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Epistemological Beliefs of English Language Teachers: A Gender Perspective

Azmat Ali Shah (Corresponding Author)
PhD Scholar, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan
Email: aashahmrd@gmail.com

Dr. Muhammad Idris
Associate Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

Dr. Maksal Minaz
Lecturer, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

ABSTRACT
The objectives of the study were to investigate epistemological beliefs of English language teachers; to find out the difference in epistemological beliefs of English Language Teachers with respect to their educational qualification and to examine the difference in epistemological beliefs of English Language Teachers with respect to gender. The study employed quantitative method. Teachers from both public and private universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa participated in this study. The study's population consists of all English instructors (355) whether they are employed permanently or temporarily. Sample of the study were 169 English language teachers. Questionnaires were used for quantitative data. Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics tests were applied. The study' revealed that instructors have a range of ideas, including those that are ultra-modern, frank, and unsophisticated. It was found that English language teachers at university level are mostly unaware about the epistemological beliefs related to the innate abilities of students, learning efforts of students, nature of expert knowledge, certainty of knowledge and simplicity of knowledge. Therefore, it is recommended that course content on epistemological beliefs and practices may be made compulsory or may be included in the training/workshops for university teachers. It is recommended that course content on epistemological beliefs and practices should be made compulsory or may be included in the training/workshops for university teachers.

Key Words: English language teachers, epistemological beliefs

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' epistemological beliefs, which are considered an important part of teaching practicum in teacher education programs, filter their initial conceptions of teaching, pedagogical decisions and instructional practices, and anything else that happens in a classroom (Choi, Jang, & Kim, 2023). More specifically, a number of learning and teaching-related challenges, such as instructional strategies and learning motivation, have been found to be influenced by epistemological beliefs (Odebiyi & Choi, 2022; Bibi, Aurangzeb, Tabassum & Ahmad, 2025). Teachers' epistemological views may also be used to justify their

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teaching styles, which are a distinguishing feature of instructional practices.

Nousheen and Tabassum (2024) believe that teaching style is the external manifestation of a teacher's hidden presumptions and beliefs about what should and shouldn't be done in a classroom, tasks to be covered, resources to be chosen, and teacher-student interaction. It is also characterized as a preference for teaching conduct and the congruence between educators' teaching behavior and teaching beliefs. It is necessary to distinguish between different teaching methods and styles. Regarding the educational goals, instructional strategies are examined in connection with a general lesson plan and the behavior of teachers. According to Wang, Meng, Xing, and Moè (2024), teaching techniques entail practical items and in-class performances, whereas teaching styles deal with the theoretical mindsets a teacher adopts.

The epistemological beliefs of teachers in other subject areas have been the subject of numerous studies (Tessema, Michael & Areaya, 2024), but substantially fewer have been conducted on the epistemological beliefs of English teachers and how they might be reflected in and impact teaching methods. Teachers' perspectives on information and what makes a good learning resource can have an impact on their teaching strategies, much as in other areas of teacher education. The motivation for the current investigation and the motivating factor behind the study was this unsupported assertion.

Statement of the research problem

National Professional Standards for Teachers in Pakistan emphasize on English language learning and the standard ten asks the English language teachers to make the learners as proficient users of English Language as a second language (Akhtar, Tanweer Khaskheli & Khaskheli, 2022). In this context teachers' epistemological beliefs and its impact on their teaching practices needs to be explored. It is noted that every year lots of candidates get failed in their English Grammar and Essay papers in their Central Superior Services and Provincial Management Services competitive examinations.

The majority of educators in Pakistan are unaware of the importance of their beliefs and how they affect their methods of instruction (Khan, Batool & Deeba, 2021). Although instructors must adapt their teaching strategies according to the nature of knowledge, the reality is very different because of their faulty ideas and their familiarity with traditional teacher-centered instruction (Rind & Ning, 2024).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

i. To investigate epistemological beliefs of English language teachers
ii. To examine the difference in epistemological beliefs of English Language Teachers with respect to gender

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

i. What are the epistemological beliefs of English language teachers?

ii. How epistemological beliefs of English Language Teachers differ with respect to teaching experience and gender?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

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The study is very important and adds to the knowledge of the Directorate of Professional Development (DPD) and the Regional professional Development Center (RPDC) about how to reshape teachers' subject-knowledge and instructional knowledge through personal development and self reflection programs. The research will help to attract the attention of teacher educators and encourage English teachers to replace traditional teaching methods with learner-centered constructivist learning settings. Moreover, this research will help to look into the knowledge sets that English language instructors hold, and it will direct teachers towards the constructivist instructional practices that best suit the learning environments of their students. Students' self-examination, critical thinking, analytic skills and personally problem solving skills will all alter in a constructivist learning environment.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Due to time and geographical constrains, and lack of financial resources, the current study was delimited to to eight universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Furthermore, the study was delimited to universities undergraduate programs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Constructivism, the theoretical foundation of the study, holds that knowledge is something that is created by the students themselves rather than being transferred from an educated to an uninformed individual. With a constructivist epistemology, educators take into account how knowledge is produced and applied. To ascertain the epistemological beliefs of teacher, Schommer's (2019) models were employed. The beliefs of the teacher educators in each level of the Schommer model might be either complex or simple.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is epistemology?

Tajeddin and Soleimani (2022) argues that epistemology addresses the nature and certainty of learning and knowledge; it encompasses the achievement and progression of knowledge as well as its source and extent whereas He further stated that epistemology is a crucial area of philosophy that addresses the nature of knowing and justification. Theories pertaining to epistemological beliefs may be divided into two categories: fundamental beliefs, which include polarity thinking and rudimentary knowledge, and more complicated thinking, which involves knowledge integration. Over time, people progress from their initial fundamental ideas to more sophisticated ways of thinking that results in the formation of epistemology.

In essence, education must provide people the information and abilities they need to be effective members of society. Knowledge is mostly transmitted through schooling, which is a component of education (Choi, Jang & Kim, 2023). The degree of information acquisition is influenced by several learner characteristics; knowledge may be applied for the good of the individual and society. According to Schommer (2019), the curriculum should be built around knowledge forms that are well-structured for ease of instruction and absorption, since this might contribute to the modernization and survival of civilization. Teachers are better equipped to identify the appropriate techniques for changing information at different levels since they are based on the idea of knowledge.

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Many people use the two words interchangeably since knowledge is the foundation of education (Baydar, 2020). One may argue that someone who is knowing is also educated. Some have suggested that becoming educated requires having information. An educated person is knowledgeable, but if other parts of education are not sufficiently developed, a guy with a lot of information might be improper educated. He considered that an educated man need more than just learning "how" and "what."

Importance of teachers' epistemological beliefs

Learning is greatly influenced by students' complex personal beliefs, which also affect their ability to argue and solve problems. There is a clear correlation between chemistry achievement and epistemological beliefs, as evidenced by multiple empirical studies (Schommer, 2019). Students' academic performance suffers if teachers' practices are not in line with fostering an environment that fosters epistemological development (i.e., constructivist practices) (Gholami, Alikhani & Tirri, 2022). One crucial factor to consider is the epistemic advancements that promote critical thinking skills like self-corrective, self-directed and self-monitored thinking. This development of critical thinking in secondary school promotes epistemic growth and will be a significant factor in teacher practice (Imran, et al., 2024). Conversely, settings that do not encourage critical thinking can be detrimental, and they include professors who have epistemic ideas that may have a significant impact on students' academic performance or negatively influence students' epistemic beliefs.

Injiya and Emaliana (2024) claimed that the harm might be significantly worse than pupils losing knowledge and insights if an atmosphere that promotes epistemic development is not provided. According to this line of inquiry, educators may be in charge of impeding students' epistemic development, which would have an impact on learning in the future. Undoubtedly, this may provide a much bigger challenge to academic success than a few facts or abilities that pupils might have overlooked over the academic year. Kalsoom et al., (2021) explained that it is crucial to understand that a teacher's duty extends beyond merely imparting information.

METHODOLGY

Nature of the study was quantitative. The study's population consists of all English teachers in undergraduate programs, whether they are employed permanently or temporarily. To choose study participants, a multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. In the first phase, institutions were chosen using a simple random sample, and teachers were chosen as respondents using easy sampling. Eight universities were selected from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's from three geographical locations i,e, central, southern, and northern areas. 169 teachers in total were chosen as a sample for quantitative data collection in the study.

Table 1: Sample of the study

	Male Teachers	Female Teachers	Total
Public Sector	59	43	102

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Private Sector	38	29	67
Total	97	72	169

Source for sample size: http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html

A questionnaire was developed for teachers' epistemological views. This allowed for the collection of quantitative data. The scale included 24 questions regarding teachers' epistemological positions. Data was analyzed through both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENTS

The validity of the instrument was confirmed by the researcher once the questionnaires were constructed. A group of specialists determined the instrument's validity. Four specialists who teach at the university level and have at least PhDs in education made up the panel. The questionnaire's validity, usefulness, and simplicity served as the criteria for establishing and ensuring content validity. The teacher beliefs items had a reliability score of 0.89. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 or above is regarded as appropriate (Kasirye, 2024).

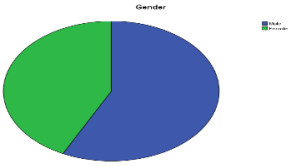
Table 2: Reliability test of Teachers Beliefs Measurement Scale

Teachers' Beliefs	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Items
Innate Ability	6	0.87
Certainty of Knowledge	6	0.82
Expert Knowledge	6	0.85
Simplicity of Knowledge	6	0.79
Learning Efforts	6	0.81
Cumulative	30	0.828

DATA ANALYSIS

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ANALYSIS

Table 3: Gender-wise analysis of the Study Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentages	Pie Graph Presentation
Male	97	57.4	
Female	72	42.6	
Total	169	100.0	

The table illustrates the gender-wise participation in the sample group of the study, where 57.4% of the study sample group belongs to male respondents and 42.6% belongs to female respondents in the sample group of the study. The results were also presented in pie graph with the purpose for visual presentation which is the same as presented in percentages.

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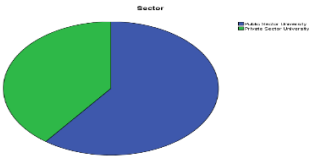
Table 4 : University Sector-wise analysis of the Study respondents

Universities	Frequency	Percentages	Pie Graph Presentation
Public Sector	102	60.4	
Private Sector	67	39.6	
Total	169	100.0	

The above table shows the university-wise representation of the study respondents in the study. 60.4% of the study respondents were from public section universities teaching English, while 39.6% of the study respondents were from private section universities teaching English. Furthermore, the same results were presented in pie graph for visual presentation.

Objective No 1. To Investigate the epistemological beliefs of English Language Teachers

Table 5: Epistemological Beliefs about Innate abilities of Teachers Teaching English

S#	Statements	Mean	Std. D	*df*	χ^2	Sig
1	Intelligence is a genetic trait that is fixed	3.284	1.328	4	36.00[a]	.000
2	People born with a set capacity for learning.	3.077	1.410	4	24.107[a]	.000
3	Some lack innate ability for study.	3.355	1.403	4	37.243[a]	.000
4	Learning is an intrinsic or inborn talent.	3.172	1.396	4	32.686[a]	.000
5	Average students start and stay average in studies	3.213	1.234	4	25.290[a]	.000
6	Bright students do not need effort to accomplish well in school.	2.485	1.225	4	74.343[a]	.000
Cumulative analysis		3.097	0.531	4	125.941	.000

The above table shows that majority of the respondents were unclear about the nature of intelligence that whether it is something inborn or it can be learning as shown by the responses of their mean score 3.284 and they were scattered in their responses as reflected by the standard deviation value 1.328, however, the chi square value 36.00 which is highly significant at .000 revealed that this certainty was obvious in their epistemological beliefs (innate abilities). Similarly, the mean scores 3.076 and 3.355 also revealed that respondents were unable to decide whether they are agreed with their inborn capacity of learning or not, and that whether some students lack innate abilities which enable them to successfully comprehend specific subject or not.

