Novice EFL Teachers' Preconceptions of Teaching English: A Case Study of Iranian Private Institutes

Research Article

Amin Karimnia*[1]
Leila Barbareh[2]

Abstract

As a growing trend in the cognitive approach to teaching, exploring teachers' preconceptions can help to reveal various underlying dimensions that could leave significant impacts on the teaching process. Such preconceptions, of course, are very important in the case of novice teachers, particularly English as foreign language (EFL) ones, who have started to shape or re-shape their ideas about teaching. This study investigated Iranian EFL novice teachers' preconceptions at private institutes, following three purposes: (a) it tried to find any possibly existing underlying preconceptions about teaching in the teachers; (b) it sought to detect any

[1] Associate professor, Department of English, Fasa Branch, Islamic Azad University, Fasa, Iran. (corresponding author); aminkarimnia@iaufasa.ac.ir
[2] MA graduate in TEFL, Department of English, Fasa Branch, Islamic Azad University, Fasa, Iran; leilabarbareh@iaufasa.ac.ir

similar patterns in their ideas; and (c) it intended to find the metaphorical expressions the teachers used to share their experiences of teaching English. To trace any similarities in the novice teachers' preconceptions, copies of a questionnaire including twelve items were completed by a sample of novice EFL teachers (43 males/females). The data analysis revealed five factors underlying the preconceptions: learning, students' problem solving, teachers' role, instruction, and good teacher. Moreover, to investigate the metaphorical expressions, 20-miniute semi-structured interviews were arranged with five EFL novice teachers. The interviews revealed that the participants employed metaphors in sharing their teaching-related experiences.

Keywords: preconception, metaphor, novice teachers, EFL teachers, cognitive psychology

Introduction

Teachers with one to three years of work experience are usually known as novice teachers (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Although they may not have extensive teaching experience, novice teachers start the teaching practice with some preconceptions. As Richards (1994) and Borg (2003) observe, teachers' conceptualizations of teaching have a significant impact on their work. Novice teachers, too, may have some preconceptions about teaching language that affect their teaching in practice. Exploring such preconceptions can help both teachers and language institutes make better decisions in the field of education, especially in English education (Fives & Buehl, 2012).

Beginner EFL teachers' beliefs and their personal EFL-related learning experiences, most importantly in the first three years of their teaching, represent a major source of data for understanding how they approach teaching (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). From a practical perspective, decision-makers in the field of EFL, especially in private institutes, must be aware of the fact that teachers' preconceptions about teaching English play a crucial role in understanding how they approach their work. Institutes, for instance, can implement programs in their institutional structure that motivate teachers to develop self-awareness of teaching and even reveal their beliefs about it.

Exploring EFL-related underlying preconceptions represents a significant topic, mainly because teachers' thoughts in foreign language teaching settings have always been controversial issues in the teaching process. Many studies have tried to unravel teachers' theories and beliefs, investigating the psychological contexts which shape teachers' thinking (Theriot & Rice, 2009). Even novice teachers with no experience of teaching do not start their career with a tabula rasa but they carry with themselves some perceptions (Youngs & Youngs, 2001).

An important issue is that novice teachers' preconceptions can affect their instructional practices, thus influencing students and even the system in certain ways (Erkmen, 2010). Al-Awidi and Alghazo (2012) contend that acquiring

teaching skill can be regarded as a process in which the teacher actively constructs a workable and personal teaching theory. Moreover, personal experiences of learning English may exhibit some similar patterns among a group of teachers. Finding out these similarities will help us to find a framework for describing novice EFL teachers' thinking and for understanding how English language teachers learn to teach (Nespor, 1987). As Warford and Reeves (2003) explain, novice teachers' preconception may be expressed as metaphorical statements that conceptualize their experience of teaching.

This study investigates Iranian novice EFL teachers' preconceptions at private language institutes, as a topic remaining unexplored in the Iranian EFL setting. More specifically, the study seeks to: (a) find out whether Iranian novice EFL teachers have any preconceptions about teaching; (b) detect any similarities among the possibly observed preconceptions of the novices participating in this research; and (c) explore the metaphorical expressions used by such teachers in describing their mental images of teaching. Ample research has extensively discussed English language as an important issue in Iran. Although English is not the main medium of instruction at Iranian universities, university students have to pass some courses in English particularly for the purpose of research. Therefore, knowing English is necessary in an Iranian academic scheme (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2017; Salehizadeh et al., 2020).

Literature Review
Teacher Thinking and EFL

The relationship between teacher cognition and education has recently come to the fore as an interesting topic, especially in investigating beginner teachers' beliefs and activities. Studies have observed various tendencies that classroom instructors may exhibit in practice (e.g. Andrews, 2003; Farrell, 2003, 2008; Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 2003; Urmston & Pennington, 2008). For instance, Farrell's (2008) study of a first-year English language instructor, in the Singaporean EFL teaching context, showed that although they were not applicable in his teaching context, the teacher pursued his beliefs; yet he made an effort to find a balance between the institution's expectations and his beliefs.

In another study, Urmston and Pennington (2008) studied five novice English language teachers working in secondary schools in Hong Kong. They asserted that there was some inconsistency between classroom practices and the teachers' beliefs, due to the constraints imposed by the education system. Researchers in Turkey have recently shown a particular interest in investigations that examine Turkish prospective EFL teachers' practices and beliefs (e.g. Akbulut, 2007; Özmen, 2012; Öztürk & Atay, 2010; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Seferoğlu et al., 2009).

