

Investigating Change in Iranian EAP Learners' Beliefs about Reading

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Abstract

Framed in Sociocultural Theory, this paper investigated changes in Iranian EAP (English for academic purposes) learners' beliefs about reading as a result of instruction in an EAP course. Previous research has relied much on quantitative approaches in belief studies and assumed learners' beliefs to be fairly stable; however, this study adopted a qualitative approach examining eight female learners' belief change about reading as a result of instruction in an EAP course. The data were collected through diaries and think-aloud protocols and they were analyzed based on the grounded theory methodology. The findings showed that 1) there were substantial changes in the learners' initial simplistic beliefs about reading during ten weeks of the term, and 2) learners' changed beliefs about reading were to a large extent evidenced in their actions while reading a text and verbalizing their thought. The results suggested that belief changes were affected by the learning context in which learners interacted with and beliefs and actions were interwoven concerning the context of learners' interaction.

Keywords

Learners' beliefs, belief changes, reading in English, Sociocultural Theory

Introduction

Beliefs are central constructs in any discipline dealing with human behavior and learning (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1988; cited in Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). In fact, it is the belief of people that directs their behavior and gives them the capability to be in contact with other members of the society. According to Abelson (1986), beliefs have novel features and are like possessions. Beliefs seem to have important functions that show how significant they are. These functions are: a) provision of meaning, b) help individuals to identify with other people and form groups and social systems, and c) reduce dissonance and confusion (Pajares, 1992).

As to the significance of belief in learning, investigating belief systems has been a concern for researchers for more than two decades. Considering the importance of learning beliefs, Horwitz (1987) states that teachers in their classes often encounter students' resistance to some of their instructional activities, and this causes lots of problems for teachers to deal with such situations. Wenden (1987) also points that students' beliefs about language learning can influence their language learning strategies. White (2008) argues that beliefs play a significant role in the learning process and "in terms of language learning, the domains of beliefs which are acknowledged as relevant are the beliefs learners hold about themselves, about language and language learning and about the contexts in which they participate as language learners and language users" (p.121). Kalaja and Barcelos (2003) also mention that beliefs are considered as one area of individual learner differences that affect the processes and outcomes of second/foreign language learning/acquisition. Interest in learners' beliefs has moved toward investigating change in these beliefs in this fledgling arena. In terms of belief change, Peng (2011) has investigated change in one first-year college

student's beliefs about language teaching and learning since his enrollment. She found substantive changes in the student's beliefs and demonstrated that these changes were much dependent on the context.

It is clear that learners' beliefs have been recognized as an important factor for years and a body of research emerged to investigate the dynamic and complex nature of beliefs, but there are still few studies on learner belief change. And more importantly, the few existing studies have examined the change in learners' beliefs regarding language learning in general, while in Iran most learners learn English for academic purpose, mainly for reading purpose. Hence, it will be of benefit to our English language teaching to see a) what beliefs learners have about reading when they enter the university; and b) their beliefs will change as a result of reading instruction at university?

Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural Theory ***Sociocultural Theory and Learners' Beliefs***

Sociocultural Theory seems to recognize the role of beliefs or knowledge as a powerful motivating factor in human activity; it focuses on the activity which influences the development of self-regulation (Alanen, 2003). Lantolf and Throne (2006) in their introduction of Sociocultural Theory express that there is a strong connection between culture, language, and cognition, and that these elements can play an important role in education considering the role of environment, information, and behavioral sciences tailored to create optimal conditions for learning and development. The focus here is on the setting or activity rather than on what participants know about their activity. As to the application of Sociocultural Theories in studying beliefs, it can be said that knowledge and control of knowledge appear to be in contact with each other. Alanen assumes that beliefs are considered as "a specific type of mediational means that learner may or may not use during the language learning process" (p.60).

The social aspect of cognition has been the interest of researchers in the field of SLA who have been investigating learners' beliefs and perceptions. Applying Sociocultural Theory, Rust (1994; cited in Benat, 2008) describes "beliefs as socially constructed representation systems which are used to interpret and act upon the world, acknowledging the role of context on mental processes" (p.14). In fact, within this perspective beliefs are seen as fluid and dynamic, not stable entities. Woods (2003), inspired by social theories, provides beliefs with some important characteristics in which belief systems are said to be totally different from the conception mentioned in other theories like cognitive ones. Woods proposes three ways in which beliefs are organized: "the first is that beliefs are not discrete, rather they are interconnected and structured; the second is that beliefs are not stable entities within the individual, but situated in social context and formed through specific instances of social interaction and, as a result, are constantly evolving; the third is that beliefs are not separable or separate from other aspects of a learners' cognitive processes, but integrated in a larger dynamic model of thought and action, forming not the periphery but the central framework within which all learning take place" (p. 202). In fact, the purpose of Woods here is to present this fact that the formation and development of beliefs can be considered as a type of learning.

Hence, the theoretical framework adopted here to investigate changes in beliefs is Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory which is in favor of shaping and evolving the beliefs within specific context, while disregarding the stable nature of mental representations and perception individuals hold (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003).

As to the present study, the aim is to see if the way reading comprehension is taught at university level has any effect (positive or negative) on learners' belief system. As to the issue of teaching reading in an EFL context like Iran, there seems to be no signs of teaching rather it might be a kind of grasping the content of the text which is similar to translations rather than the real

teaching focusing on comprehension with the application of reading strategies in line with their raising awareness of their use. This claim is reflected in Mehrpour's (2004) study in which she realized that teaching reading in Iran is done without focusing on reading comprehension achieved by reading strategies taught by teachers for the purpose of comprehending reading texts. In fact, it seems that teaching reading in Iran may be, to some extent, similar to grammar translation method (GTM) focusing mainly on forms at the cost of disregarding meaning. Teaching reading is the translation of foreign language to the first language shown by Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh's (2004) study in that reading and translating are the mainly focused language skills in English teaching of Iranian schools. Therefore, through the following research questions, we embarked on finding out whether a university teacher's way of teaching reading would influence what students believe about language learning. Thus, the study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the participants' initial beliefs about learning to read in English?
2. Will there be any change in their beliefs as a result of instruction in reading comprehension at university?
3. To what extent changes in learners' beliefs are evidenced in their actions?

Methodology

On account of the problems quantitative methodology encounters in investigating learners' beliefs, Kalaja and Barcelos (2003) argue that quantitative data collection methods "basically employ an etic perspective, leaving very little room for students' (or teachers') own perspectives and looking at the phenomenon very much out-of-context" (p.2). Ellis (2008) also argues that quantitative methodology like questionnaires are not able to examine beliefs learners hold in the sense that questionnaires "assume that learners are aware of the beliefs they hold and are able to verbalize them" (p.13), and this is problematic.

Concerning the complexity of gathering learners' beliefs, and as Ellis (2008) argues that there are some beliefs which "lie below the threshold of consciousness or cannot be easily and directly assessed" (p.13), hence, a qualitative approach to investigate belief systems can be helpful. Regarding the importance of qualitative research, Mackay and Gass (2005) explain that "qualitative research is often process-oriented, or open-ended, with categories that emerge" (p.163). They suggest that qualitative methodology creates a space for individuals to express themselves clearly in their natural settings.

In terms of the Sociocultural Theory in studying beliefs about SLA, it typically employs the qualitative research methods as Bernat (2008) expresses that studies within this perspective are usually small-scale and use in-depth descriptive and interpretive analysis. Thus, the present study benefits from the qualitative, interpretative methodology to investigate the complex and dynamic nature of learners' beliefs.

Participants

All the students of one of the classes doing their General English Course at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences were invited to take part in the study and, among them, eight female learners who volunteered to do the related tasks of reading comprehension during the term, constituted the participants of the study.

Data Collection Procedure

Considering the usefulness of diaries, Mackay and Gass (2005) mention that by the use of diaries "learners are able to record their impressions or perceptions about learning, unconstrained by predetermined areas of interest" (p.177). They also argue that this type of data collection can result in helpful insights into the learning process that these perceptions may not be accessible from the researcher's perspective alone.

Therefore, the participants were asked to write diaries throughout the course and to hand in what they wrote each week at the beginning of the following week, the reason for this being to keep them writing systematically and periodically. In order to keep them focused, they were asked to answer some questions in their diaries aiming at uncovering their beliefs about reading.

