

REFORMING ENGLISH CURRICULUM IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: AN
EXAMINATION OF EMIRATE TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES REGARDING
THE ADOPTION OF "ENGLISH CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT RICH TASK" (ECART)

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ABSTRACT

REFORMING ENGLISH CURRICULUM IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: AN EXAMINATION OF EMIRATE TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES REGARDING THE ADOPTION OF "ENGLISH CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT RICH TASK" (ECART)

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United Arab Emirates (UAE) is currently undergoing massive educational reform, especially in the teaching and assessment methods of all subject-matter areas. In Abu Dhabi, the capital of UAE, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) has mandated the revamping of English language teaching and assessment in grades 6-12 through the introduction of English Continuous Assessment Rich Task (ECART), which is a framework that helps teachers implement ongoing and alternative assessments in the English as a Foreign Language classroom (EFL). The purpose of this exploratory multiple case study was three-fold: a) to explore Emirate EFL teachers' beliefs regarding English teaching, learning and assessment in UAE, b) the extent to which their beliefs influenced their use of the ECART framework in the classroom, and c) the impact that different contextual factors—classroom environment, curriculum, professional development—had on their beliefs and classroom practices. The overarching question that guided the current study was: How do Emirate teachers' beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment in general and the use of an English reform initiative (ECART), in particular, impact their instructional and assessment practice in the classroom?

Four EFL experienced teachers from two different schools in the Emirate of AlAin in UAE participated in the current study. Data was generated over a two-month period from interviews, classroom observations, field notes, and document analysis. A constant comparative

analysis method was used to analyze the data. The findings of this study revealed that even though Emirate teachers acknowledged some of the benefits of the ECART, they held beliefs that were incompatible with the underlying principles of the reform. Emirate teachers' beliefs regarding what constituted effective English language teaching and assessments were highly consistent with their classroom behaviors. However, in few instances, there was a discrepancy between teachers' reported beliefs and classroom practices as they attempted to implement the ECART. Some of these discrepancies stemmed from the lack of deep understanding of some of the ECART guiding principles, others, from disagreement with its orientation to language teaching and assessment. In addition professional development support for the teachers was limited and of uneven quality. Support for experienced teachers' reflection on change by means of dialogue and instruction in new approaches was not a central element of the ECART, as at least some of the teachers in this study had experienced it. It is hoped that findings from this study will be useful to in-service teachers, teacher preparation programs, and educational policy makers in United Arab Emirates and in other nations where large-scale educational reforms of classroom instruction and assessment are being attempted.

*This dissertation is dedicated to my lovely mother, Salwa Elhami.
Thank you for sharing this dream with me. Your love, support, and prayers have sustained me
throughout my life. This journey would have been meaningless without you by my side.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
Chapter 1	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Context of the Study	5
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions.....	8
Definitions and Clarification of Terms	9
Alternative Assessments.....	9
Teachers' Beliefs.....	9
English as a Foreign Language.....	9
Abu Dhabi Education Council.....	10
English Continuous Assessment Rich Tasks.....	10
Chapter 2	11
Conceptual Framework and Literature Review	11
Conceptual Framework.....	11
Beliefs and Knowledge	14
Features and Characteristics of Beliefs.....	17
Sources of Teachers' Beliefs	19
Literature Review.....	24
History of Research on Teachers' Beliefs	24
Relationship between ESL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices.....	27
Learning Theories of ESL Teaching and Assessment.....	30
Traditional/Behaviorist Approach to Language Learning	30
Cognitive Approach to Language Learning.....	32
Constructivist Approach to Language Learning.....	33
Alternative Assessments	37
Major Characteristics and Features.....	39
Characteristics of Alternative Assessment in the ESL Classroom.....	41
ESL Teachers' Beliefs and Assessment Practices	43
Chapter 3	46
Methodology	46
Research Design.....	46
Case Study Research.....	47
Sampling and Selection Criteria	48
Data Collection.....	49
Interviews.....	50
Classroom Observations.....	51

Artifacts.....	54
Data Analysis	54
Verification Procedures	59
My Role as a Researcher.....	62
Chapter 4	65
Context of the Study	65
Setting the Stage	65
The Schools.....	67
AlMajid School.....	68
OmHabiba School.....	69
The Teachers.....	70
Aziza.....	70
Mona.....	73
Sherooq.....	75
Amal.....	76
Chapter 5	78
Teacher Learning and Beliefs	78
Past Language Learning Experiences	78
Traditional Teaching and Learning.....	79
Assessment through Tests.....	84
Professional Coursework and Development.....	88
Teacher Education Background.....	89
In-service Teacher Training.....	90
Teachers' Beliefs: ESL Teaching, Learning, and Assessment	93
Image of English Language Teacher	93
Benefits of Traditional Teaching and Learning.....	95
Drawback of Traditional Teaching Methods	98
Role of Tests in the Assessment Process	99
Chapter 6	103
Teachers Encountering the ECART.....	103
Brief Description of the ECART Framework.....	103
Teachers' Readiness for English Language Reform.....	109
Factors Affecting Teachers' Receptiveness of the ECART	112
The Notion of Continuous Assessment.....	112
Lack of Textbooks and Coherent Curriculum	115
Lack of Grammar Instruction and Assessment.....	119
Heavy Reliance on Performance-Based Approach.....	121
Lack of Rigorous Language Testing.....	123
Use of Rubrics as a Scoring Tool	126
Insufficient Professional Development.....	128
Chapter 7	132
Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in the Context of the ECART Reform	132

Teachers' Understanding of their Current Role in the Classroom.....	133
Teachers' Beliefs about the Effectiveness of the ECART in the classroom.....	139
ECART Encourages Active Participation of Students.....	140
ECART Highlights a Different Way of Assessment	141
Engages Students in the Assessment Process	144
Teachers' Enactment of the ECART in the Classroom	147
Teaching Practices	148
Aziza.....	148
Mona.....	152
Amal.....	156
Sherooq.....	158
Chapter 8	166
Discussion	166
Knowledge Base of Emirate Teachers in UAE.....	166
Personal Practical Knowledge	169
Apprenticeship of Observation	171
Disciplinary Knowledge and Professional Coursework	172
Teaching Experiences	173
Tensions between Teachers' Beliefs and Reform Practices	175
Implications.....	183
Teacher Preparation Programs in UAE.....	183
Inservice Teacher Professional Development in UAE	185
Education Policymakers in UAE	189
Limitations	192
Conclusion	195
APPENDICES	198
Appendix A.....	199
Appendix B.....	202
Appendix C.....	203
Appendix D.....	204
Appendix E.....	205
REFERENCES	206

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Data of Teacher Participants	71
Table 2. ECART Themes and Guiding Questions for each Trimester in Grade 6	106
Table 3. Brief Description of the ECART Requirements, including the Responsibilities of Teachers during the Process of ECART Completion.	108

