

## The impact of theory and research on three ESL teachers' beliefs and practices

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**ABSTRACT** *An increasing number of research studies report on improved and alternative approaches to the various practices of teaching. However, there often exists a gap between such research findings and any real transformations in pedagogical practices of teachers. This paper reports on a study that examined the impact of theory and research on the beliefs and practices of three English as a second language (ESL) teachers. The study aimed to evaluate possible factors that influence teachers' resistance to change in pedagogies supported by educational research by taking form focused instruction (FFI) as a model approach for testing. Based on interview and observation data, the results indicate that teachers' responses to the literature were framed by their existing beliefs about FFI. Teachers were seen to generally agree with theories and research findings that supported their own beliefs while rejecting the pedagogical usefulness of findings that differed from their own beliefs. The study suggests that to reduce the gap between research and pedagogy, it may be useful for professional development providers to use publications that report on current theory and research when working closely with practising teachers so as to make the findings more accessible and relevant to teachers' own contexts and needs.*

### Introduction

The correspondence between educational research and pedagogy is a perennial topic of debate, with the general view that there exists a “damaging split between researchers and teachers” (Allwright 2005, p.27). From a practitioner's point of view, there are several reasons that can explain this rift. One such reason is that teachers do not generally feel that theory and research can be directly or easily applied to the classroom as they may not address relevant concerns (Basturkmen, Loewen & Ellis, 2004). Teachers are also skeptical of researchers' abilities to understand classroom realities (Hadley, 2013). Even when teachers do trust researchers and their intent to address classroom practices, academic publications are often inaccessible to teachers not just by physically being unavailable, but being conceptually and stylistically beyond their reach too (Nassaji, 2012). The language of research is foreign to many teachers, even those with graduate qualifications. The technical terminology and teachers' lack of understanding of research methods and theoretical discourse make published research studies incomprehensible to many teachers (Mackey, Polio & McDonough, 2004). As a result, teachers tend to remain skeptical of theory

and research and generally avoid reading such publications as they are not seen to be of much value to their own needs (Borg, 2012). It is this avoidance that creates “a world in which teachers talk to teachers about techniques, and researchers and theoreticians talk to each other about research and theory” (McDonough & McDonough, 1990, p. 103).

One of the aims of educational research is to better inform and improve on current practices or pedagogies and outcomes. Therefore, efforts must be made to bridge the gap between teachers and researchers. In highlighting the importance of this, Ellis (1997, p. 82) identified that research has the potential to indirectly influence teachers’ cognitions and personal theories “either by helping them to make explicit their existing principles and assumptions, thereby opening these up to reflection, or by helping them to construct new principles.” He argued that even when theory and research may not be directly applicable to the classroom, an understanding of these can stimulate reflection, increase awareness of the complex phenomenon of learning, and build within teachers, willingness and drive to experiment with new approaches and techniques.

Working with English as a second language (ESL) teachers, this study attempted to investigate the effects of reading academic publications that dealt with theory and research on teachers’ beliefs and practices with regard to form focused instruction (FFI). FFI was selected as the focus of the study for two reasons. It is generally accepted that paying attention to grammatical form is not only fruitful, but also necessary for successful language acquisition (Ellis, 2008). It is therefore an essential aspect of language education and researchers have put forward various theories regarding the role of such FFI. However, much debate exists on how it should be taught, and different pedagogical approaches to the teaching of grammatical form have been suggested in the literature (Dalili, 2013).

The next sections will provide an overview of the two key concepts of this paper - FFI and teachers’ beliefs - before detailing the methods employed in the study and the results obtained.

### **Form Focused Instruction**

Current theories of second language (L2) learning suggest that FFI is a necessary component of language classrooms (Loewen, 2011; Ellis, 2008; Fotos & Nassaji, 2007). Research shows that learners require an explicit knowledge of language to allow them to monitor their output, as well as trigger the essential process of noticing new structures in their language input (Ellis, 2008). L2 acquisition theorists (e.g. Schmidt, 1990) claim that two types of noticing are required for successful L2 acquisition: learners need to attend to the linguistic features of the language that they are exposed to if that input is to become uptake; and learners need to notice the gap between their own output and the target language system. It is through this process of noticing that implicit knowledge - the intuitive knowledge of language which enables the quick application of rules in communication - is acquired.

The benefits of explicit FFI have been reported in a number of research studies (see Ellis, 2008 for a comprehensive review). There exists strong evidence to suggest that explicit instruction (i.e. when learners’ attention is clearly directed to the form of the language) is significantly more effective than

implicit instruction (i.e. where no attention is paid to form) (e.g. Norris & Ortega 2000; Fotos & Nassaji 2007; Loewen, 2011).

While evidence for the need for FFI has been established through such research studies, there is still some controversy regarding how and how much instruction is necessary. Ellis (2008), among others, argues that to achieve the goal of communicative competence, grammar and communication need to be integrated. He recommends that FFI and meaningful communication be combined through a task based communicative curriculum.

Several theoretical proposals have emerged which attempt to incorporate such instruction into the L2 curriculum. From these, a broad – albeit simplified – distinction is often made between deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive approaches begin with the teacher explicitly stating the language rule or pattern which the learners then apply. Inductive approaches do not start with the explicit presentation of the rule. Instead, learners are prompted in some way to discover the underlying patterns of the targeted structure and may possibly be required to formulate the rules that govern it. Deductive instruction therefore relates to rule driven instruction while inductive instruction relates to rule discovery through consciousness raising (Jean & Simard, 2013).

Rooted in Gestalt psychology (Orange, 2002), a discovery approach allows learners to be intuitive, active thinkers and experience new understandings of the language through hands-on learning. It is potentially more motivating than simply being told a rule (Ellis, 2008). Learners appear to enjoy the analytic approach to language and the autonomy of working out rules without teacher intervention (Mohamed, 2004). Because learners gain an understanding that is self-discovered and meaningful, this process would encourage effective retention of the new knowledge, and would foster deep rather than surface learning. A discovery approach to FFI trains learners in the skills of noticing and encourages hypothesis-testing (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011) – two fundamental steps in the process of L2 acquisition.

### **Teachers' Beliefs**

Teachers' beliefs have been described as the most valuable psychological construct to teacher education (Pintrich, 1990). A teacher's beliefs represent a complex, inter-related system of often tacitly held theories, values and assumptions that the teacher deems to be true, and which serve as cognitive filters that interpret new experiences and guide the teacher's thoughts and behaviour (Mohamed, 2008). The topic of teachers' beliefs has enjoyed a long history of focus in educational research, with investigations identifying how beliefs are formed and how currently held beliefs are challenged and altered.

Research studies (e.g. Woods, 1996; Borg, 1999; Basturkmen et al., 2004) have shown that three main factors influence the formation of beliefs. First, the teacher's own experience of being a classroom learner strongly affects their beliefs about how teaching should take place. This pervasive influence of the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) was evidenced in studies such as Rinke, Mawhinney & Park (2014). Second, teacher education programs – whether preservice or inservice – engage teachers in the craft and science of education and the knowledge and skills imparted to teachers during these programs often make a notable impact. Third, a teacher's own experience,

particularly those of the initial years, shape the teacher's understanding of teaching and how it needs to most effectively take place.

Several studies (e.g. Tang, Lee, & Chun, 2012) have highlighted the inconsistency between stated beliefs and observed practices. Such studies have shown how teachers often claim allegiance to current theories but fail to put this into practice. This may be, as Crandall (2000) has explained, because teachers are hesitant to trial new approaches. It may also be because of teachers' resistance to change.

Many studies have highlighted that beliefs put up a strong resistance to change because they are so deeply ingrained within the identity of a teacher (Borg, 2013). Teachers have reported that changing beliefs is tantamount to changing who they are as individuals. Crandall (2000) claims that before teachers can be expected to change their beliefs, they need to first be made aware of them as beliefs may be held unconsciously. Williams and Burden (1997) affirm that teacher beliefs play an important role in the teaching learning process and that, for this reason, teachers must understand their own beliefs, theories or philosophy. They argue that teachers must maintain a continuous process of personal reflection and that it is by becoming aware of their beliefs that they come to understand their own implicit theories and the ways these theories influence their professional practice.

Barnard and Burns (2013) call for the need to help teachers articulate their beliefs and use them to reflect on their teaching. It is only when teachers become aware of their own tacitly held beliefs and their routinised practice that connections can be made between them. Then, when confronted with change, teachers can reevaluate their beliefs and adopt new practices. It is only by changing existing beliefs that instructional change can take place. Instructional change, Nespor (1987) argues, is not a matter of simply abandoning existing beliefs, but of gradually replacing them with more relevant beliefs.

The influence of teacher education and teaching experience is important when it comes to the formation and alteration of beliefs. However, previous studies show contradictory results as to whether or not teacher education is successful in effectively challenging and changing beliefs as well as the instructional practices of teachers. Some studies have found that teacher education had little or no influence on teachers' beliefs (e.g. Peacock 2001; Urmston 2003; Mohamed 2008). In contrast, other studies have shown that teacher education had a large impact (e.g. MacDonald, Badger & White, 2001; Murray, 2003).

While the exposure to academic articles describing theory and research may not be part of all teacher education programs, such practice is common in graduate programs focusing on language education. Studies that have examined the effect of reading academic articles on teachers' beliefs (Borg, 1999; 2007; Kagan, 1992; Shkedi, 1998) have shown that the level of impact varies. These studies appear to show that the number of years of teaching is an important factor. Teachers with more experience seemed to be more rigid with regard to their beliefs, and less willing to alter them while novice teachers were more open to new theories and research.

If change is to be adequately measured, it is essential that behavioural as well as cognitive change is investigated as one kind of change does not guarantee

changes in the other. Therefore, the present study was designed to investigate the impact of published research about FFI on three teachers' beliefs and practices. It specifically sought to answer this question: Does exposure to published literature on FFI affect teachers' beliefs or their pedagogical actions?

### **Context and Sample**

With the intention of measuring changes to the beliefs and pedagogical actions of practicing teachers, the present study was designed to investigate the case of three ESL teachers in the Maldives. All three teachers volunteered for the study from a selected school in the Maldives. The school was typical of state schools in the country in that it followed an English medium education system which prepared students for international qualifications offered by the Cambridge International Examinations syndicate.

Because previous research has indicated that length of experience may be a factor that influences the likelihood and degree to which teachers alter their beliefs, the present study involved three teachers at three different stages of their career: novice, experienced and expert. For the purposes of reporting the study, the pseudonyms Abida, Beena and Celia will be used to refer to the teachers who took part.

At the time of data collection, Abida was a novice teacher, in her first year of teaching, having graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language just the previous year. She was a native Maldivian who had completed all her schooling in Male. Abida taught sixth grade. Beena was from India, and had been teaching in the school for three years at the time of data collection. Prior to that, she had also taught in India for three years. Beena had a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature and had taken part in several professional development workshops during the course of her career. Beena taught sixth grade. Celia was also from India, and was in her third year of teaching at the school. Prior to that, she had taught in schools in India and Abu Dhabi for seven years. Celia had a Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and a Master of Arts in English Literature. She described herself as someone who was keen to learn and improve herself professionally, and therefore welcomed any opportunities for self-development. Celia taught seventh grade.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection procedures took place over a period of two months, involving personal interviews and observations of teaching. Having obtained informed consent from both the school and the individual teachers, they were first interviewed. This interview took approximately 60 minutes per teacher. The first interview focused on obtained information about the teacher, her background and experiences. They were also asked to state their beliefs about L2 teaching in general and FFI in particular. At the end of the interview, each teacher was presented with three articles (Ellis, 2006; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Tomlinson, 2007) and requested to read them within a fortnight. These articles were selected for several reasons. Norris and Ortega (2000) is a seminal piece of work within the field of Applied Linguistics, as it synthesizes the literature on the effectiveness of second language instruction. Their study revealed that

by and large, the explicit FFI was more beneficial than the indirect, implicit treatment of form. Rod Ellis's contribution to the understanding of FFI in second language acquisition is seen to be of "tremendous significance" (Fotos & Nassaji, 2007, p.1) and as Ellis (2006) provided an overview of the theoretical positions related to the FFI, with an emphasis on pedagogical applications, this was seen to be an important reading to include in this study. Tomlinson (2007) showed the difference between deductive and inductive FFI and makes a case for the effectiveness of rule discovery tasks when focusing on form, and for this reason, it was included in the readings so that teachers are made aware of this distinction between the two approaches.

After the initial interviews, the teachers were observed during teaching within the first week of data collection. This observation lasted for 70 minutes per teacher (the normal time allocated for a double-period lesson). Two further observations were conducted during the two month period. Prior to observation, the teachers were informed that one of their lessons would be observed during a given week, but they were not told in advance which class/lesson in particular would be observed. All three teachers were interviewed a second time at the end of the two month period. The final interviews focused more specifically on their views of the three articles and the impact they made on the teachers.

Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed. These, together with the observation field notes were then analysed to derive themes and categories that arose from the data. The results of this analysis are reported in the next section.