In terms of the significance of think-aloud technique in applied linguistics, Kormos (1998) points out that it is particularly important in second language research in the sense that it paves the way for a researcher to uncover the cognitive and psycholinguistic processes underlying language performance. Hence, a think-aloud protocol was also used at the end of the term to know what the participants actually did in the reading process and to what extent what they claimed to believe aligned with their practice of reading. To do so, the participants were told to read a text while thinking aloud about how they went about reading it and recording their speech.

Data Analysis

The diary of each participant was collected weekly and read together with those written the previous weeks to learn about the mentality of the learners in the course of time. To do this, an interpretive, qualitative analysis of the diaries with the application of the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was conducted to find out what new beliefs the students have internalized as a result of participating in the learning process.

Results

The findings of the current study were classified into three main sections according to the research questions and thematic representations of learners' diary writings based on the grounded theory methodology including: Learners' initial beliefs about learning to read, investigation of the elements of change in learners' beliefs about reading, and the extent to which their changed beliefs are evidenced in their actions. The first two sections are related to diaries and the third one is devoted to think-aloud protocol. Hence, in the following, the main findings of diaries are provided first and think-aloud data are subsequently presented.

Diaries

Learners' Initial Beliefs about Learning to Read

Regarding learners' initial beliefs about reading, learners were asked to answer three questions (at the beginning of the term in their first session) in their diaries including:

- a. What do you think you need to know to read for comprehension in English?
- b. How can the reading course help learners develop their reading skill?
- c. What does the reading course learner need to do to acquire reading skills?

With respect to these questions, coding of the answers was conducted to find out the categories emerged according to the initial coding of the answers. Based on the initial coding of the answers, axial coding of data was carried out to discover the main categories of data for the purpose of selective coding at the final stage. These categories involved learners' beliefs concerning 1) the components of language (or language items), 2) classroom interaction, and 3) effective reading strategy. Based on these categories, learners' initial beliefs about learning to read are presented below with some excerpts from their diaries to demonstrate their held beliefs regarding the mentioned categories above. As students' native language is Persian, English translation of their diary writings is provided.

The Components of Language. As to this category, it is meant that learners' beliefs were directed to the basic constituents of language, i.e. vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, etc.

Investigating learners' diary writings, all participants (N=8) believed that it is needed to have the knowledge of language components to be able to read in English without any problem. To them knowledge of language involved just knowing these constituents of it. They seemed to have no idea

of the psycholinguistic processes learners go through in order to make sense of what they read. Hence, their focus was on the language-related elements rather than what is actually needed while reading a text in English. In fact, participants of the present study initially believed that by having knowledge of these components, they could get mastery over reading and their attention had to be only paid to them regardless of other important aspects of learning to read such as, reading strategies, parts of speech, etc.

In terms of the importance of language components, L4 pointed out:

Excerpt 1:

L4: "We need to have acquaintance with vocabulary and grammar for better reading.

Classroom Interaction. Classroom interaction focuses on the quality of class in terms of learners' involvement while teaching reading. In fact, it is aimed to explore to what extent learners' role and their interaction with themselves and teacher, were of importance to learners at the beginning of the term.

In terms of classroom interaction, most of the participants (N=6) held this unreasoning belief that having an effective classroom interaction made by the teacher led to their success on the road of learning to read. It seems that they did not have any clear idea what exactly classroom interaction was and how it could affect their process of learning to read. To them, teacher was of importance regardless of considering themselves as active roles in better classroom interaction and how classroom interaction can pave the way for their learning to read. Their beliefs might refer back to their school time when classes were teacher-centered that created very little space for learners in comparison with learner-centered classes which provide learners with different tasks created by the teacher giving learning space to students as they interact.

With respect to second category, L6's belief was:

Excerpt 2:

L6: "The teacher can have an interactive class by involving the learners in classroom discussions."

Effective Reading Strategy. Concerning this category, it should be noted that there are common reading strategies one can apply while reading and comprehending a text very well in a short period of time. These strategies include skimming, scanning, guessing meaning from the context, etc. Here it is aimed to see whether learners were really aware of these strategies at the beginning of the course or only heard about them somewhere else.