Both these innate abilities were significant as the chi square values were 24.107 and 37.243 @ significance value .000 shows that respondents have uncertain and low innate abilities. Similarly, the mean score results 3.171 and 3.213 with standard deviations of 1.383 and 1.23 revealed the uncertainty in the innate abilities related to epistemological beliefs of study respondents that

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whether students have intrinsic or inborn learning abilities and that students remain constant throughout their academic career, these unclear beliefs were endorsed by the chi square values (32.686 and 25.290) significant at .000. However, the respondents were disagreed (Mean score 2.485 and standard deviation 1.225) that intelligent children do not need efforts for their academic accomplishments, which was also supported by the chi square value of 74.343.

Table 6: Epistemological Beliefs about Learning Efforts of Teachers Teaching English

S#	Statements	Mean	Std. D	*df*	χ^2	Sig
1	Students emphasize more on how to learn to get success.	2.272	1.158	04	88.544[a]	.000
2	Learning is a slow and gradual process.	3.183	1.321	04	30.675[a]	.000
3	Students' efforts lead to their learning.	2.994	1.339	04	35.763[a]	.000
4	Hard work is key to academic success.	3.0947	1.329	04	30.911[a]	.000
5	Students' efforts can ensure their success.	3.455	1.367	04	43.041[a]	.000
6	Learningenables you to identify solutions	3.579	1.276	04	79.728[a]	.000
Cumulative analysis		3.096	0.538	04	124.219	.000

Table shows teachers' beliefs about the efforts of students learning, the mean score 2.272 and 1.1585 standard deviation value revealed that teachers were disagreed on the emphasis on learning information instead of learning how to learn, and majority of the respondents had same opinions as their responses were significant at .000 (chi square value = 88.544).

The mean scores of 3.183, 2.994, 3.094, and 3.455 were that teachers were unable to express the opinions related to the speed of learning, relationship of students' efforts and their learning, more hard work is required to get ahead of other students, and learning of courses information is related to enough efforts of students. These uncertain beliefs of teachers related to the efforts of students for their learning are significant as all the chi square values (30.675, 35.763, 30.911, and 43.041) are significant at .000.

On the other hand, the respondents have clear positive belief related to the ability to solve problems instead of answering questions which is reflected by the mean score 3.579 and these responses were similar among all the respondents as reflected by the standard deviation value 1.275, and the chi square value 79.728 was also significant.

Table 7: Epistemological Beliefs about Expert Knowledge

S#	Statements	Mean	Std. D	*df*	χ^2	Sig
1	I always trust the information in the text books that are written by authorities.	2.4142	1.28870	04	73.101[a]	.000

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2	I believe that even advice from experts should often be examined.	3.3728	1.35294	04	65.822[a]	.000
3	I am well aware that teachers and experts have more knowledge.	2.9941	1.40364	04	47.834[a]	.000
4	I trust experts' judgment and knowledge more than my own and agree with what they think.	2.3609	1.16236	04	68.485[a]	.000
5	Despite the fact that what the experts say is different from what I know, I still trust what they say.	3.5266	1.49629	04	60.911[a]	.000
6	I evaluate the accuracy of information in a book, if I am familiar with the topic.	3.4556	1.53126	04	48.485[a]	.000
Cumulative analysis		3.020	0.595	04	76.746	.000

The table illustrates the 3rd sub-construct of teachers' epistemological beliefs which is related to expert knowledge for students. The mean score 2.414, and 2.360 showed that teachers were disagreed about the text-book information that it has been written by authorities, and they were also disagreed that they give more preference to expert knowledge over their own knowledge, most of the respondents have same opinion in this regard as the standard deviation values were 1.288 and 1.162 and they were confident as the chi square values 73.101 and 68.485 were significant at .000.

Furthermore, the respondents have uncertain beliefs as reflected by the statements' mean scores 3.372, 2.994, and 3.455 that experts advice also need examination, teachers and experts have more knowledge, and that the accuracy of information in a book, most of the respondents have similar opinions as revealed by the standard deviation values (1.352, 1.403 and 1.531), all these uncertain beliefs were common among respondents (teachers) according to the chi square values (65.822, 47.834, and 48.485). It is important to mention that teachers were agreed that they trust expert knowledge as revealed by the mean score 3.5266 and standard deviation 1.496 which is about contradictory with the uncertain belief of teachers, and it is confirmed by the chi-square value of 60.911 which is highly significant.