## Results

Overall, the findings from this study following an analysis of the three teachers' stated beliefs and observed practices both before and after reading the research articles, suggested that exposure to the literature did not result in any significant changes related to teaching or beliefs about FFI. As the three teachers were taken to be three separate cases in this study, the rest of the section details the results based on the data for each of the teachers separately. The major limitations of this study and some of the controlling factors are presented at the end of the results and discussion section.

**Abida.** In the first interview, Abida identified her main priorities to be (1) to provide a range of teaching activities to maintain motivation and interest; and (2) to provide adequate feedback so that students are aware of the level of their proficiency. Without being specifically asked about the role of grammar in her teaching, Abida made no mention of it in the first interview. When prompted, Abida claimed that she did not view grammar as being important to focus on specifically, because it would "distract students from the communicative purpose of language." She explained that "by the time the students come to grade six, they have already had many grammar lessons, so they are familiar with all the tenses and part of speech" and that therefore, there was "nothing much left to focus on in grammar."

In her three observed lessons, no explicit focus on form was evident. Her

lessons revolved around the reading and writing skills, with two lessons on reading comprehension and one lesson on letter writing. In no part of the lessons did Abida make any links to grammatical form, even when students used language inaccurately. Asked about that, in the second interview, Abida maintained that FFI is likely to hinder fluency and negatively affect students' motivation. Her comment that "grammar really doesn't have a role in my teaching because I think its result is more negative than positive on students" effectively summarises her beliefs regarding FFI.

Asked about her reactions to the three articles, Abida explained that the meta analysis by Norris and Ortega (2000) was "very complicated and confusing." She did not appear to have comprehended it as any specific questions related to it were met with the same response: "I did not really like that article." When asked why, she commented:

Like I have told you before, I don't believe in teaching grammar. It is an old fashioned way of teaching. We had that when we were in school. But now, after having done my degree, I know that the new way of teaching shouldn't focus on grammar. Because it is better for the students that way. That is the method that we, I mean even the whole school does it that way.

Abida stated that "there is a difference between theory and reality" and that "maybe these researchers did their work in places like ... I don't know, places where they teach grammar. But certainly not suitable or even applicable to us, our context and our students."

Abida found Ellis (2006) "the easiest to read" and stated that "it was actually very informative" which she found "surprising." However, she didn't think that the questions the author brought up were empirically testable: "Some of the things he asks here... I mean, how could anyone even begin to research these? I don't think it is possible. Language learning is an internal process, and not really observable, so I don't really know if it could be researched much." Abida appeared to agree somewhat with Tomlinson (2007), stating that "if grammar is to be taught, then yes, I think maybe this will be useful. I certainly don't agree that the teacher should you know, stand in front of the class and just like teach grammar rules. This is much more interesting because students can discover the rules on their own." However, when asked if she may want to try such an inductive approach with her own students at some point, Abida commented that it was "highly unlikely."

**Beena.** Beena's priorities in teaching, as stated in her first interview were to: (1) make clear explanations; (2) complete the syllabus; and (3) maintain discipline in the classroom. With regard to language in particular, she felt that it was "more important to teach students to read and write well" because "after all, that is how they are examined, I mean, tested, both here and now and also when they go to grade ten and do their O Levels. It is all writing and reading so we should place more emphasis on that." Even though she identified that reading and writing were the crucial skills to focus on, Beena also believed that FFI had an important role to play in the language classroom. She explained that the grammar of a language is "the glue that holds it together" and that therefore, "language cannot be taught, however much you try, without

effectively teaching grammar.” She explained that she did this through regular FFI and through providing corrective feedback. “If students have made a grammar mistake in their writing, of course we have to correct it and make rewrite it so that they will remember the correct way. Otherwise, if we don’t correct their language they will just grow up using incorrect grammar. It is very important to point out and correct the mistakes.”

In her lessons, she was observed to provide a lot of corrective feedback, both orally and in writing. Of the three lessons that were observed, Beena focused one lesson on grammar. The topic of this lesson was to introduce active and passive voice. The lesson took the format of a traditional deductive grammar lesson. Beena explained the structure and rules at the beginning of the lesson, and then followed this by guided practice that was orally conducted. The lesson ended with getting the students to do a worksheet with active sentences that needed to be changed into passive voice. Talking about that lesson later, Beena explained that when she explicitly taught grammar, her lessons were structured on a Presentation-Practice-Production model as “that is how we should teach grammar” so that “everything is clear and students are adequately guided.”