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Different Factors Shaping Emirate Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices.....	23
Figure 2. ECART Organization.....	202
Figure 3. Example 1 of Students Work.....	203
Figure 3.1. Example 2 of Students Work.....	204
Figure 4. Vocabulary Supporting Sheet.....	205

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the second half of the twentieth century, English has become a global language since no other language has such a wide geographical reach. Crystal (1997) reported that English is the official language of 85 per cent of international organizations. Zai, Zheng and Zhang (1999) explained that more than 80 per cent of all scientific papers are first published in English. In addition, there is a rapid spread of the teaching of English as a second/foreign language. Second language teaching is complex in that the target language is often both the medium of instruction and the object of learning. Research on second language (L2) teaching, especially in the field of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL), has grown tremendously in the past three decades as a result of changes in the conceptual frameworks and learning theories that guide L2 instructional practices and pedagogy. The worldwide demand for learning English has created a parallel demand for adopting quality-teaching methods, as well as for developing new frameworks that address the need for high quality L2 instruction. Traditional approaches to language learning—where drills, memorization and repetition are the means to ensure students’ internalization of the target language—are largely seen today as inappropriate and insufficient for enhancing learners’ communication skills (Nunan, 1998). Thus, the majority of second language educators today adopt a communicative and more learner-centered approach to language teaching. Such an approach regards second language as a resource for exchanging meaning, rather than a language system whose usage is limited to classroom settings.

Effective second language teaching requires a means of assessment that measures students’ learning and reflects their strengths and weakness in the target language. The significant shift in second language pedagogical theories and approaches has undeniably

influenced ESL classroom assessment practices. Sharifi and Hassasskhan (2010) explained that the movement of second language teaching toward a learner-centered approach has an impact on how teachers monitor students' language development as "teaching and assessment have begun to incorporate the measures that reflect the type of tasks which are more learner-centered and authentic" (p. 195). Measures that rely solely on standardized tests and traditional assessment practices—those that do not focus on language function and meaning when evaluating students' learning progress—are incompatible with the communicative and learner-centered approaches to L2 teaching.

Accordingly, ESL teachers need to move away from the use of traditional assessment—that focuses on whether students get the 'right' answer to questions about isolated vocabulary words, formal grammar, and comprehension questions—to alternative means of assessment, which focus on understanding what students know, understand, and can do as they use the language for authentic communication purposes and extended oral and written texts (Puhl, 1997). Hancock (1994) defined alternative assessment as "an ongoing process involving the student and teacher in making judgments about the student's progress in language using non-conventional strategies" (p. 3). This is a view not only of what is assessed, but also of how and why it is assessed. When teachers use alternative assessments to inform their instructional practices and engage students in monitoring their language learning progress, assessments can then become formative as they provide feedback to students and teachers.

Despite widespread recognition by language researchers and policymakers of the importance of alternative assessments in second language teaching and learning, there is a lack of research that examines ESL/EFL teachers' beliefs, as part of their knowledge base of teaching, regarding the use of alternative assessments (Beliem & Davinroy, 1997). Research shows that

the beliefs teachers hold of the teaching and learning process influence their instruction and teaching practices (Earl, 2003). In addition, teachers' beliefs regarding assessment influence the way they assess their students and the choice of assessment activities they make in the classroom (Fennema & Romberg, 1999). Teachers' beliefs are also considered a critical component for ensuring education reform since they act as a filter through which teachers view and evaluate new information (Pajares, 1992). Accordingly, the success or failure of implementing alternative assessments in the EFL/ESL classroom could depend in large on teachers' beliefs regarding the use and effectiveness of such assessment methods. The above literature on the importance of teachers' beliefs in their decision-making process in the classroom informed the current study as it looked into the intertwined relationship between Emirate EFL teachers' belief, practices, and implementation of reform.

Statement of the Problem

The role of teachers in ensuring the success of any educational reform initiative has been cited as most essential (Harris, 2003; Choi, 2000; Markee, 1993). However, several studies have shown that teachers are not just implementers of experts' ideas in the classroom; rather, they "are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p. 81). Accordingly, any reform of instruction and/or assessment should put teachers' beliefs and perceptions at the forefront.

This study took place in United Arab Emirates (UAE) where massive educational reform is currently taking place. As a result of the global status of English language and the widespread of its use in the context of UAE, where it became "associated with business, modernity, and internationalism" (Clarke, 2007, p.584), the Ministry of Education recognized the importance of

reforming the teaching and learning of English in schools, as well as in institutions of higher education. Recently, the UAE government required public universities to use English as the medium of instruction, which pressured K-12 schools to graduate students who were fluent in English language (Fox, 2007). As a result, the Abu Dhabi Educational Council (ADEC) has brought about massive changes in the curricula and assessment of English language through the introduction of an innovative English language framework titled “English Continuous Assessment Rich Tasks” (ECART). According to Strydom and Velu (2011) the ECART “is compulsory for all students following the ADEC curriculum” (p.55). Yet, Emirate EFL teachers’ beliefs about the ECART, especially the new teaching and assessment methods included in within it, and the way such beliefs might impact their classrooms practices remain a relatively unexplored area. Troudi, Coombe, and Al-Hemily (2009) highlighted the lack of research regarding teachers’ beliefs in the Arabian Gulf countries in general, writing the following:

Thus far, several studies have looked into teachers’ assessment practices, with a few focusing on teachers’ beliefs and knowledge affecting their decision-making processes in classroom-based assessment...No research of this kind, however, has been conducted in the Gulf region. (p. 547)

For English language reform to be successful in UAE, Emirate teachers’ beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessments, should conform to the content, purposes, and assessments of the ECART. Therefore, for ECART success, teachers’ beliefs are an important factor that should be examined. Accordingly, the purpose of the research reported in this dissertation is to explore Emirate teachers’ beliefs as they are going through the process of making changes in their instructional and assessment practices. Yet, it is important to start out by shedding light on the context of the current study to show the educational development and

reform the UAE is currently undergoing and the new requirements and roles it places on teachers.

Context of the Study

This study was carried out in AlAin, one of the emirates in United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates is a federation of seven independent states located on the Arabian Peninsula. Prior to the discovery of oil, the UAE consisted of a group of low-income emirates under the protection of the British government, which built the first school in Sharjah in 1953 (Starr, 2010). Following that, schools were opened across the UAE with funding from Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. These countries were responsible for staffing the schools and providing them with texts and curricula. It was not until the independence of the emirates in 1971 that the UAE government took control over establishing and developing its schooling system. The educational structure has remained unchanged since the federation of the seven emirates and consisted of four-tier system covering 14 years of education. The tiers include kindergarten (4-5 years old), primary (6-11 years), intermediate (12-14 years) and secondary (15-17 years) levels (Godwin, 2006). Additionally, the UAE has maintained a policy of providing access and free education for its citizens, as it believes “education to be the key future prosperity in an increasingly globalized economy. Free education at all levels facilitates access for all citizens at every level of the system” (Al-Abed, Vine, & Hellyer, 2005, p. 213).

