Teach(er) and Teach(ing): Beliefs, Attitudes, and Teaching Practices

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Abstract
Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and teaching practices are often believed to determine the classroom climate, shape the teaching-learning processes, and affect the overall psycho-academic development of the students'. Based on teachers' and students' perceptions of these factors and supported by the theories of emotional intelligence, learned helplessness/learned optimism, and the Pygmalion/Golem self fulfilling prophesies, this paper examines the symbiotic relationship between these elements in the Indian context. Findings show that these elements have a significant influence in determining the classroom climate, the teaching-learning processes, and the overall psycho-academic development of the students'.

Introduction
Teachers' beliefs and attitudes are believed to be major factors that determine teachers' practice and pedagogy. (Pajares, 1992)

Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices are very significant issues in academia. They not only determine the 21st century andragogy but also shape the classroom climate – students' motivation, achievement and overall learning environment. They influence students' classroom behaviour and their interaction with the teacher (Rueda and Garcia, 1996, cited in Pettit, 2011), as well as affect their learning processes and the overall psycho-academic development (Carroll et al., 2009). Similarly, they also influence teachers' teaching practices, their way of thinking, and their expectations regarding students' performances (Lacorte & Canabel, 2005, cited in Fan, 2017). In short, teachers' influence surpasses the traditional boundaries of space (classroom), content (text) and time (semester) only to have a lifelong effect upon the students. This study starts with a brief description of the relevant terms.

Teacher Belief

Teachers' beliefs encompass their beliefs about their learners (ability and performance), the classroom (teaching-learning practices), and themselves (Xu, 2012). It focuses on aspects like teachers' perception of their own profession, their classroom strategies and behaviour, their approach towards the educational process, and their perception of the students. (Richards et al., 2001, cited in Erkmen, 2012).

It influences their consciousness, attitudes, methods and policies of teaching (Heather et al., 2009, cited in Xu, 2012). The main idea is what they think and believe shapes what they do and how they do, as well as affects the students' learning outcomes (Wu et al., 2011). There is a symbiotic relationship between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices – the two reciprocally shaping each other (Van Driels et al., 2007; Borg, 2003). Therefore, it is important to understand teachers' beliefs in order to improve the teaching-learning practices in the classroom (Borg, 2003; Wu et al., 2011).

Teacher Attitude

Allport (1935, cited in Malim and Birch, 1998: pp.648-649) defines attitude as 'a mental or neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related'. Similarly, Morris & Maistro (2005, cited in Ahmad and Sahak, 2009) define attitude as a tendency of the individual in terms of responding to a person or situation.

Greenberg and Baron (2003, cited in Sha, 2007) have categorized attitude in three different components – the psychomotor, the cognitive and the affective. The psychomotor component is related to behavioural patterns, i.e., the individual's behaviour towards something or someone. The cognitive component is related to the individual's ideas and beliefs. And the affective component is related to the individual's emotions and feelings.

However, teachers' attitude generally encompasses their enthusiasm to help the students with their knowledge and resourcefulness, and it plays significant role in facilitating learners' psycho-academic development and enhancing their overall performance (Fredricks et al., 2004). A positive attitude on the teachers' part increases their students' self-confidence and motivation, their attraction towards school and the course, and eventually results in their psycho-academic development. On the contrary, negative attitude hinders a supportive teaching-learning environment (Bloom, 1976).

Emotional Intelligence

The theory of emotional intelligence illustrates that charismatic leaders inspire people through hope, vision, compassion and mindfulness (Boyatzis, La and Pedrera, 2010). It also outlines two types of coaching, i.e., coaching for compliance and coaching with compassion. Coaching for compliance is when teachers guide their students to figure out how to transform themselves as per their teachers' desire. On the other hand, coaching with compassion focuses on the problems rather than the person, and it calls for hope and mindfulness. Hence, teachers' empathy and caring for their students make them (students) feel like a member of the whole; and work hard for the betterment of the whole and eventually benefit themselves.

Another important aspect covered by the theory of emotional intelligence is emotional contagion. Like emotions, expectations and aspirations are also transmittable and inciting. That is why it is important for the teachers to infuse students with realistic inspiration rather than false expectations. This means that the teacher ought to inject a certain amount of optimism in their students for the sake of their betterment. But, if the teachers' expectations (from them, i.e., the students) go too high and cross the limits of their ability, students start feeling desolate and become unable to properly handle the pressure anymore. This is such a situation that leads towards learned helplessness, a psycho-behavioural state of being conceptualized by Seligman and Maier in 1967 (Cherry, 2020).

Learned Helplessness and Learned Optimism

They theory of learned helplessness points towards a psycho-behavioural state that occurs when individuals go through difficult situations, and become incapable or reluctant to get rid of such situations even if there is a way out. It arises from their past experiences where they have faced helplessness to change the situation due to their inabilities. So, when such individuals start to realize that they have no control over the things happening to them, they begin to feel helpless once again. Such a situation is called learned helplessness.

It is not an innate characteristic, rather a learned behaviour gained through past experiences (Cherry, 2020).

Abramson et al., (1978) claim that learned helplessness may result in three shortfalls – emotional, motivational, and cognitive – for the suffering individuals. The emotional deficit refers to a depressed state that arises when the individual is in a downbeat situation which he feels he cannot control. The motivational deficit refers to the individuals' lack of willingness and response to get rid of that particular situation. And the cognitive deficit refers to the individuals' inner thoughts that the situation is beyond their control.

However, how learned helplessness takes place, how it feels, and how students' emotional aspects can be affected has been explained by Nixon (2016). In her experiment she divided her participants into two groups and gave them three acronyms to solve. She told them that the acronyms were easy to solve. But actually the first two acronyms were easy only for the first group, but difficult for the second group. But the third acronym was common for both the groups. She found that the first group of participants could solve all the acronyms, whereas the second group (working with the difficult acronyms) became frustrated and gave up while writing the third acronym. The second group did not know that their first two acronyms were difficult. They knew that those were as easy as those of the first group, and yet they could not solve the answers. It made their confidence low and they started feeling helpless. Nixon concluded that this was the situation how learned helplessness triggered in into the mind of the second group of participants as their confidence was brought down. This experiment shows how easily teachers can affect students – in both positive and negative ways.

However, Seligman (2011) came out with a model of learned optimism and claimed that it is important to learn the process to be optimistic if one wants to have a better life. Highly influenced by Aaron Beck's (1967) cognitive behavioural techniques and Albert Ellis's (1955) rational emotive behavioural therapy, Seligman came out with his own model of learned optimism – also known as the ABCDE model.

A stands for Adversity (the adverse situation that befell the individual);
B stands for Belief (individuals' immediate interpretation of the situation);
C stands for Consequence (individuals' instant initial response to that situation);
D stands for Disputation (individuals' effort to justify their initial beliefs);
E stands for Energization (rational outcome of individuals' justification of their beliefs).

Following this model, one can learn to question their initial and unjustified responses to any adverse situation and gradually come up with a happy conclusion.

Pygmalion and Golem effects: self fulfilling prophecies

When we expect certain behaviours of others, we are likely to act in ways that make the expected behaviour more likely to occur. (Rosenthal and Babad, 1985, cited in Niari et al., 2016)

The Pygmalion effect (also known as the Rosenthal effect) is a psychological phenomenon wherein others' high expectations of an individual lead to improved performance of that individual in a given area. That is, an individual is likely to have an increase in performance when other people have high expectations of him. However, the flipside of the Pygmalion effect is known as the Golem effect, wherein low expectations lead

to decreased performance. That is, an individual is likely to have a decrease in performance when other people have low expectations of him. Nonetheless, both these Pygmalion and Golem effects are forms of self-fulfilling prophecies.

Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) conducted an experiment at an elementary school where students had to take IQ pre-tests. Later, as part of the experiment, they informed the teachers of the students who showed extraordinary capacity for intellectual development and would flourish within a year. Surprisingly enough, these students were randomly picked and had nothing to do with the initial IQ test. However, the teachers were not informed about this process and were left with high expectations of those selected students.

Nonetheless, when the students again sat for the test after eight months, those randomly chosen students were found to have a notably higher score than their peers. And though there were students (outside these chosen ones) who scored higher (in the initial IQ test), they were rated less favourably by the teachers. It happened due to the self fulfilling prophecy (that the teachers had no/less expectations of these students; paid less attention, support and encouragement to them; and consequently graded them poorly). Furthermore, it is the same self fulfilling prophecy in action that made the randomly chosen ones end up in excellence. It happened so because the teachers had high expectations of these chosen ones, and hence they paid more attention, support and encouragement to them (than to their peers).

Similar ideas have also been reflected by McLeod (1995, pp.378-379). According to her, 'Departments and institutions develop their own cultures; the prevailing attitudes of teachers toward students tend to become organizational norms. If most teachers in the department have a low sense of efficacy and tacitly agree that certain groups of students (sometimes even all students) can't learn to write, then newcomers are pressured to accept the same low sense of efficacy and accompanying low expectations'.

The Pygmalion and the Golem effects indicate that our performances are changeable and can be influenced by others. The way we think, act, or even perceive our own potential can be influenced by what others expect of us. Though such expectations may spring from subjective and irrational thoughts, they have the ability to affect us and reshape our performances. Positive expectations result in increased performance, whereas negative expectations result in decreased performance. Both the Pygmalion and the Golem effects suggest that teachers' beliefs and expectations significantly affect students' learning and performance.

Literature review

Teachers' beliefs about both the teacher and the students are vital factors in determining the classroom interaction and the teaching-learning environment (Varghese et al., 2005). Hence, there is a need for multiple methods to have an in-depth analysis of teachers' beliefs from diverse perspectives (Schraw and Olafson, 2015, cited in Fives and Gill, 2015). However, the first outlining of the existing methods for the scientific study of teacher beliefs started with Shavelson et al. (1986, cited in Yeung et al., 1999). They mentioned issues such as policy analysis, process mapping and repetitive grid techniques. Kagan (1992) highlighted a systematic description of techniques such as stimulated recall (teachers think aloud when viewing their recorded classroom activities); concept maps (teachers map their understandings of pedagogical issues); semi-structured interviews (teachers recall specific classroom events and decisions); attitude scales (e.g. Likert scale); close analysis (of the classroom language) etc. Fives and Buehl (2012, cited in Erens and

Eichler, 2019) highlighted a framework for mapping the association between attitudes, beliefs and values, and showed multiple aspects and functions of the belief system – guiding actions, framing problems, filtering information etc.

Wang (2016) investigated various aspects of teachers' beliefs in the classroom and concluded that teachers simultaneously embrace multiple beliefs vis-à-vis the roles of teacher-student relationship, teaching approaches and practices, and other related issues. Similar findings came out in a study carried out by Mihaela and Alina-Oana (2015). They found the presence of variables such as years of experience, school culture and social context to correlate between teachers' beliefs and teaching attitudes. Xu (2012) studied the role of teachers' beliefs regarding the teaching-learning process, and summarized that their beliefs strongly manipulate their teaching practices and increase (or decrease) students' performance. Likewise, Erkmen (2010) also showed that teachers' beliefs strongly influence their teaching practices.

Harvey et al. (1968) examined various aspects of teacher beliefs and their relationship with classroom climate and students' psycho-academic development. In another study, Grossman et al. (1989, cited in Salonen and Savander-Ranne, 2015) showed how teachers' beliefs about and orientation towards the syllabus/course content shape the way they think and the choices they make in their teaching.

Ekperi et al. (2019) investigated the correlation between teachers' attitude and students' psycho-academic development, and found that the former significantly shapes the latter. Brophy & Good (1974, cited in Timmermans et al., 2016) showed a correlation between teachers' attitude, their personality factors, and their classroom practices; and demonstrated how these elements affect the teacher-student relationship. Similarly, Ulug et al. (2011) argued that teachers' attitudes (either positive or negative) have significant effect on students' psycho-academic development and classroom performances.