Drawing on the findings of studies concerned with teachers' thinking to inform language teaching pedagogy and teacher education, Nguyen (2020) employed multiple data sources (focus group, lesson plan, and stimulated recall

interview) to delve into the conceptions of six Vietnamese EFL instructors regarding language output and interaction. Cross-case analysis showed that most of the teachers geared language output and interaction activities towards achieving a targeted linguistic objective. Further analysis revealed that this view reflected a synthetic, product-oriented conception of teaching learning through skill building, and it was in line with traditional approaches that emphasized transmission style and form instruction. This finding implies that constructivist approaches to teaching, such as task-based language instruction, may run counter to teachers' existing conceptions of teaching. The implementation of task-based instruction, thus, needs to consider a negotiation between teachers' focus on meaning and the need for form-focused instruction.

In a longitudinal study, Phipps and Borg (2009) scrutinized 11 English teachers' beliefs about grammar practices and teaching. They reported that due to the students' expectations and preferences, the teachers had to adopt ways of teaching contrary to their beliefs. In another study of novice Turkish teachers, Akbulut (2007) observed that the beginner teachers were not able to apply their ideas while teaching, simply due to contextual restrictions and disciplinary problems in classes.

Cognitive Psychology and Teacher Cognition

Cognitive psychology is the study of mental processes, such as decision-making and learning. Many other areas of psychology probe into the relationship between thoughts and behavior, but cognitive psychology focuses on the internal processes instead. This field also explores philosophical questions, because some of the issues it addresses move beyond a mere experimental/scientific framework. As Erkmen (2010) observes, until the mid-1970s, the mainstream explorations were concentrated on teachers' *behavior*, although teachers' mental dimensions only represented a subsidiary concern (Freeman, 2002). The problem of a fully behavioral investigation is that it would leave many questions unanswered. As a response, the mid-70s witnessed a turning point during which studies started to take account of teachers' cognition, including their knowledge, beliefs and thinking (Borg, 2003).

Since then, teachers have begun to be seen as *thinkers* and *decision-makers*, in the light of their learning experiences (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Clark & Yinger, 1977; Elbaz, 1983; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Trent, 2019). Analyzing teachers' thoughts about teaching, Clark and Peterson (1986) categorized three main instructors' thought processes: (a) teachers' beliefs and theories; (b) teacher's pre-active decision-making and planning; and (c) teachers' decisions and interactive thoughts. Although teachers' theories and beliefs are associated with the psychological aspect (which underlines teacher thinking and decision-making), instructors' interactive and pre-active thinking related to the decision-making and thinking procedures experienced by teachers before and during the teaching process (Richards, 1994).

While a focus on cognitive processes is not an entirely new notion in applied linguistics, interest in the cognitive processes employed by foreign language teachers is a far more recent topic. As the "teacher-as-thinker" idea gained prominence in cognitive psychology, researchers were more eager to find out how instructors conceptualized their work and the modes of decision-making and thinking activities underlying their practice. The cognitive analysis of language teaching contributes to the understanding of how teachers teach and how novice teachers develop an image of teaching (Richards, 1994).

In a study of two EFL instructors at a public school and two at a private school, Kavanoz's (2006) observed similar findings on instructors' roles. In the public school, the teachers considered themselves as "tellers", "presenters" and "correctors", while in the private school, the teachers considered their roles as "facilitators", "guides", "leaders", and "problem solvers." The author reported that the teachers' roles reflected their teaching styles. The instructors in Richards et al. (1992) investigation served these functions in their classroom practices: correcting learners' errors, responding learners' questions, providing fruitful learning experiences and providing a model of correct language use. When the teachers were asked to describe their main activities as English teachers, they enumerated their roles as helping learners discover effective approaches to learning, adapting teaching methods to match their students' needs and imparting knowledge and skills to their students.

Novice EFL Teachers' Beliefs

Examining beginner or first-year language teachers' beliefs has become a trending topic recently. More investigations have addressed novice teachers and particularly their beliefs, although compared to other areas of teaching, these studies are not yet great in number. Phipps and Borg (2009), Farrell (2008), and Akbulut (2007) conducted some studies on novice teachers' beliefs. There have been some investigations dealing with novice teachers in Iran, too. For example, Bashiri et al. (2016) explored novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs regarding learner autonomy. They revealed a difference between experienced and novice teachers' personal beliefs in terms of learner autonomy. The study showed the role of beliefs in teaching and learning.

In another survey, Shahvand and Rezvani (2016) investigated the teachers' beliefs about effective teaching in the context of language classrooms in Iran. By looking at Iranian EFL instructors' own belief, the study addressed the need for a thorough understanding of the role of effective teaching in EFL classrooms. In studies concerned with beginner instructors, the problems that such teachers encounter in the first year of teaching have been given more attention (Veenman, 1984). Although the importance of novice teachers' problems is a significant issue, the studies exploring areas such as teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching remain underdeveloped, particularly in the case of non-native (non-English speaking) novice English language teachers.

In general, different Iranian researchers scrutinized the relationship be-tween teachers' beliefs and various aspects of their instructional practices. A considerable number of these studies focused on teachers' beliefs and activities among novice and expert instructors (e.g., Bashiri et al., 2016; Ghajarieh , 2019; Khalaj, 2010; Mehrpour & Mirsanjari, 2016; Mehrpour & Moghaddam, 2018; Yazdanpanah & Sahragard, 2017; Zarei & Sharifabad, 2012). The findings tend to enumerate differences and of course a few similarities among novice and expert teachers.