In order to nationalize the curriculum and foresee the subjects offered in schools, the government of UAE established a central educational authority, which was labeled Ministry of Education and Youth (MOE). Despite the establishment of such educational ministry, the curriculum and the textbooks of the secondary schools was still borrowed from neighboring countries (Ridge & Farah, 2009). In 1979 the MOE launched its National Curriculum Project to

create a single Emirati curriculum, which came into full use in 1985. Since then, the UAE has been continuously developing and reforming the curricula used in schools.

Currently, the UAE has come to regard education as integral to the country's development plans. Accordingly, the government considered educational reform as an essential process in sustaining the progress and development of UAE through providing well-educated and highly qualified nationals to fill the private and public sectors. The revamping of English language curricula in UAE schools has become a part of a larger reform policy that was promoted by the UAE Ministry of Education and Youth in its "UAE Education Vision 2020". This educational plan called for radical change in the teaching/learning concepts, practices, and means used in schools (UAE Ministry of Education and Youth, 2000). With regard to English language teaching and learning, there has been a call to reform the traditional teaching methods that have been prevalent in UAE classrooms to a more learner-centered approach in which students take responsibility of their own learning (Truscott, 2010). In addition, EFL teachers were encouraged to move away from reliance on standardized tests when assessing language learners to integrating more alternative and authentic assessment practices that "occur as part of the learning process not an artificial add-on" (Truscott, 2010, p.5). In Abu Dhabi, the capital of UAE, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC)— which governed schools in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and the Western region—has mandated massive reform in the teaching and assessment of all subject-matter areas in order to fulfill its vision of a New School Model that was intended "to improve student learning experiences and to raise the academic outcomes of Abu Dhabi students to an internationally competitive level" (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2010, p.2). ADEC was established in 2005 and is considered "the supra-government education body charged with reforming education in the capital city and eponymous emirate of Abu Dhabi" (Gallagher, 2011,

p. 62). In addition, ADEC is responsible for setting educational standards that govern K-12 schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. According to their website, ADEC:

Seeks to develop education and educational institutions in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, implement innovative educational policies, plans and programs that aim to improve education, and support educational institutions and staff to achieve the objectives of national development in accordance with the highest international standards. (Abu Dhabi Educational Council, para. 2)

English language was one of the subject matter areas that has undergone massive changes in its curriculum and assessment methods through the introduction of English Continuous Assessment Rich Task (ECART), which was considered one of the crucial reform initiatives undertaken by ADEC and applied to grades 6-12. ADEC described the ECART as “an inquiry based learning process that students and teachers use in collaboration to engage in the study of English to address Abu Dhabi Standards outcomes” (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2011, p. 1). The purpose of ECART is to “integrate continuous assessment into the planning and teaching process” (p. 8) and “provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding against set criteria” (p.5). Accordingly, ECART acted as a framework that supported EFL teachers in implementing ongoing and alternative assessments to assess and track Emirate students’ language learning progress (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was three-fold. The first purpose was to elicit Emirate teachers’ beliefs regarding English language teaching, learning, and assessment in order to understand how such beliefs influenced their receptiveness and implementation of “English Continuous Assessment Rich Task” in the classroom. The second purpose was to examine the

extent to which teachers' beliefs affected their classroom behavior. In order to get a more holistic view of the various elements that shaped Emirate teachers' beliefs and behaviors in the classroom, the third and final purpose of this study was to examine the way in which different contextual factors—classroom environment, curriculum, and professional development—mediated their understanding and enactment of reform in the classroom.

Research Questions

The overarching question that guided the current study was: How do Emirate teachers' beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment in general and the use of ECART, as an English reform initiative, in particular impact their instructional and assessment practice in the classroom? The current study also addressed the following sub-research questions:

- 1) What beliefs do Emirate EFL teachers in UAE hold regarding the teaching, learning, and assessment of English language? What factors are responsible for shaping these teachers' beliefs?
- 2) How do Emirate EFL teachers' beliefs influence their receptiveness to and practice of the ECART in the classroom?
- 3) How do changing contextual factors — classroom environment, curriculum, and professional development — impact their beliefs and use of ECART?

Before going further in a review of the literature and conceptual framework regarding teachers' beliefs and practices in the context of reform (Chapter 2), the research design and methodology (Chapter 3), the findings of the case studies (Chapter 4-7), and the discussion and implications of the results of the current study, I would like to introduce some technical terms that are important to define at the outset as they will be used regularly in the study.

Definitions and Clarification of Terms

Alternative assessments. A plethora of terms have been used in the literature to refer to alternative methods of assessments, such as ongoing assessment, continuous assessment, dynamic assessment, descriptive assessment, and instructional assessment. However, Hamayan (1995) explained, “although these labels reflect subtle differences in focus, they share some basic characteristics” (p. 213). Examples of such characteristics are the ongoing nature of the assessment process, its use within the context of instruction, its authenticity and relevance to real-life contexts, its involvement of students in the assessment process by making the learning goals and assessment criteria available to the them, and the unique results it provides regarding the learning progress of individual students. Alternative assessments are, thus, seen as procedures that are not only carried out to gather, analyze and report students’ performances according to the standards and learning goals set by the curriculum and the teacher, but also to inform instruction.

Teachers’ beliefs. Teachers’ beliefs play an important role in their instruction and decision-making process as they act as a lens through which teachers make sense of their practices in the classroom. In general, beliefs are considered personally held perceptions that guide how people receive and react to new information (Borg, 2001). Such perceptions are usually held to be true by individuals and are thus resistant to change (Rokeach, 1976). The study of teachers’ beliefs is central in educational research as it helps us better understand teachers’ behaviors and the pedagogical decisions they take in the classroom.

English as a foreign language (EFL). English as a foreign language refers to the use and study of English in a non-English speaking country. According to Michieka (2011), the EFL context is one where “English is mainly acquired in the classroom and not much of it is available

in the immediate environment; it is not the language of instruction or interpersonal communication nor is it the language of administrative or legal systems” (p. 208).

Abu Dhabi education council (ADEC). Since the establishment of the Abu Dhabi Educational Council in 2005, it has taken over the role from the UAE Ministry of Education in terms of becoming the education regulatory body that supervised public schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and the Western region. In addition, ADEC is responsible for monitoring and offering support to public schools, developing curriculum and educational policies, overseeing educational reform, and providing licensing and accreditation to private schools.