Methodology

This study was conducted at Jadavpur University, West Bengal, India. A total of 100 undergraduate students and 25 teachers from the departments of Education, International Relations and English participated in this study. The researcher used two separate sets of questionnaires (one for the teachers and one for the students) and a semi-structured interview (for only the students) to elicit data. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of nine questions divided into three separate sections (Teaching practices and course content, Learning process, and Psycho-academic development). The students' questionnaire, on the other hand, consisted of four questions divided into two sections (Learning process, and Psycho-academic development). Data collected from these questionnaires and the semi-structured interview was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Collected data was then analyzed, interpreted, and finally presented in the form of pie charts.

Findings

Analysis of Quantitative Data:

The following questions were used by the researcher with an aim to elicit information from the teacher participants.

1. Do your beliefs and attitudes towards the course (you teach) affect your teaching practices?

This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the course have any effect on their teaching practices. Majority (52%) of the respondents found these to have a negligible effect, while some others (8%) talked about moderate effect. However, the remaining respondents (40%) thought of these to have no effect.

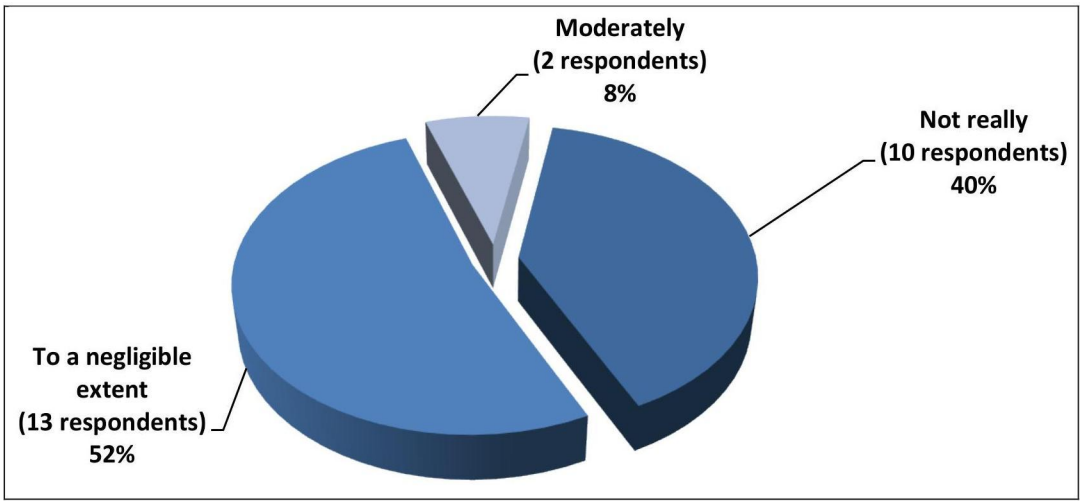

Figure 1: Effect of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the course on their teaching practices

2. Do your beliefs and attitudes towards the course (you teach) affect your completion of the syllabus/course contents in due time?

This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards a course have any effect on the completion of the syllabus/course contents on time. A vast majority (88%) of the respondents said that these did not affect the completion of the syllabus/course contents. However, the remaining respondents said that these have some effect [to a negligible extent (8%), and moderately (4%)] on the completion of the syllabus/course contents.

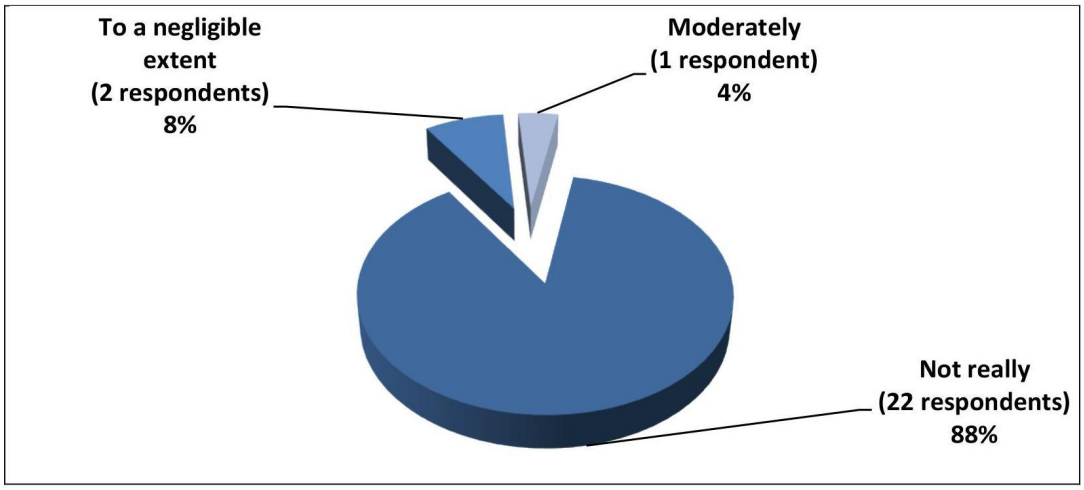

Figure 2: Effect of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the course on completion of syllabus/course contents in due time

3. Do your beliefs and attitudes towards the course (you teach) affect the learning processes of your students'?

This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards a course have any effect on the learning processes of the students'. Majority (52%) of the respondents thought of these to have no effect at all. However, the remaining (48%) respondents found these to have a negligible effect.

