listed all respondent beliefs as findings, only the top 50% of those listed were included, up to a maximum of 10. "?" indicates either not given or unclear. "X*" indicates most popular response where this could be determined. 1) Sample size given is that of in-service teachers only, including beliefs from all in-service teachers in the study. 2) Pri = primary; Sec = secondary; Ter = tertiary; PS = primary and secondary; ST = secondary and tertiary. 3) quan = quantitative only; MM = mixed methods. 4) LT = language teaching. 5) Source not acknowledged by authors.

2. Figure 2. Only beliefs coded 10 times or more are shown. Beliefs are recorded no more than once per respondent.

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