English continuous assessment rich tasks (ECART). ECART is an innovative curriculum developed by ADEC in 2009 and based on “outcomes, or standards, rather than textbooks, in consultation with an arm of the New South Wales Government, Australia” (Ridge & Farah, 2009). ECART is an English language pedagogical framework that moves away from the traditional textbook driven methods of teaching and learning to an inquiry-based approach to foreign language learning.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Over the past decade, teachers have been recognized as central agents in determining the successful implementation of educational reform in the classrooms (Levitt, 2001; Lumpe, Haney, & Czerniak, 2000). Teachers are regarded as active decision makers who use their beliefs and knowledge when making instructional and assessment choices in the classroom. To that end, research has shown that teachers might possess beliefs that hinder the appropriate enactment of educational reform (Allen, 2002; Bliem and Davinroy, 1997). Researchers have thus attempted to reveal the crucial role that teachers' beliefs played in how they received and implemented reform. Accordingly, this study examined Emirate EFL teachers' beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment, including the use and the perceived effectiveness of the ECART as an alternative assessment method that was currently used in United Arab Emirates. In this chapter, I review the conceptual framework and literature that has informed my understanding about teachers' beliefs, relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices, the different approaches to second language teaching and learning, and the use of alternative assessments in the field of second language teaching.

Conceptual Framework

In the current study, I use the term *beliefs* to refer to a conceptual framework that shapes how people perceive the world around them and make sense of particular situations and contexts (Rust, 1992). The construct *belief* has been studied by scholars in different disciplines and research fields, such as social psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and recently education. Accordingly, different terms have been used to refer to the construct *belief* depending on the background of the researcher and the phenomenon under study. In his review of teachers' beliefs

in educational research, Pajares (1992) highlighted the difficulty of finding a definition for the construct *belief*:

Defining beliefs is at best a game of player's choice. They travel in disguise and often under alias-attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy, to name but a few that can be found in the literature. (p. 309)

However, what is agreed upon across disciplines is that the construct *belief* often refers to a psychologically held understanding of the world that is subjective, regarded to be true, and thus guides behavior (Bryan, 2003; Richardson, 1996). In an early definition of the construct *belief*, Goodenough (1963) described beliefs as propositions that are “accepted as guides for assessing the future, are cited in support of decisions, or are referred to in passing judgment on the behaviors of other” (p.151). Accordingly, researchers have longed argued that beliefs not only guide behavior, but also influence people's reactions toward new input. To that end, Puchta (1999) elaborated that beliefs are “generalization about cause and effect, and they influence our inner representation of the world around us. They help us to make sense of the world and they determine how we think and how we act” (p. 68). Hence, people react toward new information on the basis of a set of preexisting beliefs they have regarding a particular situation. Such beliefs are sometimes held consciously or unconsciously, which makes it hard to observe. Rokeach (1976) in his seminal work on belief systems explained the difficulty of capturing beliefs and cautioned researchers when making inferences about people's beliefs because:

When a person says: “This I believe...”, he may or may not be representing accurately what he truly believes because there are often compelling personal and social reasons, conscious and unconscious, why he will not or cannot tell us. For these reasons beliefs—like motives, genes, and neutrons—cannot be directly observed but must be inferred as best one can, with whatever psychological devices available, from all the things believers say or do. (p. 2)

Whether beliefs are held consciously or unconsciously, they are usually resistant to change due to their evaluative and affective nature (Abelson, 1979; Nespor, 1987). Borg (2001) explained that the evaluative and affective component of beliefs is reflected in the origin of the word:

Many definitions of *belief* recognize an evaluative aspect to the concept, and this is not surprising as the word itself originates from the Aryan word *lubh*, meaning ‘to like or to hold dear’, from which the word *love* also originates. (p. 186)

In the current study, I use Borg’s (2001) definition of beliefs as it encompasses the major features of the construct discussed above:

A belief is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior. (p. 186)

Given the research questions of the study and how I intended to examine Emirate teachers’ beliefs and their impact on their classroom practices, Borg’s (2001) definition of beliefs seemed appropriate for the current study as it helped me in identifying beliefs that were not explicitly mentioned by the teachers, rather implicitly stated. For example, in some cases, teachers described their commitment toward a specific approach to teaching as they “felt” it worked best for their students. Reflecting on Borg’s definition and how beliefs are “imbued with

emotive commitment,” I coded such statements as “beliefs about teaching.” Accordingly, Borg’s (2001) definition of beliefs guided the conceptual framework, data collection, and analysis of the current study.

Beliefs and Knowledge

Many attempts to define the construct *beliefs* have considered the relationship between beliefs and knowledge (Abelson, 1979; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). There are two schools of thought when it comes to identifying the relationship between beliefs and knowledge: one that draws a clear distinction between both terms (Abelson, 1979; Nespor, 1987; Rokeach, 1968), and the other that treats them as two equivalent and/or overlapping constructs (Borg, 2003; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Kegan, 1990). Some researchers argued for the conceptual differences between knowledge and beliefs and regarded them as two distinct terms. In the field of traditional philosophy and epistemology, knowledge requires a condition of truth and is considered more “factual or practical in nature in that it can be objectively and independently verified” (Ennis, Cothran, & Loftus, 1997, p.74). However, beliefs do not require a truth condition as they are considered a set of accepted propositions “for which there is no conventional knowledge, one that is not demonstrable and for which there is accepted disagreement” (Woods, 1996, p. 195). Accordingly, compared to knowledge, beliefs have a higher degree of subjectivity, are self-perpetuated, and their truth-value is limited to the people holding them.

On the other hand, some researchers used the terms knowledge and beliefs interchangeably based on the rationale that both constructs share an element of subjectivity. For example, in her critique of the various approaches used when evaluating teachers’ cognition, Kegan (1990) explained that her decision of using the terms beliefs and knowledge synonymously was due to the “mounting evidence that much of what a teacher knows of his or

her craft appears to be defined in highly subjective terms” (p. 421). In the literature on teaching and teacher education, many researchers have considered beliefs as representing teachers’ ‘personal practical knowledge’ (Carter, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Elbaz, 1983). Personal practical knowledge refers to the tacit beliefs, values and understandings of teachers that determine the decisions they take in the classrooms (Carter, 1990). According to Meijer, Verloop, and Beijard (2001), teachers’ personal practical knowledge can be identified through various characteristics. First, it is personal and contextual, which means that it is unique to each teacher and it is adapted to the classroom situation. Second, this kind of knowledge is tacit and based on reflection of experiences that teachers had, which they might not be able to articulate on their own. Finally, teachers’ personal practical knowledge guides teachers’ practice as to what strategies they deem necessary in the classroom.

Accordingly, the epistemological stance of teachers’ personal practical knowledge derives from the view of knowledge as, both, personal and practical. On one hand, the personal demission of knowledge refers to teachers’ beliefs and values that have grown out of past experiences and, thus, shape their understanding and present thinking. On the other hand, practical knowledge reflects the store of knowledge that teachers build as a result of their classroom experiences and the practical dilemmas they face when carrying out certain actions in the classroom. Taken together, personal practical knowledge represents teachers’ knowledge about teaching and learning that “is contextualized in experience and represents unity among that teacher’s beliefs, values, and actions” (Golombek, 1998, p. 448). In that sense, beliefs embody an overall knowledge framework that is personal and practical and thus guides teachers’ thought and actions.