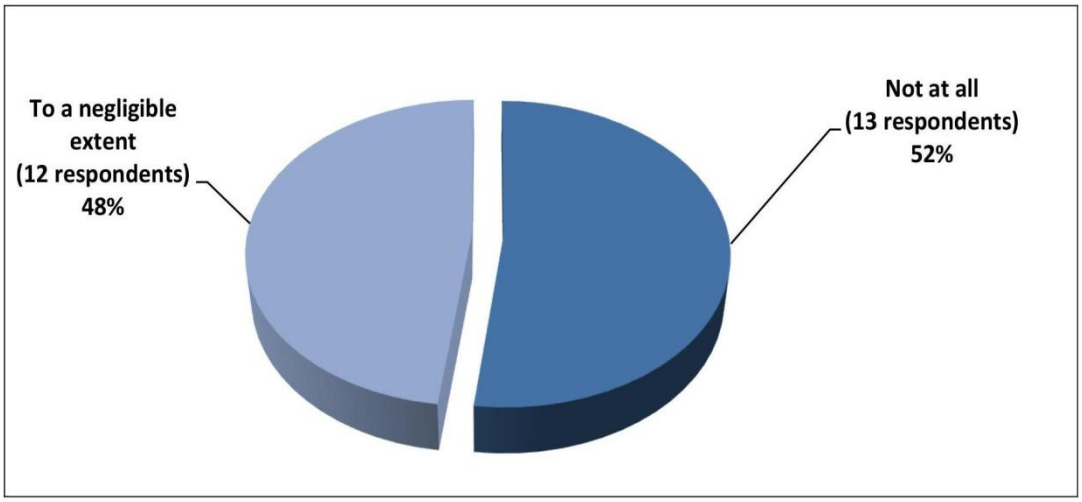

Figure 3: Effect of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the course on the learning processes of the students'

4. Do your beliefs and attitudes towards the course (you teach) affect the psycho-academic development of your students'?

   This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards a course have any effect on the psycho-academic development of the students'. Majority (76%) of the respondents said that these do not affect the psycho-academic development of the students. However, the remaining respondents held these to have a negligible effect (24%).

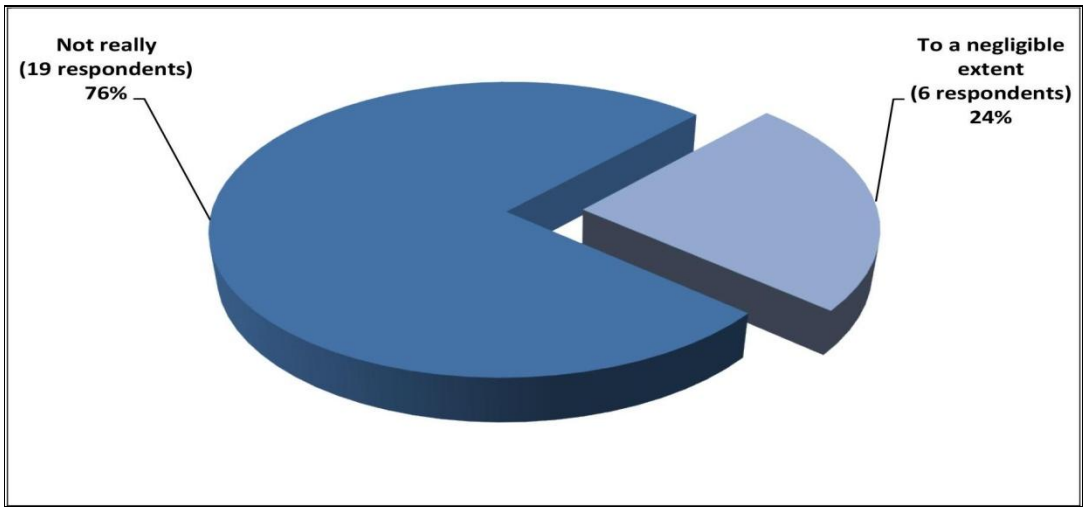

Figure 4: Effects of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the course on the psycho-academic development of the students'

5. Do your beliefs and attitudes towards the students affect your teaching practices?

   This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards their students affect their teaching practices. Here all of them agreed that these affect their teaching practices in different levels. A major part (44%) of the

respondents said that these affected them significantly; and another (8%) said it affected them utterly. However, there were others who thought of these to have a moderate effect (32%), as well as negligible effect (16%).

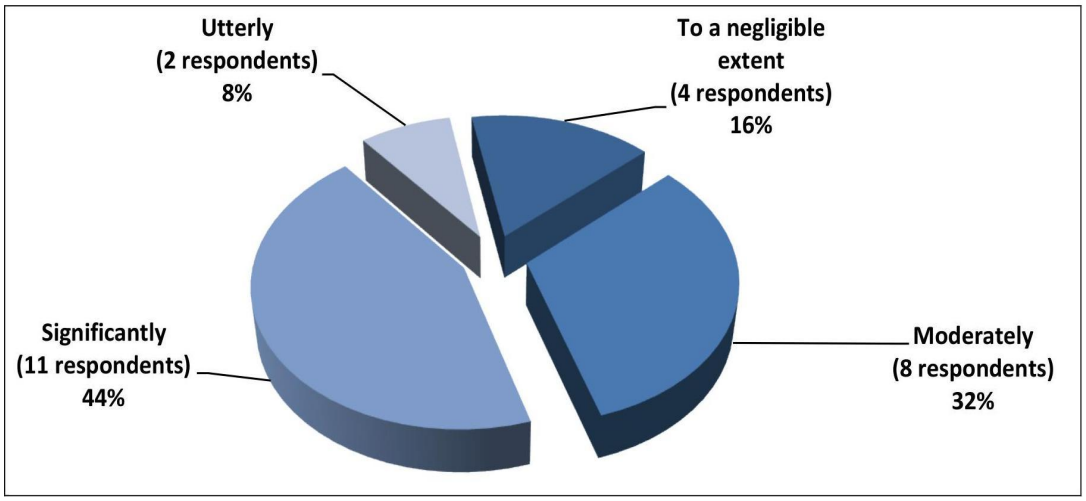

Figure 5: Effects of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the students on their teaching practices

6. Do your beliefs and attitudes towards the students affect their learning processes?

The aim of this question was to find out whether or not teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards their students affect the learning processes of those students'. 84% of the respondents said that these do not have any effect on the learning processes of the students. However, the few respondents (16%) thought these to affect their learning processes to a negligible extent.