Research Method
Design and Instruments

This study relied on a mixed method as it combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study drew on a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews as the instruments of quantitative and qualitative data collection, respectively. Two instruments were used in this research: (a) teachers' beliefs questionnaire (TALIS); and (2) Warford and Reeves' (2003) interview guide.

Teachers' Beliefs Questionnaire. In order to measure the instructors' beliefs, the data were collected through questionnaires. The original questionnaire was adopted from OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). The 12 items in the questionnaire were measured based on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1 point) to "Strongly Agree" (4 points). The questionnaire was employed to explore the participants' beliefs about Eng-lish language teaching. As the questionnaire was standard, its reliability and validity had been confirmed.

Semi-Structured Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted in this study with five participants to investigate their metaphors. Warford and Reeves' (2003) interview guide, then, was used as the second instrument for data collection. Each interview lasted about fifteen minutes.

Participants

The participants were 43 Iranian novice EFL teachers (both males and females) who worked in private institutes in Shiraz, Iran, and had less than three years of experience in teaching English. All the participants were Persian native speakers and were aged 20-30. Among the novice teachers, five were inter-viewed, based upon the principals of confidentiality and anonymity. The partic-ipants were informed of the study's purpose and their consent was earned. The interview questions generally addressed the participants' experiences in lan-guage education.

Data Collection Procedure

The participants were informed about the objective of the study. Then, they learned about the questionnaire and how to respond to it. The copies of the

questionnaire were administered to the teachers. Following that, the scores obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed. In addition, five participants had semi-structured interviews through which their metaphors associated with teaching were identified. More specifically, the interviews were audio-recorded and were then transcribed to exactly detect the metaphors used in the participants' accounts.

Data Analysis

Initially, the participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire on teachers' beliefs. Next, to explore the teachers' beliefs about language teaching, descriptive statistics were calculated to find any similarity. To analyze the data, the audio-records of the interviews (each approximately fifteen minutes in length) were carefully transcribed, following the guidelines of McCracken's (1998); each transcription was substantially analyzed for its internal theme and possible metaphors expressed. The interviews were then inspected to detect possible patterns in the responses. The data observed were then coded, and the participants' metaphorical expressions were highlighted and categorized.

Results
Answering the First and Second Questions

The first question tried to find out whether the teachers had any preconceptions about teaching English, whereas the second question was meant to detect any pattern of similarity in the preconceptions expressed. A 30-item questionnaire was used to elicit the teachers' preconceptions about teaching English. The questionnaire included 12 items measured according to a four-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree (4)" to "Strongly Disagree (1)." To analyze the participants' preconceptions about teaching English, factor analysis was conducted, which revealed the following five factors: (a) learning including items B, H, J and K; (b) students' problem-solving including items F and I; (c) teachers' role including items C, D and E; (d) instruction including items G and L; and (e) good teacher including item A. Therefore, the teachers' preconceptions about teaching fell under five factors through factor analysis.

Figure 1
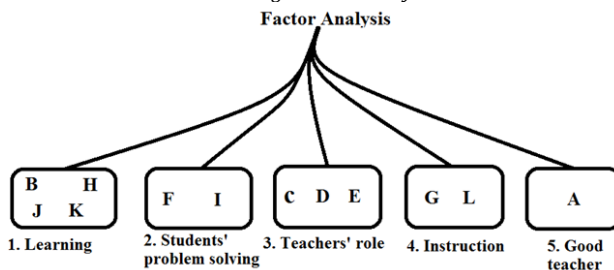*The Five Factors Found Through Factor Analysis.*

Table 1

Mean Scores of the Items of the Questionnaire

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
A	43	2.00	4.00	3.2093	.55883
B	43	2.00	4.00	2.6512	.65041
C	43	1.00	4.00	2.7907	.67465
D	43	1.00	4.00	3.0465	.57543
E	43	1.00	4.00	2.0000	.75593
F	43	2.00	4.00	3.2791	.62965
G	43	2.00	4.00	2.9070	.68362
H	43	1.00	4.00	2.5814	.62612
I	43	1.00	4.00	3.2093	.63838
J	43	2.00	4.00	2.8140	.58781
K	43	1.00	4.00	2.5116	.76756
L	43	1.00	4.00	2.8140	.66389
Preconception (Total)	43	2.42	3.33	2.8178	.25083
Valid N (listwise)	43				

As the mean scores fell between 1 to 4, 2.5 was considered to be the mid-point. The mean scores above the mid-point were regarded as the positive pre-conceptions, and those below the mid-point were seen as the negative precon-ceptions. Based on the results, the participants had positive preconceptions about teaching English, in general (mean = 2.81). The results of the descriptive statistics revealed that the participants had positive preconceptions about all the items of the questionnaire, except item E (*Teachers know a lot more than students; they shouldn't let students develop answers that may be incorrect when they can just explain the answers directly*) (mean=2.00). The results also indicated that among the items of the questionnaire, item F received the highest mean score (*Students learn best by finding solutions to problems on their own*) (mean=3.27).