Regarding the significance of reading strategy, the majority of the participants (N=6) held this belief that that they needed to know about reading strategy and applied them in their reading practice. However, these six learners namely introduced some things related to the strategies used in reading comprehension, such as overall picture of text, or guessing meaning which clearly shows that their beliefs about using these strategies seem to be raw at the beginning of the course about learning to read, and these beliefs may be considered as unconsciously produced thoughts. In fact, the two above-mentioned strategies are the only strategies mentioned by participants in their diaries (four out of eight learners believed in total picture of a text; three out of eight wrote about guessing meaning). It can be concluded that learners may have heard about or applied these strategies during their school period and wrote them in their diaries. However, this point should be added that they did not explain anything regarding how these strategies should be applied while reading a text, and this acknowledged that they had simplistic ideas concerning these strategies at the beginning of the course.

As to the held beliefs of learners about reading strategies, L8's belief included:

Excerpt 3:

L8: “Reading the text for the first time in a way that an overall picture of it comes to our mind.”

Having expounded each category separately above to grasp learners’ initial beliefs about reading, it is of benefit to arrive now at conclusion regarding the above-mentioned categories with the application of grounded theory methodology. Based on the learners’ diaries, the main theory of learners’ initial beliefs about learning to read can be classified in two parts:

1. Learners’ initial beliefs about learning to read lied in their reliance on components of language.
2. Learners had simplistic ideas about strategies applied in reading comprehension.

Investigation of the Elements of Change in Learners’ Beliefs about Reading

As to investigating belief change, learners were asked to answer the following questions (in the third session of the term) in their diaries:

- a. What does learning to read mean to you now?
- b. What is your idea about the activities done in class this week?
- c. What problems do you feel on the road of learning to read?
- d. How much are you motivated to learn to read now?

During 10 weeks of the winter semester, 63 diaries were collected from eight learners who were passing the General English Course at university. Diary questions aimed to examine whether their views toward learning to read has undergone any change as the result of the instruction in the course. Employing grounded theory methodology, initial coding of learners’ diaries together with axial coding for the purpose of selective coding was carried out to integrate the main categories of coded units, to build a general theory regarding the sort of change learners were faced about learning to read during the semester. Based on the above-mentioned questions and learners’ responses, the main categories emerged included the learners’ beliefs about 1) the process of improvement in learning to read, 2) the effectiveness of classroom activities in learning to read, and 3) reading motivation. Hence, in the following, results of learners’ responses with respect to the three categories are provided.

The Process of Improvement in Learning to Read. The aim of this category is to examine to what extent learners’ beliefs about learning to read, faced any changes on their road of reading acquisition at the end of the term in comparison with the beginning of the course. In fact, here it was the beliefs about their process of improvement in reading that were of importance.

In terms of the process of development in learning to read, all learners (N=8) held this belief that their process of learning to read was improving session by session and evaluated this process of improvement as a positive one.

Regarding the first category, L2’s key diary excerpts from beginning to the end of the term are provided as follows. (It should be noted that learners’ diaries were collected during 10 weeks, and each session indicates one week).

Excerpt 4: L2

Session four: “I think I can learn to read gradually since the teacher is helpful.”

Session five: “In the past, I thought reading in English was very hard, But now, with learning reading strategies, I can read at least one text and get a whole image of it. I guess I got interested in reading.”

Session seven: “I am satisfied with the process of learning to read because the method of teacher really affects.”

Session eight: “My opinions have changed about reading. In the past I could not read a text, however, with the strategies I learn, I feel I can read faster, and nearly understand the whole image of a text without getting help from dictionary.”

Session nine: "Each session passes, I am better than before. My reading skills have improved. I feel sorry that we did not have such a teaching method in our high school period."

Session ten: "Gradually, my idea about reading has changed. I previously believed that reading was hard for me. However, passing this term, I learnt lots of new reading strategies. I think our class was very helpful since I have learnt how to read practically."

With respect to her diary writings, it is obvious that her beliefs at the beginning and first sessions of the term lied in the fact that she presumed that reading was hard at the beginning, while after passing sessions with learning some reading strategies, she felt that her beliefs have changed about learning to read, and until the end of the term her changed beliefs about reading were same and she was satisfied with her process of improvement in reading at the end in comparison with the beginning. It is of value to point this matter that the second learner initially believed that she had to be familiar with vocabularies, spelling, and pronunciation that were considered as language components to be able to read, while at the end of term she realized that by learning reading strategies her beliefs were gradually changing.

The Effectiveness of Classroom Activities in Learning to Read. In the present study, it is aimed to explore the efficiency of classroom activities through the lenses of learners who wrote their ideas about the impact of classroom activities on their road of learning to read. In fact, this category investigated learners' belief change regarding ten sessions and the activities done in class that paved the way for learners to encounter change in their beliefs.

As to the influence of classroom activities in the process of learning to read, all learners (N=8) pointed out in their diaries that these activities were so much effective in the sense that they caused learners to feel improvement on their route of learning to read, and to have a better sense of reading at the end of the term in relation to the beginning.

Concerning the impact of classroom activities, L1, for instance, held the following beliefs in their diaries during the term:

Excerpt 5: L1

Session one: "Activities are excellent because the teacher makes the learners interact, and this is stimulating."

Session three: "The class is not boring since the teacher creates a space for learners to engage in class discussions. The method adopted by teacher improves our reading skills."

Session five: "I feel that my reading becomes stronger and better with this method. For example, we can take a look at pictures to have an overall image of a text, or pay attention to the first sentence of the first paragraph and the last sentences of the last paragraph, to know about the introduction and conclusion of the text. These strategies really help me in better reading."

Session six: "I learnt how to guess the meaning of unknown words."

Session seven: "The teacher helped me how to use dictionary practically. Activities are really effective and I feel this progress more than before with learning new strategies."

Session nine: "I want to say that in my first session, I did not know what to do with a text; however, session by session, with learning principles of reading and helping the teacher, reading has become easier, and I am really grateful to our teacher."

Concerning the effectiveness of classroom activities in learning to read, in the first sessions, learner's focus was on classroom interaction which she praised classroom interaction. It is in the fifth session that learner's beliefs have got a new shape that from that session until the end of the term she was always writing about reading strategies that she has learnt, and the effect these reading strategies had in her process of learning. She admitted this fact at the end that in her first sessions she did not know what to do with a text, while familiarizing with different reading strategies in line with effective classroom activities at the end of the term, reading has become easier for her. The first

learner initially believed that she had to pay attention to components of language (e.g. vocabularies), while during the term with learning new reading strategies, she understood that reading was not what she thought at the beginning since she wrote about this point in her diary that “in my first session, I did not know what to do with a text, however, session by session, with learning principles of reading and helping the teacher, reading has become easier”.

Reading Motivation. As to the reading motivation category, it is meant that whether learners were motivated to learn to read or not. In fact, the purpose was to find out if the General English Course has created any motivation in learners’ mentality that motivated learners toward reading.

With respect to this category, all participants (N=8) pointed out in their diaries that they were very much motivated to learn to read, and this sort of motivation was their companion until the end of the term. The greatest number of learners (N=6) held this belief that by learning new reading strategies, they were improving in reading and this was a motivating factor for them until the end of the course.

Regarding the third category of belief change, the sixth learner’s diary excerpts are provided to show how the process of motivation is formed towards learning to read:

Excerpt 6: L6

Session one: “I just want to pass this course.”

Session three: “I am not interested in learning to read in English.”

Session four: “In my first sessions, I was not much interested in reading. As we step forward and learn some new reading strategies, I will have a better feeling of this course and I think that reading in English can be easy.”

Session six: “When I realized that by learning reading strategies reading can be easier, I would like to learn to read. I guess I should change my mentality about reading in English.”

Session nine: “I am very much motivated to learn to read now.”

As to sixth learner’s diary excerpts, she initially was not motivated to learn to read as she wrote “I want to pass this course”. It was in her fifth session that she asserted she was motivated in reading with learning new reading strategies which made reading easier for her. After that, she was always writing about her enhanced motivation about the course that she wrote “I should change my mentality about reading in English”. It is necessary to add this point that she believed in vocabulary and grammar as two significant elements in reading at the beginning of the term, while learning new reading strategies created such motivation in her that she changed her initial mentality about reading.

Based on the three above-mentioned categories extracted by diary questions that helped the present study to investigate changes in learners’ beliefs about learning to read, the following main theories are presented:

1. Learners’ initial beliefs about the components of language, such as grammar or vocabulary have been replaced by the belief that reading is not what they had thought at the beginning of the term. In fact, they held such a kind of belief (at the end of the term) that they should not be much worried about meaning of words, or they could read texts easier than before with the help of reading strategies that they learnt which led to ignoring the role of language components at the end of the term.

2. One of the reasons that caused changes in learners’ beliefs about reading was learning reading strategies, like guessing meaning from the context, previewing, etc. If we have a deep glance at learners’ diaries, this point is transparent that from the middle sessions up to the end of the term, they wrote about reading strategies they learnt session by session, and the effect these strategies had on their process of improvement in learning to read. In fact, learners’ writings indicated that with the help of reading strategies, reading has become easier for them and they were

motivated to learn to read at the end of the General English Course. Most of the strategies that learners asserted in their diaries included previewing and predicting, guessing word meanings, main ideas of paragraphs, and topics of paragraphs. In comparison with their first diaries, at least three new strategies were added at the end of the term.

Think-Aloud Protocol

Agreement between Beliefs and Actions

To investigate to what extent learners' claims in their diaries regarding their belief change, were evidenced in their actions, think-aloud protocol was employed to explore the relationship between learners' stated beliefs in diaries and their actions while reading a text and verbalizing their thought. It should also be noted that learners were given a reading text in their think-aloud session similar to their classroom practice.

Before examining the agreement between beliefs and actions in learners' verbal reports, it is needed to present the taught strategies in class during the term that included:

1. Previewing and predicting
2. Scanning
3. Guessing word meanings
4. Topics of paragraphs
5. Main ideas of paragraphs

In fact, learning reading strategies was one of the above-mentioned categories that helped to explore change in learners' beliefs at the end of the term. Based on these strategies participants asserted in their diaries, it was aimed to investigate whether learners applied strategies while reading a text and thinking aloud. In other words, the purpose is to examine the agreement between data gathered by diaries and think-aloud protocols, in the sense that to what extent they employed reading strategies mentioned in their diaries in practice.

As to the think-aloud data, all learners (N=8) applied most of the strategies they mentioned in their diaries. In fact, the strategies learners used in reading a text were previewing and predicting, guessing word meanings, main ideas of paragraphs, and topics of paragraphs. In comparison with the beginning of the term that learners had simplistic beliefs regarding the two strategies i.e. overall picture of a text and guessing meaning, at least, three new strategies were added to learners' learnt reading strategies. All eight learners' mentioned strategies in their diaries at the beginning and end of the term, and in the think-aloud session are presented in table 1.

As the table shows, the strategies applied by the majority of learners (seven learners) in both diaries (at the end) and think-aloud session included: previewing and predicting, guessing meaning, and topics of paragraphs. More than half of the participants (five learners) pointed out four strategies in their diaries and think-aloud session: previewing and predicting, guessing meaning, topics of paragraphs, and main ideas of paragraphs.

Concerning these strategies applied by learners in their think-aloud session, it must be concluded that, to a very large extent, there was an agreement between diary writings and think-aloud protocols. In other words, learners' beliefs about reading strategies that led to change their beliefs at the end of the term, were very much evidenced in their actions based on the data gathered by think-aloud protocol.

Discussion

Sociocultural Theory and Learners' initial Beliefs about Reading

Regarding the findings of the current study, learners' initial beliefs about learning to read can be considered as a mediating tool (Alanen, 2003) that learners used in their process of learning to read. Although learners' initial beliefs about reading might be simplistic at the beginning, it was

their beliefs or mediational means that shaped their subsequent beliefs about reading and played an important role in their process of learning to read until the end of the term.