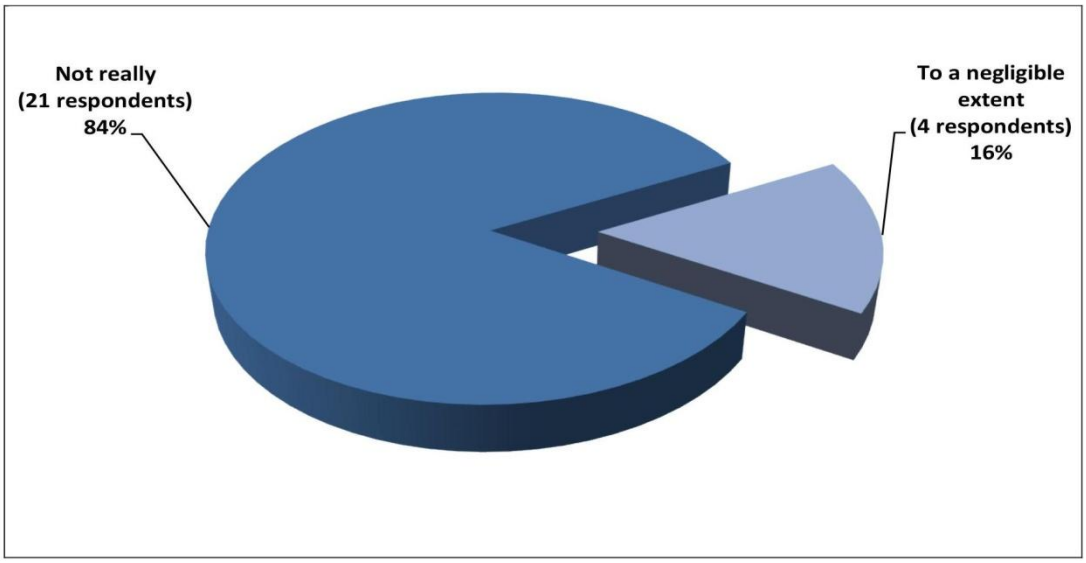

Figure 6: Effects of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the students on their learning processes

7. Do your beliefs and attitudes towards the students affect their psycho-academic development?

This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards their students have any effect on the psycho-academic development of those students'. Majority of the respondents (56%) said that these affect the psycho-academic development of the students' significantly. Another portion (24%) believed

these to have a moderate effect. However, a small portion (12%) mentioned about utter effect, whereas the last portion (8%) thought these to have a negligible effect.

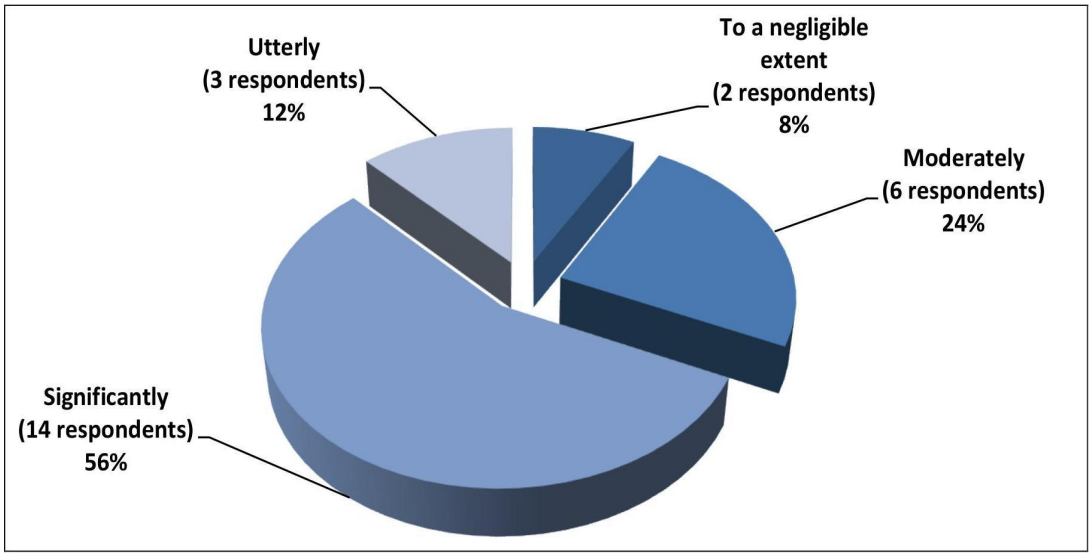

Figure 7: Effects of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the students on their psycho-academic development

8. Do your teaching practices affect the learning processes of your students'?

The aim of this question was to find out whether or not teachers' teaching practices have any effect on the learning processes of their students'. Majority of the respondents (68%) said that these do not affect the learning process of the students'. However, the remaining respondents found these to have negligible (24%), and moderately (8%) effects.