Commenting on the articles, Beena stated that she was “very surprised” as to why a meta-analysis as done by Norris and Ortega (2000) “would even need to be conducted.” To her, FFI was such “an obvious part of teaching a language” that it was “strange that some people actually question its usefulness.” At first Beena expressed confusion with some of the questions posed by Ellis (2006). “He says here What grammar should be teach? I thought that was very strange. What does it mean... what grammar?” She explained that she had never thought about there being a broad selection of grammatical models to choose from, because for her grammar had largely meant “the parts of speech, the tenses, the voices, conditionals and things like that.” She however agreed with the discussion related to the influence of language transfer, because she believed that a learner’s first language influences their L2.

Beena did not agree with Tomlinson’s (2007) arguments, that a rule discovery approach to teaching grammar could be beneficial. She felt that it would simply “confuse students.” Furthermore, she felt that it was not suitable from a classroom management perspective, because “getting students to find the rules on their own diminishes the role of the teacher. What is the point of us being there if they are going to do all the work on their own?” She did feel that it would be possible for students to work out grammar rules from examples of language use: “it would just be impossible to do.” She felt that in general research articles were of little use to teachers because “most of the things they say in these articles are not relevant to our situation or not really applicable to a classroom. It is all theory. I am sure if these same people tried to teach using such methods, they too will fail.”

**Celia.** When asked about her priorities in teaching, Celia’s responses were very focused and clear. She stated that her priorities in teaching were: (1) to create a conducive learning environment where students want to learn; (2) to build a strong rapport with students to gain their trust and respect; and (3) to provide a holistic awareness about English so that all aspects of the language are seen to work together without emphasising one over the other.

Elaborating on this last priority, Celia explained that in her first few years of teaching, she had focused more on grammar over the skills, and as a result, she found that “although [the students’] accuracy was great, they lagged behind in terms of fluency.” Grammar did have an important role to play in the language classroom “particularly in situations like this where the language is not usually spoken outside the school.” However, “balance is key” according to Celia. She also felt that language lessons need to be integrated, by which she meant “that you must focus on different things within one lesson. For instance, we do a reading passage about the issue of global warming and I will use the passage not only for practising their reading but also to focus on vocabulary and grammar. Then using the passage as a basis, I will get them to do writing and some speaking as well. So everything is integrated into one lesson.”

Celia’s stated priorities were evident in the observations of her teaching. Each of the lessons had a main focus (e.g. reading comprehension), but in each, Celia included activities that encouraged the use of other skills as well as focusing on the grammar and vocabulary when relevant.

Commenting on the three articles in general, Celia noted that they were all very helpful in better understanding the issue of teaching grammar, and felt that professional development workshops “should use more evidence like this so that we are better informed.” Celia did not find the results of Norris and Ortega’s (2000) findings surprising, as she agreed that explicit instruction was crucial for successful acquisition. She also felt that Ellis’s (2006) paper was “very informative and enlightening” bringing to her attention “many things about grammar teaching [she had] never thought about before.” She strongly agreed with his proposition that instruction needs to ensure that learners are able to connect grammatical forms to the meanings they realize in communication. She commented: “That is so true. If it is not meaningful, there is no point in knowing any of the grammar.”

Celia was skeptical of Tomlinson (2007) and admitted that she had never tried an inductive approach to grammar instruction because she had “never really believed it would work.” However, after reading the article, she felt she was “more encouraged to try something like that... even though, to be honest, I wouldn’t know how to really do it properly.” In her second interview, she stated that she was more aware of her teaching now, had started “giving more thought to how we actually teach and if it is actually aligned with how students learn.” She also explained that when she focused on grammar, she “tried to encourage students to guess the rule” but because of her lack of understanding of discovery tasks she knew that she was not using an inductive method in her teaching. “I am not convinced if it is better than just teaching the rules,” she said, “but I would like to learn more about it.”

### **Discussion**

The three case studies reported here have provided additional evidence that there does exist a gap between research and pedagogical practice. The way in which this study attempted to address this gap was through getting teachers to read academic articles in order to understand if such an activity results in any type of cognitive or behavioural change in teachers. However, as evident from

the findings, there were no real changes with regards to teachers stated beliefs and observed practice.