In the next step, the responses were coded as "Disagree =1" or "Agree =2." To simplify the interpretation, "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" categories were incorporated into one single negative category (Disagree), whereas the categories of "Agree" and "Strongly agree" were merged in one positive catego-ry (Agree). To examine whether the Iranian novice EFL teachers' preconcep-tions about teaching English exhibited similar patterns, the percentage of the answers to each item was computed. Furthermore, the chi-square test was con-ducted to see whether there was any significant difference between the fre-quency of the answers of the two alternatives (Agree and Disagree) in each item. Table 2 shows the results of the frequency and chi-square analysis.

Table 2

Frequency of the Responses and Chi-Square to Compare the Pattern of the Responses

Questionnaire Statements	Frequency and Percent-age of the responses		Chi-square	Asymp. Sig.
	Disagree	Agree		
A) Effective/good teachers demonstrate the correct way to solve a problem.	3 7.0%	40 93.0%	31.837[a]	.000
B) When referring to a "poor performance", I mean a performance that lies below the previous achievement level of the student.	19 44.2%	24 55.8%	.581[a]	.446
C) It is better when the teacher – not the student – decides what activities are to be done.	13 30.2%	30 69.8%	6.721[a]	.010
D) My role as a teacher is to facilitate students' own inquiry.	4 9.3%	39 90.7%	28.488[a]	.000

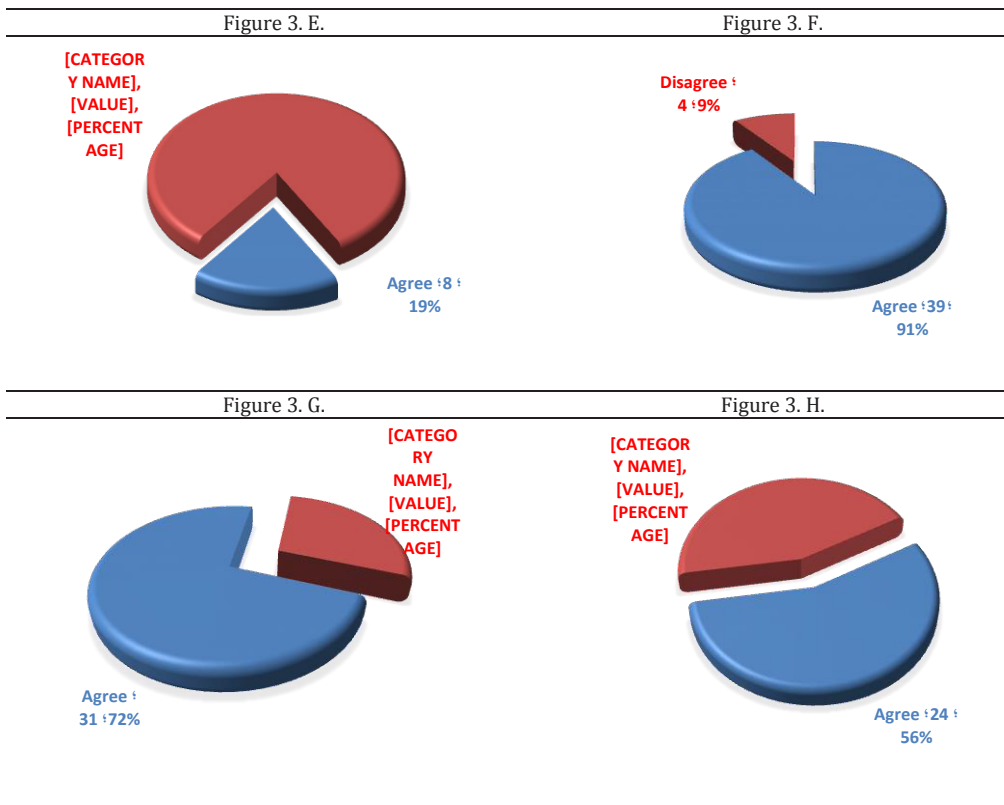|				
E) Teachers know a lot more than students; they shouldn't let students develop answers that may be incorrect when they can just explain the answers directly.	35 81.4%	8 18.6%	16.953[a]	.000
F) Students learn best by finding solutions to problems on their own.	4 9.3%	39 90.7%	28.488[a]	.000
G) Instruction should be built around problems with clear, correct answers, and around ideas that most students can grasp quickly.	12 27.9%	31 72.1%	8.395[a]	.004
H) How much students learn depends on how much background knowledge they have – that is why teaching facts is so necessary.	19 44.2%	24 55.8%	.581[a]	.446
I) Students should be allowed to think of solutions to practical problems themselves before the teacher shows them how they are solved.	3 7.0%	40 93.0%	31.837[a]	.000
J) When referring to a "good performance", I mean a performance that lies above the previous achievement level of the student.	12 27.9%	31 72.1%	8.395[a]	.004
K) A quiet classroom is generally needed for effective learning.	20 46.5%	23 53.5%	.209[a]	.647
L) Thinking and reasoning processes are more important than specific curriculum content.	12 27.9%	31 72.1%	8.395[a]	.004

According to the mean scores listed in Table 2, the majority of the teachers agreed with items A, D, F, G, I, J, and L. This tendency revealed that they had similar perceptions of the items above. On the other hand, the majority of the teachers disagreed with item E, which was another similar perception. However, the teachers' perceptions about items B, H, and K were not similar. Figures 2-4 illustrate packages of pie charts that specify the percentages of each item.

Figure 2
The Frequencies and Percentages of Responses to Items A-D
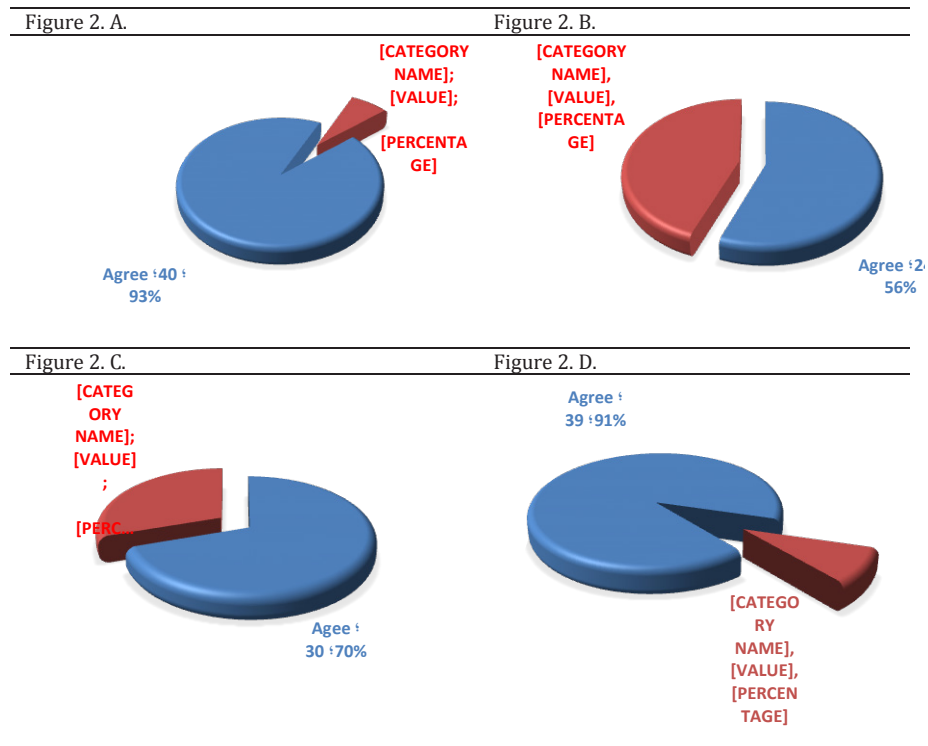
Note. Figure 2. The frequencies and percentages of responses to items a-d: Figure 2. A.: "Effective/good teachers demonstrate the correct way to solve a problem" (sig.= .00, p < .05); Figure 2. B.: "When referring to a 'poor perfor-mance', I mean a performance that lies below the previous achievement level of the student" (sig.= .446, p < .05); Figure 2. C.: "It is better when the teacher – not the student – decides what activities are to be done" (sig.= .01, p < .05); Fig-ure 2. D.: "My role as a teacher is to facilitate students' own inquiry. (sig. =.000, p < .05)."

Figure 3
The Frequencies and Percentages of Responses to Items E-H

| Figure 3. E. | Figure 3. F. |

| Figure 3. G. | Figure 3. H. |

Note. Figure 3. E: "Teachers know a lot more than students; they shouldn't let students develop answers that may be incorrect when they can just explain the answers directly" (sig. = .000, p <.05); Figure 3.F: "Students learn best by finding solutions to problems on their own" (sig .= .000, p <. 05); Figure 3.G: "Instructions should be built around problems with clear, correct answers, and around ideas that most students can grasp quickly" (sig .= .004, p < .05); Figure 3. H: "How much students learn depends on how much background knowledge they have – that is why teaching facts is so necessary" (sig. = .446, p <. 05).

Figure 4

The Frequencies and Percentages of Responses to Items I-L:
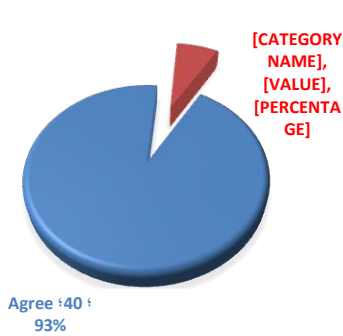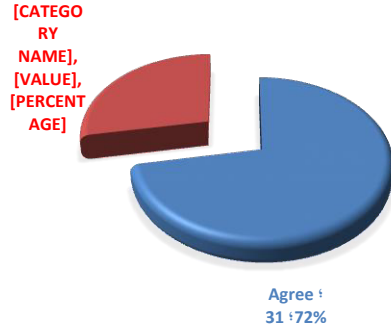
Figure 4. I.	Figure 4. J.

[CATEGORY NAME], [VALUE], [PERCENTAGE]

[CATEGORY NAME], [VALUE], [PERCENTAGE]

Agree ؛40 ؛ 93%

Agree ؛ 31 ؛72%

Figure 4. K.	Figure 4. L.