Based on the above discussion of the characteristics of *beliefs* and *knowledge*, one can

draw a distinction between the two constructs due to some of the unique features of each one. Nevertheless, research has shown that the two concepts have overlapping qualities that make it hard to examine one without referring to the other. For example, knowledge is not always objective as many aspects of teachers' knowledge are situated, context-specific, and derived from teachers' classroom experiences (Richardson, 1996). In this study, I regard beliefs to be a representation of "a complex and inter-related system of personal and professional knowledge that serves as implicit theories and cognitive maps for experiencing and responding to reality. Beliefs rely on cognitive and affective components and are often tacitly held" (Murphy, 2000, p. 4). In addition, Clark and Peterson (1986) asserted that teachers' beliefs represented an important aspect of their thought processes and, thus, they considered beliefs as "the rich store of knowledge that teachers have that affect their planning and their interactive thoughts and decisions" (p. 258). Accordingly, I believe that teachers' *beliefs* and *knowledge* overlap especially when we acknowledge the contextual and personalized aspects of knowledge. By looking at Emirate teachers' beliefs as encompassing their personal practical knowledge, one can shed light on how such beliefs not only shape and organize their thinking of what it means to be a teacher, but also guide their behavior and teaching practices in the classroom.

In that sense, examining teachers' beliefs becomes essential in understanding their behavior in the classroom as "most of a teachers' professional knowledge can be regarded more accurately as belief" (Kegan 1992, p. 73). However, it is note worthy to highlight that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and behaviors is not a unilateral one, rather seems to be dialectic as teachers' behaviors do not necessarily flow from their beliefs and changes in teachers' beliefs sometimes occur as a result of change in their practices (Poulson, Avramidis, Medwell, Wray, 2001), which reflects the complex nature of the relationship between teachers'

beliefs and behaviors. In addition, the interplay between teachers' beliefs and practices is usually mediated by the context within which teaching takes place, which underscores the importance of examining the various contextual factors that might impact Emirate teachers' beliefs and the decisions they make in the classroom. Such an understanding of the intertwined relationship between beliefs, practices, and knowledge informed the discussion chapter of this dissertation.

Features and Characteristics of Beliefs

Various researchers have delineated the unique features and characteristics that make *belief* stand as a construct on its own. Abelson (1979) and Nespor (1987) delineated four distinctive characteristics of beliefs: a) existential presumptions, b) alternativity, c) affective and evaluative loading, and d) episodic structure. According to Pajares (1992), existential presumptions are:

The incontrovertible, personal truths everyone holds... they are deeply personal, rather than universal, and unaffected by persuasion. They can be formed by chance, an intense experience, or a succession of events, and they include beliefs about what oneself and others are like. (p. 309)

The feature of existential presumptions presupposed the existence/or lack of certain entities. Applying this characteristic to teaching, existential presumptions reflected the personal truths and beliefs teachers held regarding students and their ability to learn. For example, a teacher may believe that students' success in school depends largely on their cultural, linguistic, and/or economic backgrounds. Existential presumptions were, thus, regarded as taken for granted assumptions that were hard to change because they existed beyond a teacher's control or influence (Nespor, 1987). The second feature of beliefs is alternativity, which refers to people's attempts to create alternative worlds and ideal situations that contrast with reality. Such a characteristic motivates people to define new goals and tasks that could help them reach this

ideal world as for them:

It is not a matter of finding the sequence of rules to apply to a starting state to reach a goal;
it is a matter of rejecting the old rules and finding new ones, which achieve the goal state.

(Abelson, 1979, p. 357)

Nespor (1987) gave an account of a teacher who envisioned an alternative reality about an ideal classroom environment—one that should be fun and friendly—due to her bad experiences as a student. She strived to create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, however she ended up losing control of her classroom and was not able to complete many instructional tasks.

Accordingly, when teachers' beliefs represent alternative worlds of realities, they often have a great impact on how they conduct and carry out their classroom.

The third feature of beliefs is their affective and evaluative nature. Beliefs are often expressed in the form of feelings and subjective evaluation, which often shapes how people approach certain situations. In teaching, “combination of affect and evaluation can determine the energy that teachers will expend on an activity and how they will expend it” (Pajeras, 1992, 310). For example, Bryan (2003) examined the beliefs of a prospective elementary science teacher in the context of a teacher education program. The teacher valued and enjoyed the teaching of science and held positive beliefs about the discipline. Accordingly, she devoted more time to improving her science teaching by engaging in hands-on and time-consuming activities in her learning to teach process. The author argued that the teacher's affective and evaluative beliefs about the teaching of science acted as regulators of how much energy she spent on science teaching and learning. As a result, the affective and evaluative feature of beliefs has an impact on teachers' instructional practices as they guide the choice of activities they use in the classroom and the amount of effort they devote to the preparation and teaching of the subject

matter.

The final important characteristic of beliefs is their episodic structure, which referred to the collective experiences and events that took place early on in life and shaped peoples' beliefs. In teaching, Goodman (1988, as cited in Pajeras, 1992) explained, "teachers were influenced by *guiding images* from past events that created *intuitive screens* through which new information was filtered" (p. 310). Nespor (1987) further argued that such experiences and well-remembered events "produces a richly detailed episodic memory which later serves the student as an inspiration and a template for his or her own teaching practices"(p. 320). Accordingly, the episodic structure of beliefs is considered by many researchers in the field of education as a significant feature of teachers' beliefs as it represents a store of experiences and events that teachers draw from and use as a template for their work and teaching practices.

Sources of Teachers' Beliefs

Since many researchers think of beliefs as the most valuable psychological construct to teacher education (Fenstermacher, 1994; Pintrich 1990), examining the sources of teachers' beliefs is essential in order to highlight the various factors that influence teachers' understanding and conceptualization of the process of teaching and learning. According to Richardson (1996) there are three categories of experiences that influence teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning: a) personal experiences, b) experiences with schooling and instruction, c) and experiences with formal knowledge. Personal experiences refer to the images and metaphors that:

Go into the formation of world view; intellectual and virtuous dispositions; beliefs about self in relation to others; understandings of the relationship of schooling to society; and other forms of personal, familial, and cultural understandings...Ethnic and socioeconomic

background, gender, geographic location, religious upbringing, and life decisions may all affect an individual's beliefs that, in turn, affect learning to teach and teaching.

(Richardson, 1996, p. 105)

Research has shown that personal experiences are encoded in images that affect teachers' practices. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) found out that a principal's commitment and desire to involve the community in his school stemmed from his personal experience of growing up in a tightly knit community in Toronto. In a study that examined the teaching conceptions and beliefs of Chinese and western science teachers, Gao (2002) argued that the differences found between the two groups were due to their different cultural and social backgrounds. These studies imply that the personal experiences of teachers did not only shape their thinking about teaching and learning, but also influenced the decisions they make in the classrooms.

The second important and widely researched source of teachers' beliefs is their experiences with schooling and instruction. Teachers' prior experiences as students have a great impact on their beliefs and assumptions regarding how teaching should be approached. Studies that examined the influence of such experiences started in the 1970s with Lortie's (1975) introduction of the concept of 'apprenticeship of observation,' which referred to the years of observations the teachers have had as learners in their high school and college. Clark (1988) further explained the impact of the different teaching models that pre-service teachers are exposed to during their precollege education:

Students begin teacher education programs with their own ideas and beliefs about what it takes to be a successful teacher. These preconceptions are formed from thousands of hours of observations of teachers, good and bad, over the previous fifteen or so years.

Undoubtedly, students' conceptions of teaching are incomplete, for they typically see and

hear only the performance side of classroom teaching. (p. 7)

In the field of second/foreign language education, teachers' prior language learning experiences are usually formed during their apprenticeship of observation in school and as undergraduates. Grossman (1990) explained that teachers' ideas about how to teach particular topics can be traced back to their memories of how their own teachers approached these topics. These memories are sometimes difficult to overcome and, thus, prospective teachers start replicating the strategies for teaching a specific content the way they experienced it as students. Some of these strategies might not be effective anymore, which would make it a waste of time as students would be learning very little, if any, from them. The author, thus, cautioned that the danger of the apprenticeship of observation relied in the fact that it was not true apprenticeship, as the prospective teacher would be teaching only from the viewpoint of the student. Hence, the influence of prior language learning experiences of language teachers is one of the important factors in shaping teachers' practical knowledge and the way they teach their students who are learning a second/foreign language.

The final source of teachers' beliefs is their experiences with formal knowledge. Richardson (1996) explained that such experiences include "knowledge of subject matter, conceptions or beliefs about the nature of subject matter and how students learn it, and experiences with formal pedagogical knowledge that usually begin in preservice teacher education programs" (p. 106). Research showed that teachers hold strong beliefs about the nature and goals of the subject matter and the pedagogical skills required for teaching it (John, 1991; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988). In addition, teachers' experiences with formal knowledge include their understanding of how students learn the subject matter and the ways in which to address learner difficulties and misconceptions. Such knowledge is referred to as "pedagogical content

knowledge” (Shulman, 1987) and represents the means needed to communicate the subject matter to the students in a comprehensible way. Grossman’s (1990) research on English teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge showed that teachers have a variety of sources from which they construct their beliefs regarding teaching English. Some of these sources include the their past experience as learners, the disciplinary background that encompasses teachers’ subject matter knowledge, the teacher education courses they have taken in their graduate programs, and classroom experience. All of the above sources informed the development of pedagogical content knowledge of English teachers as to how to respond to students in the classrooms and the ways to interpret and resolve students’ lack of understanding of the subject matter. As a result, examining the sources of EFL teachers’ beliefs is an important step in understanding the role that prior experiences play in the process of learning to teach and the ways in which such experiences influence the development of beliefs over time and throughout teachers’ careers.

In addition to the above sources of teachers’ beliefs, Borg (2003) added the importance of the context of teaching when examining teachers’ beliefs. In his extensive review of research examining ESL/EFL teachers’ beliefs, Borg (2003) illustrated the various sources that influenced ESL teachers’ beliefs and behaviors regarding language teaching and learning. The four sources that impacted teachers’ beliefs and practices, as delineated by Borg (2003), were schooling, professional coursework, classroom practice, and the context of teaching. Such sources were believed to be critical in influencing the consistency of teachers’ beliefs and behaviors. The author explained, “Research has also shown that teachers’ cognition and practices are mutually informing, with contextual factors playing an important role in determining the extent to which teachers are able to implement instruction congruent with their cognitions” (p. 81). In order to draw a holistic view of EFL teachers’ beliefs, their use of ECART in United Arab Emirates, and

the contextual factors that shaped their beliefs and behaviors, I used Borg's (2003) framework of ESL/EFL teachers' beliefs and how it interacted with various factors as a point of reference. Below, Figure 1 represents the conceptual framework that guided the current study as it reflects the different factors that shape teachers' beliefs, such as their past teaching and learning experiences, their disciplinary knowledge, and the context in which teachers work.

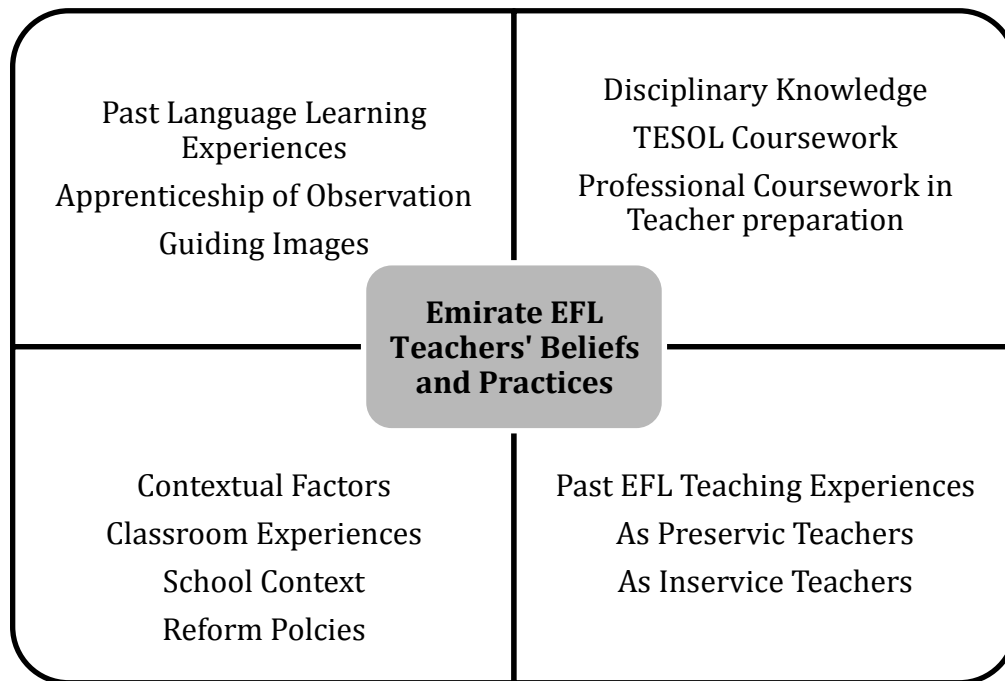


Figure 1. Different Factors Shaping Emirate Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices.

Since ESL teachers' beliefs were considered a powerful conceptual tool that influenced their behaviors in the classroom and acted as a filter through which they interpreted new information and educational reform policies, this study drew upon the conceptual framework of *beliefs* in order to examine EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in regards to the use of ECART as an alternative assessment method in the UAE classrooms. Since teachers were also influenced by context, the participating teachers in the current study were viewed as people who were in the process of changing their practices as a part of implementing the ECART reform. Accordingly, the changes in their teaching and assessment practices, in the context of reform, were also

impacting the beliefs they held prior to beginning to try to enact the reform.

Literature Review

History of Research on Teachers' Beliefs

Research regarding teachers' beliefs took off in the 1980s as a result of the growing interest in examining teachers' cognition (Nespor, 1987). "From the 1980s to the present, consistent with the shift to cognitive perspectives in education and psychology, research has examined many aspects of teachers' mental lives including their attitudes, perceptions, implicit theories, cognitions, reasoning, images, metaphors, and epistemological beliefs" (Hoy, Davis, & Pape, 1996, p.715). Prior to the 1980s, research on teaching and learning emphasized teachers' behaviors rather than teachers' thinking and beliefs, which reflected the predominant *process-product* approach to the study of education (Dunkin & Biddle 1974). Devries and Beijaard (1999) explained that such paradigm was concerned with making associations between teachers' behaviors and students' learning outcomes: "This kind of research focuses on the relationship between isolated characteristics of the behavior of teachers in the classroom (the processes of teaching) and their effect on students (the products of learning)" (p. 373). Accordingly, most of the research aimed at finding correlations between teachers' behaviors and students' learning and achievement (Devries and Beijaard, 1999). This approach to the study of teaching and learning assumed a causal relationship between teachers' behaviors and students' achievement and did not take into account teachers' underpinning mental processes and the context within which teaching and learning takes place. Freeman (2002) argued that this was also the case with research on second/foreign language teaching and learning where:

Learning to teach has been largely viewed as a matter of mastering content on the linguistic and meta-linguistic levels, practicing classroom methodologies and technique,

and learning theoretical rationales for them. This view, which derives from the process-product paradigm (see Chaudron 1988), is supported by a network of key assumptions about how to organize and teach language as knowledge. (p. 4)

Accordingly, second/foreign language teacher education regarded teachers as empty vessels waiting to be filled with language acquisition theories and pedagogical skills in order to be effective teachers who can enhance their students' language learning process.

However, by the end of the 1970s, researchers began to question the underlying assumptions of the process-product paradigm and whether looking at teachers' behaviors alone was sufficient to account for the complexity of teaching and learning. Walberg (1977) introduced the phrase 'teachers' mental lives,' which referred to the impact of teachers' cognition on their classroom practices and opened up a broad area of research that examined why teachers teach the way they do. The focus had thus changed from regarding teachers' behaviors as a discrete unit of analysis to examining the factors that shape teachers' behaviors, some of which were teachers' beliefs and prior experiences. Johnson (2009) explained this shift in educational research by highlighting that:

From an interpretative stance, researchers could no longer ignore the fact that teachers' prior experiences, their interpretations of the activities they engage in, and, most importantly, the context within which they work are extremely influential in shaping how and why teachers do what they do. (p. 9)

In that sense, examining teachers' beliefs and thinking processes was regarded as valuable as investigating their behaviors, which reflected a critical turning point in the conceptualization of teaching as a complex cognitive skill.

As a result of the expanding research that acknowledged the cognitive aspect of teaching, researchers began to view second/foreign language teaching as situated and interpretive in nature. It became clear that second language teachers develop their own theories of teaching according to their interpretation of the learning context and their assumptions and beliefs regarding what constitute good teaching. Duarte (1998) illustrated that “the interpretive and situated nature of teaching implies that teachers do not learn and implement unadulterated versions of any given methodology but develop their own understandings of the teaching-learning process” (p.618). Thus, second language teachers’ prior experiences, values and beliefs were recognized as determinant factors that shape what they do in their classrooms. In addition, second language teaching was regarded as a highly complex process that was built through experiences, which student teachers had in their classrooms as learners, and later as participants in professional programs. Such a process required teachers’ continuous interpretation of classroom events; an interpretation that is largely socially constructed and negotiated as a result of the past experiences that teachers had. Therefore, Freeman and Johnson (1998) recognized the importance of examining the prior knowledge of teachers by asserting that:

We as teacher educators now acknowledge that prior knowledge is a powerful factor in teacher learning in its own right, one that clearly deserves our attention and study if we mean to strengthen and improve, rather than simply preserve and replicate, educational practice. (p. 401)

Accordingly, identifying second/foreign language teachers’ beliefs has received substantial attention due to its role in understanding why teachers do what they do in their classrooms and the assumptions they might have about language teaching and learning.

Relationship between ESL Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Since behaviors are guided by thought, researchers recognized by the end of the 1980s that examining teachers' beliefs would help better understand their behaviors in the classrooms and also enhance preservice teacher preparation programs (Clark, 1988; Goodman, 1988). The empirical studies on the relationship between ESL teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices have largely focused on preservice teachers and whether or not teacher education programs were able to change their beliefs. The preexisting beliefs of preservice teachers are referred to in the literature as 'entering beliefs' and were found to be "highly idealistic, loosely formulated, deeply seated, and traditional" (Richardson, 2003, p. 6). Horwitz (1985) explained that the EFL preservice teachers in her methods class held preexisting beliefs that inhibited them from being receptive to new learning and teaching approaches. Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and K. Hoy (1998) studied the development of preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and concluded that once those beliefs were established, they "appear to be somewhat resistant to change" (p. 235). Peacock (2001) examined the changes in beliefs of 146 EFL preservice teachers in the City University of Hong Kong and found that they held many beliefs that were detrimental to their teaching. The author thus argued that a critical reflection on such beliefs was necessary in order to eradicate the negative influence they have on teachers' approach to EFL teaching and learning. Accordingly, Johnson (1994) concluded his study that examined ESL preservice teachers' emerging beliefs and instructional practices by highlighting the following:

Research on teachers' beliefs share three basic assumptions. First, teachers' beliefs influence both perception and judgment, which, in turn, affects what teachers say and do in classrooms. Second, teachers' beliefs play a critical role in how teachers learn to teach, that is, how they interpret new information about learning and teaching and how that

information is translated into classroom practices. And third, understanding teachers' beliefs is essential to improving teaching practices and professional teacher preparation programs. (p. 439)

Even though research on ESL preservice teachers has been abundant in the last decade, little attention has been given to inservice teachers. Fang (1996) argued that an important direction for future research was to examine the relationship between ESL inservice teachers' beliefs and practices and the impact the educational context has on shaping their beliefs. In hopes of better understanding the different ways in which ESL inservice teachers' beliefs impact their instructional practices, Johnson (1992) used surveys to examine the theoretical beliefs of thirty ESL teachers regarding L2 teaching and learning. The results of his study showed that teachers clearly held theoretical beliefs regarding three methodological approaches to language learning: skill-based (using drills and memorization to practice certain skills), rule-based (focusing on the instruction grammatical rules), and function-based (focusing on real-life communication activities and using authentic materials). In addition, teachers designed reading and writing activities that corresponded to their different theoretical beliefs, which reflected a consistency between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices. The findings of Smith's study (1996) also indicated that ESL teachers' beliefs about second language teaching and learning were consistent with their decision making in the classrooms in terms of choosing certain learning tasks that adhered to their teaching approaches (grammar instruction versus communicative language teaching). Burns (1992) examined the beliefs of six ESL teachers about writing instruction. The results of his study showed that teachers' beliefs regarding ESL writing instruction were largely based on a communicative language teaching approach and were consistent with communicative writing teaching practices.