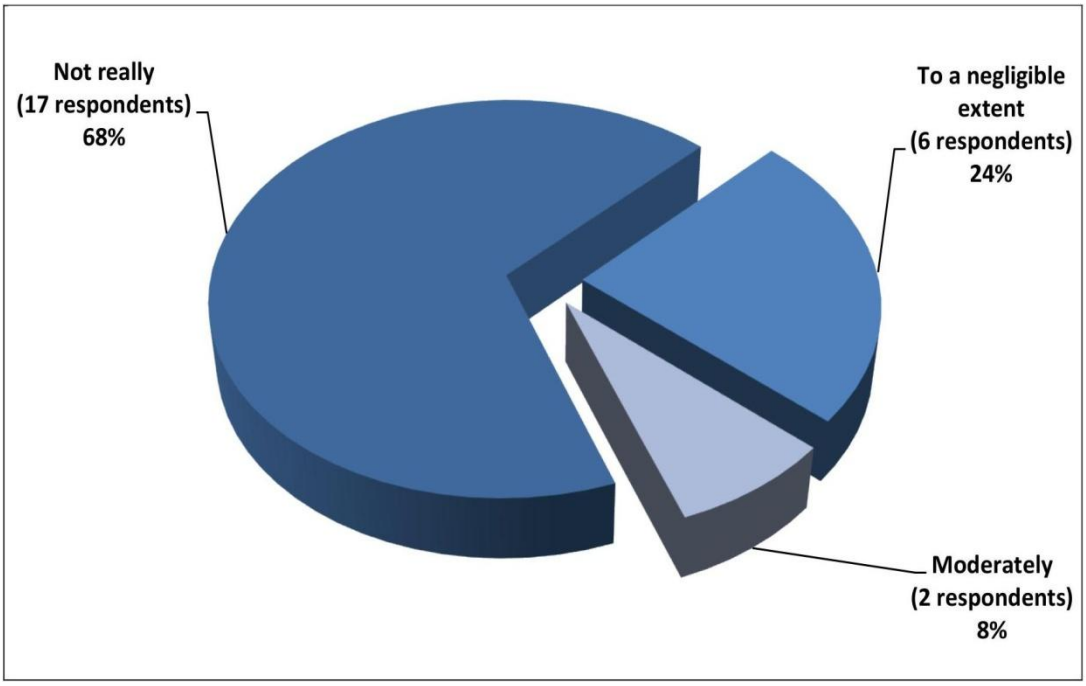

Figure 8: Effects of teachers' teaching practices on the learning processes of the students'

9. Do your teaching practices affect the psycho-academic development of your students'?

   The aim of this question was to find out whether or not teachers' teaching practices have any effect on the psycho-academic development of their students'. All of the respondents agreed that their teaching practices affect [to a negligible extent (28%), moderately (52%), and significantly (20%)] the psycho-academic development of their students'.

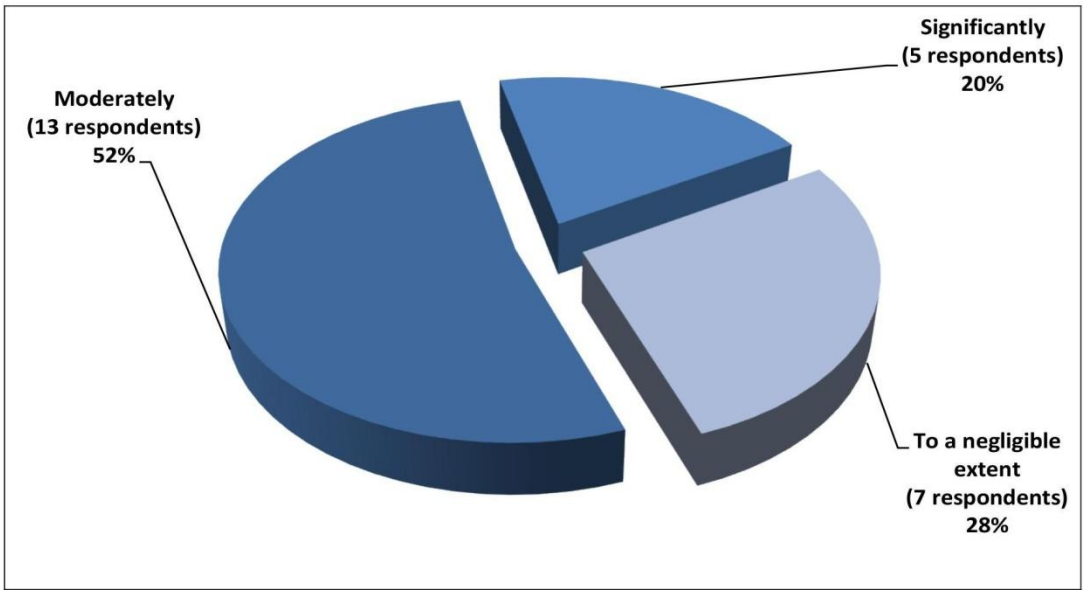

Figure 9: Effects of teachers' teaching practices on the psycho-academic development of the students'

The following questions were used by the researcher with an aim to elicit information from the student participants.

1. Do teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards you affect your learning processes?

   This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards them affect their learning processes. Most of the respondents (64%) claimed that these factors do not have any effect on their learning processes. However, remaining respondents claimed these to have a negligible effect (23%) or moderate (13%) effect.

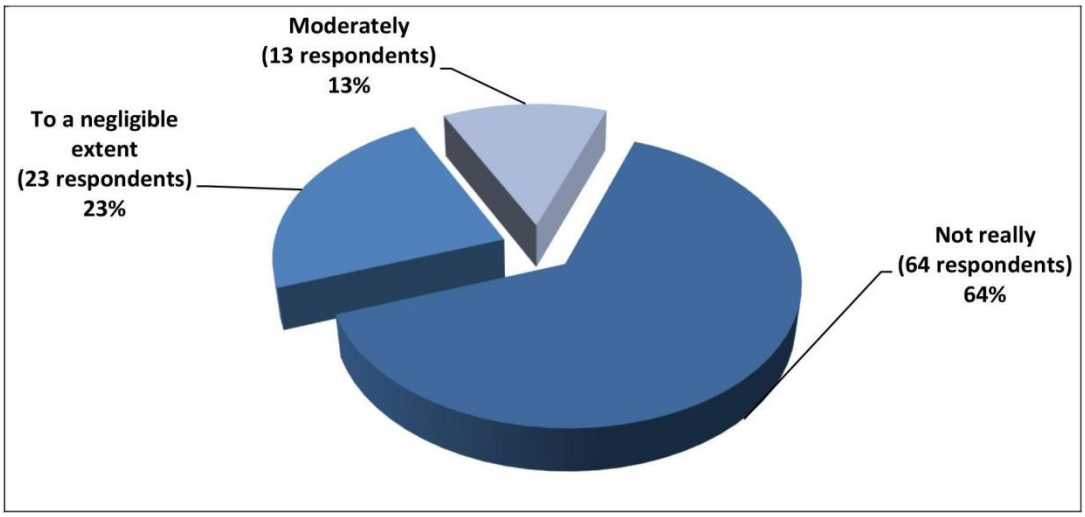

Figure 10: Effects of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the students on their learning processes (students' perspective)

2. Do teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards you affect your psycho-academic development?

This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards them affect their psycho-academic development. All of the respondents agreed that factors these affect their psycho-academic development in varying degrees [utterly (7%), significantly (31%), moderately (56%), and to a negligible extent (6%)].