[CATEGORY NAME], [VALUE], [PERCENTAGE]

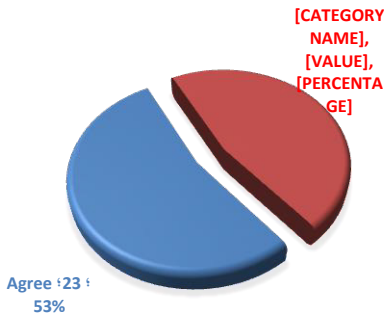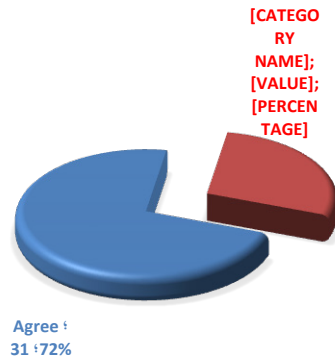[CATEGORY NAME]; [VALUE]; [PERCENTAGE]

Agree ؛23 ؛ 53%

Agree ؛ 31 ؛72%

Note. Figure 4.I: "Students should be allowed to think of solutions to practical problems themselves before the teacher shows them how they are solved" (sig. = .000, p < .05); Figure 4.J: "When referring to a 'good performance', I mean a performance that lies above the previous achievement level of the student" (sig.= .004, p <.05); Figure 4.K: "A quiet classroom is generally needed for effective learning" (sig.= .647, p < .05); Figure 4.L: "Thinking and reasoning processes are more important than specific curriculum content" (sig.= .004, p < .05).

Figure 5
Agreement in Factors Demonstrating Similar Positive Perceptions
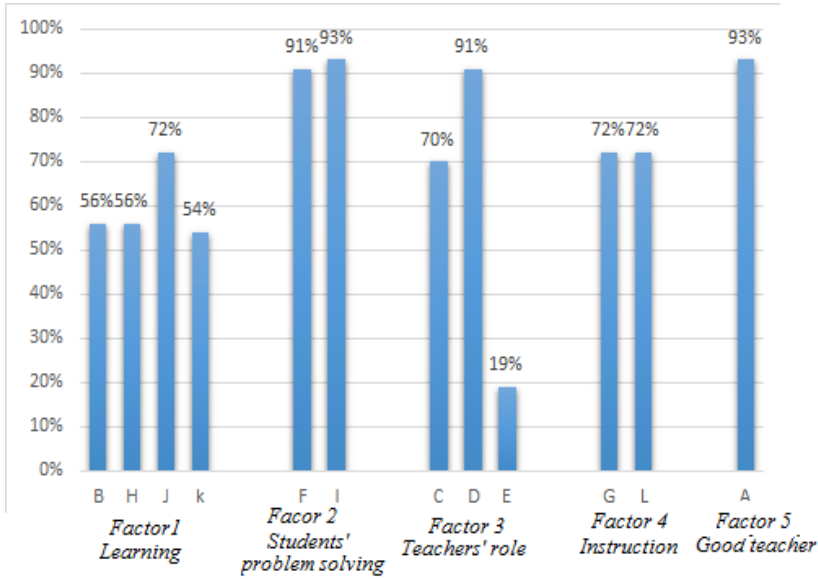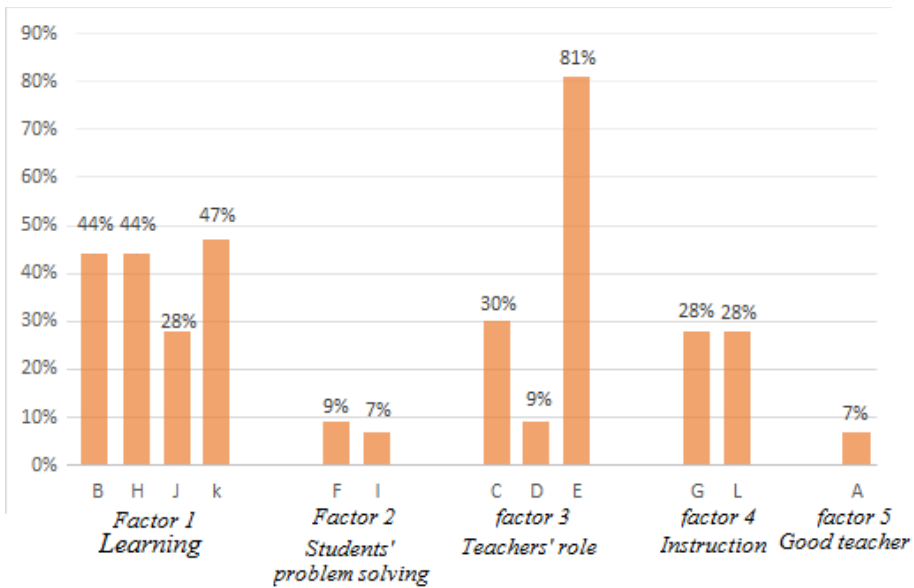

Figure 6
Agreement in Factors Demonstrating Similar Negative Perceptions.

The results of the first factor showed that in items B, H, and K, the teachers' responses were not similar. About 56% of the respondents agreed with item B

(*When referring to a "poor performance", I mean a performance that lies below the previous achievement level of the student*), and item H (*How much students learn depends on how much background knowledge they have-that is why teaching facts is so necessary*). Meanwhile approximately 44% of the teachers disagreed (sig = .44) with items B and H. In the same vein, 72% of the respondents agreed with item J (*When referring to a "good performance", I mean a performance that lies above the previous achievement level of the student*).

About 72% of the respondents agreed with item J and about 28% disagreed with it (sig. .004); this observation suggested that the teachers' preconceptions of the relationship between performance and continuous achievement was positive. As far as item K was concerned (*A quiet classroom is generally needed for effective learning*), about 54% of the teachers' responses expressed agreement, whereas 46% of them disagreed (sig. = .64). More teachers believed that learning English would happen in a quiet atmosphere. Therefore, the teachers did not have similar preconceptions of this aspect of learning.

The second factor that addressed students' problem solving was item F (*Students learn best by finding solutions to problems on their own*); 91% of the teachers agreed with item F, while only 9% expressed disagreement (sig. = 0). The teachers were convinced that students should be problem-solvers. Furthermore, item I (*Students should be allowed to think of solutions to practical problems themselves before the teacher shows them how they are solved*) received a high score in terms of agreement (93%), with a relatively low rate of disagreement (7%); this observation clarified that preconceptions were similar in terms of the students' pre-active problem-solving abilities. The third factor concerned with the teachers' role in an English class was item C (*It is better when the teacher-not the student-decides what activities are to be done*); 70% of the respondents stated agreement and 30% of them expressed disagreement (sig. = .010) in this regard. A similar component, item D (*My role as a teacher is to facilitate students' own inquiry*) received 91% agreement and 9% disagreement (sig. 000), revealing that most of the teachers shared the similar preconceptions that a teacher must have a facilitating function in the English learning process.

As the findings revealed, however, the majority of the teachers had negative preconceptions of item E (*Teachers know a lot more than students; they shouldn't let students develop answers that may be incorrect when they can just explain the answers directly)* (percentage = 81.4%, sig. = . 00, $p < .05$). This relatively strong response to item E unraveled that the teachers had similar preconceptions about providing opportunities to students in their efforts to work with the foreign language, even if their answers were not perfect enough. The fourth factor was concerned with giving instructions in an English class; item G (*Instruction should be built around problems with clear, correct answers, and around ideas that most students can grasp quickly*) received 72% of the teachers' agreeable responses (with 28% disagreement; sig. = .004). The teachers sharing similar preconceptions contended that instructions had to be clear and understandable for students. As far as item L was concerned (*Thinking and rea-*

soning processes are more important than specific curriculum content), 72% of the teachers expressed agreement while 28% shared disagreeable opinions (sig. = .004); this tendency clarified that, as the larger number of the teachers assumed, instruction should be based on thinking not just a course book. Hence, more teachers had similar preconceptions about giving instruction in an English class.

The last factor was concentrated on the idea of a *good teacher*; item A (*Effective/good teachers demonstrate the correct way to solve a problem*) received an agreement score of 93%, with 7% disagreement (sig. = .000). As the teachers participating in this study suggested, a good teacher would show learners the *way* of learning. Thus, in terms of item A, the teachers had similar preconceptions about an effective/good teacher. Based on the findings of this study, the novice teachers *definitely* had some preconceptions about teaching, and as illustrated in Figures 2-4 (see above), these Iranian novice EFL teachers' preconceptions of teaching revealed similar patterns in terms of such items as *students'* problem-*solving*, *good teacher*, and *instruction*. In contrast, the teachers' beliefs about the factor of *learning* did not show a similar pattern.

Answering the Third Question

The third question tried to figure out whether or not the Iranian novice EFL teachers employed any metaphors in their preconceptions of teaching. Following McCracken's (1998) guidelines, the transcriptions of the interview sessions were rigorously analyzed to find the metaphors used by the EFL novice teachers participating in the study. The metaphors used by the participants were mainly concerned with such topics: (a) deciding to enter the English language teaching profession; (b) English language learning; (c) EFL teaching; and (d) the ideal language teacher. The most prevalent metaphors used by the participants were elicited in response to the question: "Why did you choose EFL teaching?" The participants responded in two different ways: "I had to" and "I liked it." Some accompanying phrases were "with reluctance", "under compulsion", "with interest", and "built-in feature."

The second group of the metaphors employed by participants were expressed in response to the question: "How would you evaluate your language learning experience(s)?" The participants evaluated their English language learning as "enjoyable" or "unpleasant." Other related ideas used by the participants included "sweet", "intriguing", "disgusting", and "hateful." The third group of metaphors were shared in response to the question: "What did EFL teaching sound like before you started teaching?" The participants employed such phrases as "as easy as pie" and "difficult to do." The fourth group of metaphors were stated to answer the question: "What qualities would the ideal language teacher possess?" The metaphors in this case were "knowledgeable", "god of language", "good looking", "patient", "not being a dictator", and "having knowledge in psychology." A participant stated:

...EFL teachers were gods of language. I thought they knew everything. We called them a *pocket dictionary* because they knew every word in English when asked.

All the participants mentioned that they were inspired to learn English by somebody else. This person was in most cases their first teacher. One of the participants explained:

... my first teacher was Mr. ****. He was very good-tempered and spoke English in class. He pointed to the objects in class and told us their names in English. We didn't know what he was saying but we repeated after him. Then he would ask for a volunteer and I usually raised my hand and walked to the front of the class and I named all three or four objects and he would clap. It was the most enjoyable experience in English class for me.

Another participant stated:

... my mother had a friend who lived in the United States. Whenever she traveled to Iran with her family and visited us, I'd ask their children to speak American English. I was very fascinated with their American accent. I wished I could speak like them.

Their experiences of learning had a great impact on their teaching. In terms of methods of teaching, the participants fell into two groups: the first group stated that they followed the same way they were taught; in contrast, the second group claimed that they would never repeat what their teachers did. Another participant recalled:

... I learned from my teacher to call the names of the students who didn't study. We had a lot of stress which was bad at that time but it made us study every session. I try to do the same thing in my class.

Nonetheless other participants stated very different approaches:

... the teacher should behave in a very friendly manner to make the students feel delighted. In an EFL class, students come with a lot of fear and stress. I myself went to class with tears and the teacher's behavior frightened me so much. The teacher should be nice and helpful especially during the first two or three sessions.