In considering the implications of the current study, it is important to explore several issues. It was evident in all three cases that teachers had difficulty in understanding the content of at least some of the articles. Since several studies have shown that L2 teachers are reluctant to engage with research studies (e.g., Shkedi 1998), this in itself was not surprising. What was interesting to see was that all three teachers did in fact read at least two of the articles, when there was no real need to do the reading apart from it being for the purposes of the research study. In Abida's case, it was clear that she had simply skimmed through them as she was not able to elaborate on any of the details in the articles. But with Beena and Celia, it was evident that despite some challenges of accessibility, they did read the articles and reported to have reflected on how the issues related to their own practice. All three teachers reported having difficulty in understanding Norris and Ortega (2000), perhaps because it was the most theoretical of the three. Meta analyses (such as Norris & Ortega, 2000) rely heavily on technical statistical procedures, which have been shown to limit teachers' understanding of research (Nassaji, 2012). It is likely that the simpler language and the reduced technical jargon of Ellis (2006) as well as its more direct link to classroom practices were reasons why all three teachers related to the most with it. As shown by previous studies (e.g. Zeuli, 1994) teachers are generally concerned with the more pedagogical aspects of research and as seen from comments regarding Ellis (2006), teachers' reactions to it were framed in terms of their own classroom experiences.

Several studies (e.g. Mohamed, 2008) have highlighted that beliefs put up a strong resistance to change because they are so deep-rooted. Previous research (e.g. Basturkmen et al., 2004) suggests that length of experience may be a factor that affects the likelihood of change, with the implication that novice teachers are more likely to adapt their beliefs. However, the findings of this study do not indicate this. Even though no real changes to beliefs appear to have taken place, the reactions of the teachers to new information presented to them showed that the novice teacher was the least open to change while the most experienced teacher expressed a genuine desire to find out more about the issue with guidance on how the research findings could be applied directly in her teaching. This may well be a matter of individual difference between the personalities and general approach to professional learning, but it is still interesting that a novice teacher with very limited experience seemed to dismiss published literature by notable researchers in the field more easily than the two teachers with more experience and qualifications. As the sample size for this study was very limited, it is not possible to make any claims about the relationship between length of experience and teachers' openness to change. It would be interesting for future research to explore this factor further.

Although reading the articles did not appear to influence the nature of any of the teachers' stated beliefs or practices, they did succeed in raising both Beena's and particularly Celia's awareness of FFI; such awareness raising has been argued to be a significant benefit of reading research studies for L2 teachers (Ellis, 1997) and seen to be one way in which research can become accessible to practitioners. Although experienced teachers, reading the articles gave both

Beena and Celia an aspect of classroom pedagogy that they had not thought about before. They appeared to be open to engage in more opportunities for new learning, and Celia herself noted the importance of becoming more aware of current research findings. This suggests that teacher educators must use articles reporting on research and theory in professional development sessions where teachers can be guided to make sense of the findings and relate it specifically to their own contexts and needs.

### **Limitations**

It is important to consider the limitations of the present study. First, because the study is based on just three individual teachers, it is not possible to make generalizable conclusions about the role of research articles on teachers' beliefs and practices. However, case studies are not meant to be generalized (Yin, 2013). Their strength is that they can provide in depth information using triangulated methods and sources of information, resulting in a comprehensive picture of individuals. A second limitation is that the study only exposed the teachers to three articles on a common topic. A range of publications from different time periods could lead to different results. However, it must also be remembered that teachers do not generally take the initiative or have the time to read several articles on a single pedagogical topic and engage in in-depth discussions about them. Thus, it may be more suitable to introduce such literature through a professional development activity.

### **Conclusions**

With the purpose of exploring the nature of the gap between research and practice, this study aimed to examine the impact of reading published research articles on teachers' beliefs and practices of FFI. Four main conclusions can be drawn from the findings: (1) teachers may face challenges in understanding academic articles of a theoretical nature; (2) reading theoretical and research articles alone are not likely to result in a change in teachers' beliefs or practices; (3) teachers generally support the research findings that support their own beliefs and reject those that conflict with their own beliefs; and (4) exposure to varying theoretical and research based views on a particular topic through publications can lead to an increased awareness of the breadth and complexity of the topic as well as encourage reflection about teachers' own practices and how they relate to the learning process. These findings suggest that one way of reducing the gap between researchers and teachers is through professional development. If professional development providers work closely with teachers in making published academic articles more accessible and relevant to classroom needs, it can build a stronger link between theory and practice and encourage reflection about the interplay between theory, research, teaching and learning.

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