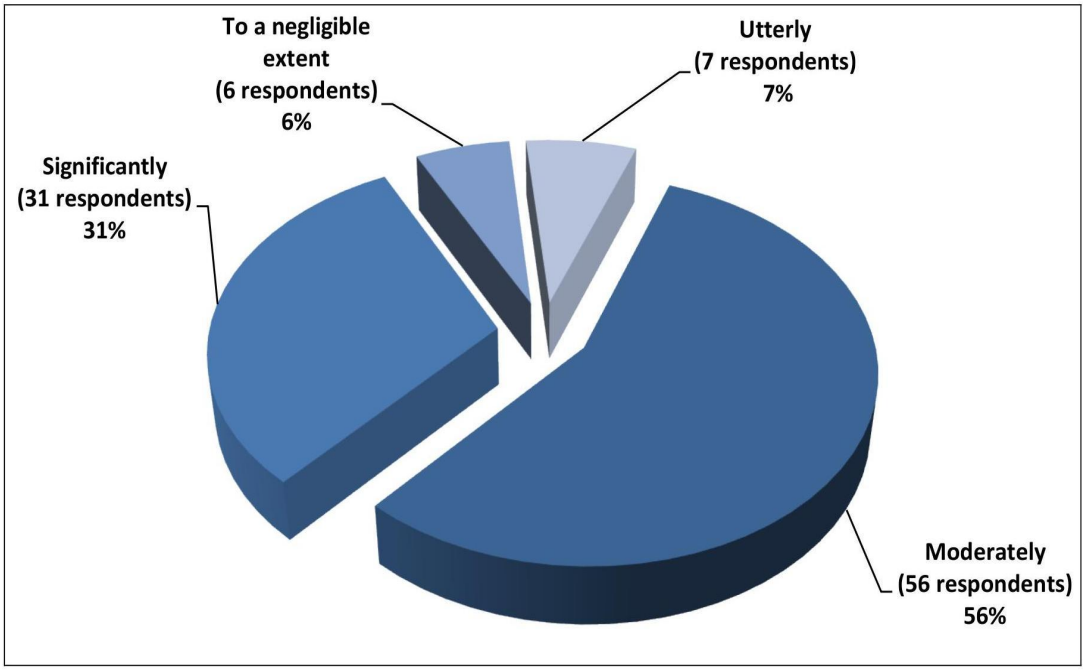

Figure 11: Effects of teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the students on their psycho-academic development (students' perspective)

3. Do teachers' teaching practices affect your learning processes?

This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' teaching practices affect students' learning processes. Most of the respondents (64%) claimed that

these factors do not affect their learning processes. Some claimed those to have a negligible effect (23%), while others claimed those to have a moderate effect (13%) on their learning processes.

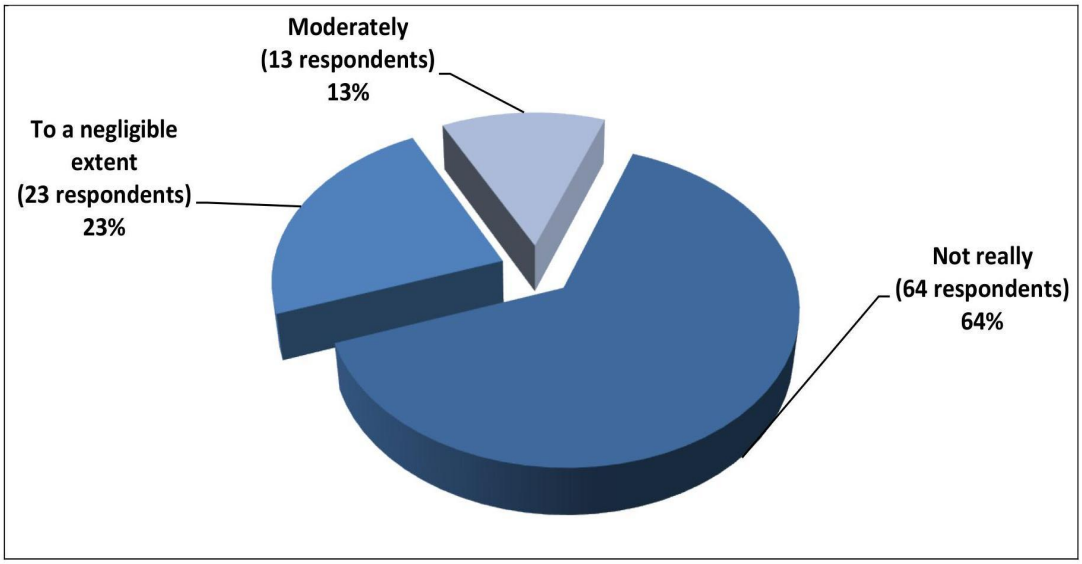

Figure 12: Effects of teachers' teaching practices on the learning processes of the students' (students' perspective)

4. Do teachers' teaching practices affect your psycho-academic development?

This question aimed to find out whether or not teachers' teaching practices affect the students' psycho-academic development. Majority of the respondents (60%) claimed that these have a moderate effect on their psycho-academic development. Other respondents talked about varying levels of effect [significantly (24%), utterly (7%), and to a negligible extent (9%)] on their psycho-academic development.