Discussion

This study sought to explore Iranian novice EFL teachers' preconceptions, find any the similar patterns in their preconceptions, and categorize the metaphorical ideas they used to represent their teaching/learning related experiences. As explained earlier, novice teachers' thinking is an expanding topic for research, although there are many gaps in the literature especially in terms of such teachers' preconceptions in various cultures. The results in this research showed that the Iranian novice EFL teachers *definitely* had some preconceptions about teaching. According to the descriptive statistics, the novice teachers expressed both positive or negative preconceptions about teaching English, as

decided by the items in the questionnaire used. Therefore, the teachers' preconceptions fell into two groups although these preconceptions showed certain similarities.

The pattern of responses revealed that the majority of the participants believed effective instructors would show the correct way to solve a problem (item A). They also believed that it would be better when the instructor (not the student) decided classroom practices (item C). Concerning the role of teachers, the participants contended that teachers had to facilitate students' own inquiries (item D). This idea implied that the participants considered a teacher to be an authority figure in the classroom who would attempt to foster learners' autonomy.

The results also revealed that most of the participants agreed over the idea that students would come to best results by finding solutions to problems on their own (item F). Responding to item I, the participants agreed that teachers should allow them to think of solutions to practical problems themselves before the teachers themselves shows them how they are solved. The teachers also disagreed with item E (*Teachers know a lot more than students; they shouldn't let students develop answers that may be* incorrect *when they can just explain the answers directly*). This general disagreement implied that the participants advocated *autonomous* learners. This finding was in line with the observations of Bashiri et al. (2016), who investigated experienced and novice teachers' beliefs regarding learner autonomy; they reported that novice teachers believed in learner autonomy.

In addition, the majority of the participants in this study believed that instruction should be built around problems with correct, clear responses, and around ideas that most learners can understand quickly (item G). Most of the participants viewed "good performance" as a performance that lies above the previous achievement level of a given student (item J). Based on the responses to item L, the participants believed that reasoning and thinking processes were more significant than specified curriculum content.

As Debreli (2012) explains, teachers' perceptions and beliefs strongly influence their approach to teaching and learning and the way they act in class. Pajares (1992) also argues that teachers carry with them some strong beliefs and ideas about education that leave an impact on the way they process the input in their program. According to Kagan (1992), student teachers and novice teachers use their previous educational experiences to interpret the input provided in their teacher education programs. Kagan further assumes that these beliefs are quite stable, strongly held, and resistant to change.

Concerning the similarity of the teachers' perceptions, the results of the present study were compatible with those of Altan's (2006), who also found a degree of conceptual similarity among pre-service teachers' beliefs. The question addressing the teachers' use of metaphors also revealed two groups of metaphors dominantly used: expressions associated with enjoyable or unpleasant English learning experiences. As a consequence, some of the participants in the

interview explained they would prefer to employ the same method of teaching as used by their own teachers, while some others said they would draw on exact opposite methods. However, all novice teachers in this study admired a person who encouraged them to find interest in English, but that person was in most cases their first teachers.

According to Ahkemoglu (2011), metaphors are cognitive and reflective means for people to utilize association, comparison and resemblance, while filtering reality through their own mental images. Martinez et al. (2001) suggested that "metaphors may function as stepping stones to a new vantage point from which a teacher can look at his or her own practice as an educator from a new perspective" (p. 974). Furthermore, Lin et al. (2012) indicated that "teaching metaphors provide a framework with which to assess teaching and a means for teachers to augment self-awareness and professional development" (p. 184). The results of the present study were in line with those of a study conducted by Lin et al. (2012), as they found "the pre-service teachers' conceptualization of teaching is deeply rooted in their past experiences" (p. 195).

The results of the present study are in line with Lortie's (1975) who reports that the foundation of an individual's ideas about teaching language is via the experience of being a student and through other life experiences. According to Warford and Reeves (2003), there is evidence of perceptions and a system of language teaching-related metaphors. This study is in agreement with this view as the Iranian novice EFL teachers in private institutes had shaped a system of metaphors about English teaching.

Conclusion

This study investigated the preconceptions of a group of Iranian novice EFL teachers, given the importance of the topic in teaching practice. The study tried to find whether the teachers had any preconceptions, find any similar patterns in their possibly existing preconceptions, and unravel their metaphorical expressions associated with their experiences of English language teaching. Two instruments were utilized to collect data: Teachers' Beliefs Questionnaire extracted from OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) was used to investigate the participants' beliefs about English language teaching, and interview sessions were arranged based on Warford and Reeves' (2003) guidelines to investigate the teachers' metaphors.

The results of factor analysis revealed that the questionnaire consisted of five factors: learning, students' problem solving, teacher's role, instruction, and good teacher. The chi-square test was also employed to evaluate the differences between the number of the participants who agreed and disagreed with every item of the questionnaire. The results revealed that the participants agreed with most of the items presented in the questionnaire. The participants disagreed with only one item (item E). Based on the results of chi-square test, the findings indicated that the participants had similar preconceptions about lan-

guage teaching. The results of the interviews also revealed that the participants had a specific system of metaphors.

Further studies can explore various related questions such as comparing English novice teachers' preconceptions at private institutes and public schools English teachers' about teaching English, comparing EFL teachers' preconceptions with those of teachers of other languages, and formulating a metaphor analysis system to regulate the metaphorical expressions used by EFL teachers regarding their teaching experiences/preconceptions, especially novice ones.

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