Table 8: Epistemological Beliefs about Certainty of Knowledge

S#	Statements	Mean	Std. D	*df*	χ^2	Sig
1	It is necessary for language teachers to engage students a lot in classroom discussion.	3.3964	1.32835	04	43.160[a]	.000
2	Scholars can uncover the truth about anything if they put in enough hard work.	3.6213	1.22417	04	68.189[a]	.000
3	If a student tries hard enough, he/she can understand complex ideas.	3.5503	1.26731	04	53.574[a]	.000

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4	In my opinion, there ought to be a teaching strategy that works in every learning scenario.	3.6036	1.49292	04	66.414[a]	.000
5	Scientific knowledge is unchanging and definite.	3.8698	1.34327	04	96.947[a]	.000
6	It is best for language teachers not to ask too many questions.	2.4556	1.36695	04	40.142[a]	.000
Cumulative Analysis		3.416	0.580	04	124.373	.000

Table exhibits teachers' beliefs related to the epistemological beliefs 4th construct that is Certainty of Knowledge. The results revealed that on most of the items the respondents were agreed that they believe in certainty of knowledge. The mean scores 3.621, 3.55, 3.603, and 3.869 the respondents were agreed that scholars can uncover any truth with enough hard work and efforts, can understand the complex ideas, some teaching strategies are more fruitful for students as compared to others, and that scientific knowledge is unchangeable. It is also important to mention that most of the respondents have the same perception related to these statements as reflected by the standard deviation values 1.22, 1.26, 1.49, and 1.343, and these results were also supported by chi square values 68.189, 53.574, 66.414, and 96.947 which were significant at .000.

On the other hand, the respondents were uncertain about whether language teachers may extensively engage students in classroom discussion or not as reflected by the mean score 3.396 with standard deviation 1.328 and chi square value was 43.160 significant at .000. Furthermore, the mean score 2.455 standard deviation 1.366 chi square value 40.142 significant at .000 which showed that respondents were disagreed with the statement best teachers do not ask too many questions.

Objective No 2. To examine the difference in epistemological beliefs of English Language Teachers with respect to gender

Table 10 : Gender-wise differences in epistemological beliefs of English language teachers teaching at University level

Epistemological Beliefs	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	*Mean difference*	*df*	*t* value	Sig
Innate abilities	Male	18.9381	2.90048	.82703	167	1.813	.072
	Female	18.1111	2.97670				
Learning efforts	Male	18.1443	2.99996	-1.02234	167	-2.053	.042
	Female	19.1667	3.45596				
Expert knowledge	Male	18.5155	3.45842	.91824	167	1.660	.099
	Female	17.5972	3.68346				
Certainty of knowledge	Male	20.4433	3.27544	-.12615	167	-.232	.817

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	Female	20.5694	3.76353				
Simplicity of knowledge	Male	19.9691	3.22249	.80241	167	1.628	.105
	Female	19.1667	3.09475				

Table shows the results related to gender-wise differences in the epistemological beliefs of teachers teaching English at university level. There were five sub-constructs in the epistemological belief of teachers. According to the analysis the innate beliefs mean score of male respondents was 18.9381 and female mean score was 18.1111 with standard deviation of 2.90048 and 2.9767 accordingly. The mean difference was .82703, *t* value was 1.813 and the significant value was .072. these results showed that both male and female respondents have same beliefs related to the innate abilities of students.

Furthermore, no significant difference was found between and male and female respondents beliefs related to the expert knowledge a sub-construct of epistemological belief of teachers as shown by the mean scores (male 18.5155, female 17.5972) standard deviation (male 3.458, and female 3.683) the mean difference between them was .9182 and the t value was 1.66 which is not significant as the significance value was higher than .05.

The analysis of data also revealed the male mean score 20.4433, standard deviation 3.2754, female mean score 20.5694, standard deviation 3.76353, mean score difference -.12615, t value -.232 which is not significant as the significance value was higher than .05, revealed that there is no significant difference in the beliefs of male and female teachers teaching English at university level about the certainty of knowledge. Similarly, the beliefs about the knowledge simplicity of male and female teachers teaching English were also same as the mean score of male respondents was 19.9691 and female respondents was 19.1667 and standard deviation values of 3.222, and 3.094 respectively. The mean difference between male and female language teachers was .80241 and t value 1.628 which was not significant as the significance value (.105) was higher than .05.

On the contrary, the mean score of male respondents was 18.1443 with standard deviation value of 2.99996 and female respondents was 19.1667 standard deviation value was 3.45596. the mean difference between male and female respondents was -2.053 which was significant as the significance value was .042 which is less than .05, the results shows that female respondents have more positive beliefs related to the learning efforts of students as compared to the male respondents.

Findings of the Study

- The results revealed that most of the English language teachers in the public and private sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have ambiguous and uncertain epistemological beliefs about students' innate abilities, learning efforts, expert knowledge, certainty and simplicity of knowledge. Their responses showed that they neither agreed with the statements of these epistemological beliefs nor disagreed.
- Majority of the respondents were disagreed that intelligent children do not need efforts for their academic accomplishments.

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- The study found that students need to solve problems instead of answering questions.
- The results related to the certainty of knowledge (epistemological beliefs) revealed that most of the respondents were agreed that knowledge is certain, and that scientific knowledge is unchangeable, further they also agreed that with efforts true knowledge can be uncovered.
- It is also important to mention that only on two constructs of epistemological beliefs male and female English language teachers were different.
- Female respondents have highly positive beliefs about the learning efforts of students.
- All the mean scores related to the innate abilities of students, expert knowledge, certainty of knowledge and simplicity of knowledge were similar and no significant difference between male and females' teachers were found.

DISCUSSION

The beliefs of English language teachers at university level related to the innate abilities of students were not much clear and teachers were unaware about the nature of students' innate abilities. The conclusions of Nelmawati (2024) explained the inborn abilities and school or education responses towards the inculcation of new abilities using the previous innate abilities are always important where the role of innate abilities cannot be ignored. Likewise, intelligence as a psychological construct is always under discussion among psychologists where some experts believe that intelligence is an inborn quality and others believe that it is nourished through training, education and environment (Morral-Yepes, et al., 2022). The results also showed that teachers were unaware whether innate abilities are necessary for students to successfully complete their academic targets, related to which the study of Asbury et al. (2023) concluded that students' innate abilities are indispensable for the successful completion of subject orient targets in their schooling.

The results of this study showed that language teachers believe in hard work along with intelligence. But they were unclear whether hard work with low and without intelligence can improve the academics of students or not. According to the study conducted by Ferguson and Brownlee, (2018) intelligence without hard work cannot ensure students success and similarly, intelligence without hard work also cannot guarantee students' learning success. Similarly, Fletcher and Ní Chróinín, (2022) in his book never work harder than your students concluded that effective learning in classroom takes place with teachers' continuous feedback, guidance and ensuing that students must take responsibility for their learning. These conclusions are very clear for guiding students towards their academic success, however, the ambiguous beliefs of English language teachers related to the learning efforts of students showed that they are unaware about it. Furthermore, English language teachers at university level were also confused about the simplicity of knowledge. The results of the previous studies like Gholami, Alikhani and Tirri (2022) confirmed that most of the English language teachers are unable to understand the nature of the simplicity of knowledge, and they are unable to understand that knowledge is an incremental and slow process as it does not occur abruptly.

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It is concluded that English language teachers from gender-wise perspective are mostly similar in their epistemic beliefs but female teachers believe more in students learning efforts as compared to their male counterpart. These results were in accordance with the findings of the study of Nelmawati (2024) that female language teachers have higher epistemic beliefs as compared to male teachers. The results were also supported by the findings of Yu, Kreijkes and Salmela-Aro, (2024) that female teachers have highly positive beliefs about the innate abilities of students and their learning efforts as compared to male teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that course content on epistemological beliefs and practices should be made compulsory or may be included in the training/workshops for university teachers.
2. It is recommended that training for female teachers may be arranged to make them acquainted with new teaching methods viz a viz the classroom management techniques.
3. It is recommended that training / workshops and seminars may be arranged both for public and private sector university teachers in order to in which public sectors teachers expert knowledge and learning efforts be focused.
4. Furthermore, the future researchers are also recommended to explore pedagogical beliefs and practices of English teachers at university level with reference to their personal teaching experiences.
5. The researcher used questionnaires for data collection, it is therefore recommended that future researcher may use observations in order to ascertain the classroom practices of English teachers.

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