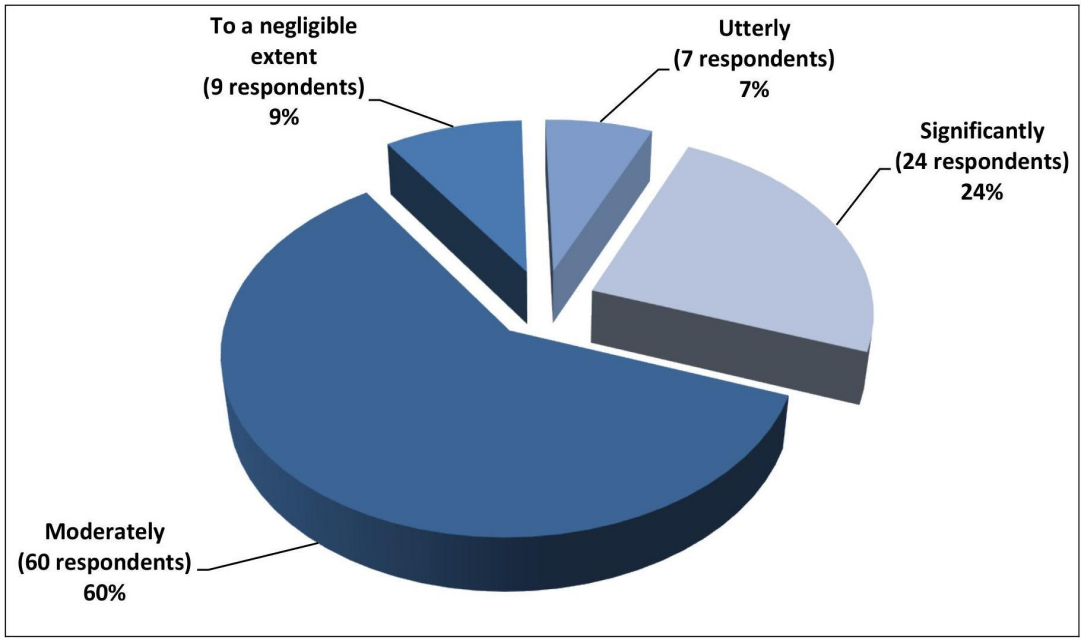

Figure 13: Effects of teachers' teaching practices on the psycho-academic development of the students' (students' perspective)

Analysis of Qualitative Data

The student respondents were also required to participate in a semi-structured interview as part of data triangulation. Following are the key findings from the interview that focused on the relationship of teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and teaching practices with students' learning processes and psycho-academic development.

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes and students' learning processes

Participants mentioned that their learning processes are 'learner individual', 'internal' mechanisms, and those could hardly be affected by external factors – particularly the mentioned ones. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards them can affect them psychologically, can make them feel enthusiastic or apathetic towards learning, and can even change their level of motivation and performance. But these can hardly affect their learning processes. One of the respondents said: "My teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards me affect me seriously. It can motivate or de-motivate me. But the way I learn is my personal habit. It is my essence. What and how I do things is who I am. It can hardly be changed by pressure or by other factors. Though I am expressing my perspective, I believe this would represent the vast majority, if not everyone."

Teachers' teaching practices and students' learning processes

Teachers' teaching practices were also reported to have no or negligible effect on their learning processes by the majority of student respondents. "The way my teachers teach in the classroom surely increases or decreases my knowledge, but that cannot change how I learn (at home). My learning process is something that I am used to and comfortable with from my childhood. I cannot change it now for anything, even if I try" – said one of the respondents. However, a small number of the respondents had slightly different opinions and reported that teachers' teaching practices sometimes affect their learning processes to some extent.

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes and students' psycho-academic development

Almost all of the respondents had similar opinions on this topic. They felt that these factors have a major influence upon their psycho-academic development. One of the respondents said: "Teachers' optimistic beliefs and attitudes make me more motivated about that subject, which eventually results in better understanding, as well as academic development. On the contrary, pessimistic beliefs and attitudes make me frustrated and result in poor learning and academic development."

Teachers' teaching practices and students' psycho-academic development

Here also, almost all of the respondents agreed that these factors have a credible influence upon their psycho-academic development. One of the respondents said: "It is due our teachers' and how they teach that we learn whatever we learn. Their teaching methods can make things either easy or difficult for us. These can either facilitate or hinder our learning and psycho-academic developments. A good method helps us, whereas a poor method makes it difficult for us. So, both our psychological and academic development is very much influenced and determined by our teachers' classroom teaching practices."

Discussion

The above mentioned analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data draws attention to the fact that teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and teaching practices are important factors in shaping the classroom climate and the psycho-academic development of the students. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the students were found to affect their classroom teaching practices, as well as the psycho-academic development of the students'. However, these did not affect the learning processes of the students'. Similarly, teachers' classroom teaching practices were also found to affect the psycho-academic development of the students'. But these did not have any effect on students' learning processes. However, unlike these already mentioned factors, their beliefs and attitudes towards the course were found to have no effect on any of the focus areas, i.e., teaching-learning processes, completion of the syllabus/course content, and students' learning processes and psycho-academic development.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to find out how teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and teaching practices determine the classroom climate, shape the teaching-learning processes, and affect the overall psycho-academic development of the students'. These elements are in a symbiotic relationship among themselves, and they modify one another. Based on teachers' and students' perceptions, and supported by the theories of emotional intelligence, learned helplessness/learned optimism, and the Pygmalion/Golem self fulfilling prophesies, the findings of this study show that these elements are important in determining the classroom climate, the teaching-learning processes, and the overall psycho-academic development of the students'.

As this study was conducted in the Indian context, its findings provide a better understanding of the current teaching and learning practices in the Indian academia. And due to its contemporary high significance, this topic requires further elaborate research. Hence, it is expected that this study will be a resource for facilitating future research in the same.

Biographical note

Muhammad Fazle Ramzan Khan is currently working on his PhD in Education at Jadavpur University, India. He has been teaching English and conducting teacher training sessions at universities in Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh for 14 years. He attained his Certificate in TESOL from the University of Oregon, USA.

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