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An Exploratory Study of the Interplay between
Teachers' Beliefs, Instructional Practices &
Professional Development

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Language Teaching and Learning,
The University of Auckland, 2006.

ABSTRACT

Previous research has revealed the influential role of teachers' beliefs in determining their professional behaviour. Teachers' beliefs affect not only their teaching, but also filter new input, suggesting significant implications for the implementation of educational innovations and teacher development.

This study explores the interconnections between teachers' beliefs, their instructional practices and professional development, examining the extent to which the introduction of an innovative teaching approach impacts teachers' beliefs and behaviour. It focuses particularly on grammar instruction in the context of English teaching in secondary schools of the Maldives.

Combining descriptive ethnography with a quasi-experimental design, the study was implemented in two phases. Phase One, based on questionnaire data from 197 teachers from 51 schools, explored teachers' beliefs and their self reported practices. Findings indicated that teachers placed great emphasis on grammar and that they were unfamiliar with inductive approaches to grammar instruction. In Phase Two, inductive grammar teaching methods were introduced to 14 teachers from two schools, in a 12 week professional development programme.

Drawing largely on data from observations and interviews, the results from this phase showed that although teachers were observed to generally follow their pedagogic beliefs, several points of difference between their beliefs and practices existed. While the professional development may have increased their understanding of inductive approaches to grammar instruction at the level of awareness, only limited changes to beliefs and practices were observed. Changing instructional practice appeared to be a difficult task with only two teachers uptaking the innovation. Some subsidiary changes were however observed in the practices of several other teachers. Various impediments constrained change efforts, including teachers' lack of openness to change, their low professional motivation and the lack of a supportive school culture. Contextual factors such as large classes and difficult working conditions also negatively affected the change process. Findings indicate that development activities which provided regular one-on-one support for the teachers were more likely to lead

to uptake than those involving mainly workshops. The individual nature of the uptake process, its lack of uniformity and the challenges faced by the teachers are discussed, as are the implications for the provision of professional development.

Dedication

*To my children, Malaa & Abil,
who fill my life with immeasurable joy
and inspire me to be a better person.*

“Change has a considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the hopeful it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better.”

- King Whitney Jr.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of many individuals. I would especially like to thank the following people.

Professor Rod Ellis for his expert guidance, invaluable advice and unfailing support. I particularly appreciate his meticulous attention to detail, his patience in explaining things in the simplest terms and for his promptness in providing feedback to drafts and responding to email queries.

All the teachers who so willingly participated in the study. Particularly the teachers in the two case study schools who allowed me to follow them around constantly, giving up so much of their free time to answer my questions and discuss matters related to my research. I thank them for their time, patience and willingness to share their stories and classrooms with me.

The staff and students of the case study schools, for their support, hospitality and contribution. I have learnt much from them during the months I spent at these schools and have a greater appreciation of the difficulties they face.

Dr Helen Basturkmen for her insightful comments and constructive feedback. For asking the right questions to get me thinking.

Dr Abdul Muhsin Mohamed for his assistance during the initial stages of the research and for taking the time to read and comment on the questionnaire.

The Educational Development Centre, Maldives, and particularly Mariyam Azra, for easing the process of data collection for the questionnaire survey.

Saeedbe for his invaluable help, especially during the initial stages of the study, in trying to locate suitable participants. I value his insight into the educational sector of the Maldives and thank him for his patience in answering my never-ending questions.

All those who helped in the huge task of preparing and sorting the questionnaires for distribution, including my parents, Saeedbe, Inazbe, Dhatha, Aruk and Aisha.

The University of Auckland for awarding me an International Doctoral Scholarship which enabled me to study at this prestigious institution.

Russell Greenwood for proofreading the thesis.

My parents, Nasheeda Riza and Mohamed Ahmed, for teaching me the value of education; for listening to and soothing my worries from half a world away; for enthusiastically celebrating my triumphs, however big or small.

My sisters, Nuzha and Nazeeha, for the emails, online chats and laughter which helped keep me sane during this three year journey.

My husband, Hussain Adam, for putting on hold his career while I pursued a dream; for being my sounding board, my rock and my cheerleader; for believing me capable of accomplishing much more than my intended goals and for never letting me settle for just dreaming.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EDC	Educational Development Centre
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
GCE	General Certificate of Education
HoD	Head of Department
KAL	Knowledge about Language
L2	Second/Foreign Language
MoE	Ministry of Education
PPP	Presentation Practice Production
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages