

Teachers' Beliefs and ELT Curriculum Intensions: How to Bridge the Gap

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are key players in the success or failure of curriculum innovations (wedell, 2003). They filter, modify, and implement the curriculum according to their beliefs and to the context where this curriculum innovation is being implemented (Borg 2006, Waters, 2009).

In addition, the literature suggests that curriculum planners and educational policy makers often focus on the planning and initiation issues ignoring the dilemmas and obstacles that might evolve during the actual implementation (Markee, 1997), and that little attention has been given to how teachers implement changes in pedagogy (Carless, 2004).

Given the crucial role of teachers' beliefs and the contextual factors which influence how teachers implement and make sense of ELT curriculum innovations, this paper presents the findings of a study which examines three teachers' implementation of the English language curriculum in Libyan secondary schools, and compares their implementation to what is recommended by this curriculum innovation. It also sheds light on how teachers' beliefs and other contextual factors influence the way teachers interpreted and implemented this curriculum.

In order to study these issues, a qualitative research design was employed as a mode of inquiry. Data collection methods consisted of classroom observations in which audio recordings of the teachers' actual classroom practices were obtained, and follow up interviews in which teachers commented on their classroom practices and discussed the factors shaping these practices. The interviews with the teachers shed light on the tensions between teachers' actual classroom practices and the intentions of the curriculum. They also highlighted complex relationships among the curriculum reform, teachers' practices, teachers' beliefs, and other contextual factors.

This paper illustrates the value of studying what teachers do while implementing ELT curriculum innovations and how their beliefs and other contextual factors influence the way teachers interpret and implement these innovations.