Table 1. Learners' Reading strategies in Diaries and Think-Aloud Data

<i>Learners</i>	<i>Diaries</i>		<i>Think-Aloud</i>
	<i>Beginning of the Term</i>	<i>End of the Term</i>	<i>End of the Term</i>
One	Overall picture of the text, guessing meaning	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning
Two	–	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning
Three	Overall picture of the text	Topics of paragraphs, previewing and predicting, guessing meaning	Previewing and predicting, guessing meaning
Four	Guessing meaning	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning, scanning	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning
Five	Guessing meaning	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning, scanning	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning
Six	–	Previewing and predicting, guessing meaning, topics of paragraphs	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning
Seven	Overall picture of the text	Guessing meaning, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, guessing meaning
Eight	Overall picture of the text	Previewing and predicting, guessing meaning, scanning, main ideas of paragraphs	Previewing and predicting, topics of paragraphs, main ideas of paragraphs, guessing meaning

In terms of the mediating function of beliefs, Alanen (2003) argues that Sociocultural Theory specifies how learners' beliefs are to affect second language learning. She believes that beliefs have a significant impact on the learning process and this kind of influence indicates itself as a mediating tool. Hence, learners' initial beliefs about learning to read are in line with Alanen's assumption that "beliefs are a specific type of mediational means that the learner may or may not use during the language learning process" (p. 60).

Sociocultural Theory and Learners' Belief Change as a Self-Regulation Process

Considering Sociocultural Theory in studying learners' beliefs, learners use their beliefs to regulate their mental activity (Lantolf & Throne, 2006). As to the current study, learners believed that during their reading course, their beliefs have evolved about learning to read. For example, nearly all learners believed that reading has become easier than before, or the strategies taught, have

made reading comprehension tasks easier and they could read faster and better. It seems that this sort of progress can be best justified as a self-regulation process in a sense that from the beginning of the semester to the end, learners went through stages of development about reading including: other-regulation, and self-regulation.

With respect to the findings of the present study, it seems that learners' initial beliefs were directed to considering too much role for teacher and these beliefs might refer back to learners' high school period in a way that learners were more dependent on their teachers regardless of assuming any roles for themselves. Nonetheless, it might seem that learners' mentality has gradually changed during the term with passing General English Course at university and this change of mentality can be best considered as a movement from other-regulation which focused on teacher's role to self-regulation that learners were able to read the text with the help of taught strategies at the end of the term.

Sociocultural Theory and Relationship between Beliefs and Actions

In terms of agreement between beliefs and actions, the findings of the current study clearly showed that learners' belief changes were to a large extent evidenced in their actions while they were reading a text and applied most of the reading strategies pointed out in their diaries. In other words, there was an agreement between learners' changed beliefs and their actions. As to the Sociocultural Theory, this relationship signified that beliefs and actions interacted with each other in the context which students exchanged their thoughts.

Conclusion and Implication

In this research we have made an attempt to investigate learners' belief changes about reading by drawing upon Sociocultural Theory. The result showed that learners' initial beliefs about learning to read lied in their reliance on language constituents (e.g. vocabulary or grammar) that these beliefs, based on Sociocultural framework, were considered as meditational means that learners applied in their process of learning to read. Also, learners' initial simplistic beliefs about reading have changed during the term in line with learning reading strategies taught over the semester. In addition, it was found that there was an agreement between learners' changed beliefs about reading and their actions while reading a text. As to the Sociocultural Theory, belief changes were viewed as a self-regulation process. The findings revealed that there the studies by Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh's (2004) and Mehrpour's (2004) seem to be repeated as the teacher in the current study managed to arm students with certain reading strategies.

With respect to the findings of the study, the following implications can be drawn. First, teachers should be aware of their students' beliefs about reading and adopt a suitable teaching methodology based on their beliefs. Second, it is better for teachers to provide learners with appropriate instruction to change or even remove their probable simplistic or incorrect beliefs about reading. Third, for researchers who are studying belief and its change, Sociocultural Theory can best justify the occurrence of change in learners' beliefs since it recognizes the role of learning context and learners' interaction. Finally, English teaching system at high schools should provide learners with appropriate teaching methodology to be able to read as correctly as possible since in Iran most learners learn English for academic purpose, mainly for reading purpose at high schools.

This study examined belief changes about reading through diaries and think-aloud protocols. Nonetheless, to capture precise results, more data collection instruments such as, interviews or autobiographies are needed. What's more, investigating learners' beliefs about other main language skills can be done for better teaching. Last but not least, the participants of the study were female learners. It is of value to explore both male and female learners' belief relationship to capture this connection appropriately. In fact, the aim of the present study was to reveal the dynamic nature of

beliefs and how they were evolving during the time. Therefore, more longitudinal detailed research is warranted to understand the dynamically evolving beliefs of learners in different contexts.

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