Some studies, however, revealed that ESL teachers' stated beliefs were not always consistent with their behaviors in the classroom, which reflects the complex nature of the relationship between beliefs and behaviors (Agee, 2004; Rex & Nelson, 2004). Richards and Pennington (1998) carried out a study that examined novice EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communicative language teaching in Hong Kong. The authors found that even though teachers believed in the effectiveness of the communicative approach to second language teaching and learning, the behaviors were not consistent with their beliefs. Some of the factors that accounted for such inconsistency were the low proficiency of their students, the need to maintain order in the classrooms by avoiding communicative activities, and the pressure from their colleagues to follow a traditional teacher-centered approach that was deeply rooted and practiced in the educational culture in Hong Kong. Accordingly, the inconsistency between ESL teachers' beliefs and practice call for attention to the context and culture within which teaching takes place.

The above studies attempted to examine the relationship between ESL inservice teachers' beliefs and their teaching practices. However, this body of research has largely focused on three themes: a) teachers' theoretical beliefs regarding ESL teaching and learning, b) ESL teachers' decision making in the classroom, and c) ESL teachers' cognition in relation to specific curricular, mainly reading, writing, and grammar instruction. A missing and often ignored theme in second/foreign language education research is the impact of teachers' beliefs on their assessment practices, especially at times of educational reform. Allen (2002) argued "attempts to implement new classroom practices without considering teachers' beliefs can lead to disappointing results" (p. 519). Accordingly, research that examined the beliefs of ESL teachers regarding implementing new and alternative methods of assessment was needed.

Before embarking on a discussion of teachers' beliefs regarding the use of alternative assessments in EFL classrooms, it is important to delineate the different learning theories that have shaped the teaching, learning, and assessment of English as a foreign language. There has been a major shift in the field of English as a foreign language in terms of the perception of how languages are taught and learned. In the following section, I will discuss the three major theories of foreign language teaching and learning and highlight how they shaped the assessment process.

Learning Theories of ESL Teaching and Assessment

Traditional/Behaviorist Approach to Language Learning

A traditional approach to language teaching focuses mainly on developing students' grammatical and lexical knowledge through drills, memorization and repetition. Such an approach to language teaching was influenced by the behaviorist models of learning that spread during the early decades of the twentieth century. Hilgard (1962) explained that behaviorism rests on the premise that learning takes place as a result of the frequent formation of associations between a stimulus and a response. According to the National Research Council (2001), in the behaviorist view of learning "people are motivated by rewards, punishments, or other (mainly extrinsic) factors, they attend to relevant aspects of a situation, and this favors the formation of new associations and skills"(p. 61). As a result, reinforcement and feedback are necessary for strengthening stimulus-response associations. A behaviorist view of language learning, thus, centers on the use of methods that employ repetition, memorization, and imitation, which serve to establish habits that were later reinforced and rewarded. Richards (2006) illustrated that traditional language teaching methods relied mainly on "memorization of dialogs, question-and-answer practice, substitution drills, and various forms of guided speaking and writing practice" (p.6). In addition, behaviorists maintained that learning occurred when complex tasks were

broken down into smaller ones. Hence, learning was seen as a linear process that involves the organization of knowledge and information in a sequential and hierarchal order (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). For second language learners, this meant that knowledge of simple structures and forms of the target language had to be mastered before moving to more complex ones.

The behaviorist view of learning heavily influenced assessment. Since knowledge was analyzed in terms of distinct skills that students needed to master, tests were designed to reflect the mastery of those skills. For example, from a behaviorist perspective “various recall, completion, matching, and multiple-choice test types, along with some essay questions, fit closely with what was deemed important to learn” (Shepard, 2000, p. 5). Students’ performance on such test indicated the extent to which they master sequential and fragmented types of information. Such tests have been criticized for functioning merely as a tool that gauges students’ progress in a disconnected way. Traditional assessments, thus, focused on the product of learning rather than the process and did not uncover students’ weakness and misconceptions. In addition, Cohen (1990) argued that traditional assessment practices neglected students’ creative thinking and problem solving skills, which could have a detrimental effect on students by delaying the development of their independent thinking. In the field of second language learning, Popham (2003) criticized traditional forms of language assessment that focused on identifying the correct answer, such as the case with multiple-choice and true/false questions, because they did not require language learners to produce any language, rather they assessed their ability to recognize the right answers. Engaging students in assessments that allowed them to produce the language and use it in various contexts to demonstrate their understanding of it was, thus, needed. Operating within a behaviorist framework when assessing second language learners was regarded as inadequate for understanding what students know and can do with the

target language.

Cognitive Approach to Language Learning

Calls for the development of progressive language learning theories and assessment practices that would put emphasis on the application of language, rather than the accumulation and testing of rules have echoed in the field of second language acquisition within the past three decades. Seeing language learning as merely a process of habit formation that gets reinforced by positive feedback and weakened by negative feedback has undermined the richness of language and thought. Such an approach to language learning totally ignored the functional aspects of language, as well as the underlying complex mental processes that took place when learning a second language. Rejection of the behaviorist theory as a framework for explaining language learning started in the early 1960s. Lightbown and Spada (1999) argued that Chomsky's theory of first language acquisition—which highlighted the mental processes that governed children's knowledge of the underlying rules and structures of a language—was an attempt to show that “human language cannot be scrutinized simply in terms of observable stimuli and responses” (p. 9). The accumulation of factual information, along with the application of routine procedures that limited students' ability to integrate knowledge and impede their problem solving skills, were now seen as ineffective language learning strategies.

Accordingly, a cognitive approach to language learning emerged to address the limitations of the behaviorist approach and to emphasize the importance of the mind in the learning process. Unlike the behaviorist approach to learning, the cognitive approach placed more attention on how individuals stored, processed, and applied knowledge. Shepard (2000) explained that learning, according to cognitive theorists, was seen as “an active process of mental construction and sense making” (p. 6). The author further illustrated:

From cognitive theory we have also learned that existing knowledge structures and beliefs work to enable or impede new learning, that intelligent thought involves self-monitoring and awareness about when and how to use skills, and that “expertise” develops in a field of study as a principled and coherent way of thinking and representing problems, not just as an accumulation of information. (p. 6)

The above quotation crystallizes the principles of cognitive theory. The cognitive approach to learning has given serious consideration to the importance of students’ prior knowledge in making sense of any new and incoming information. Learners’ background knowledge and prior experiences predispose them to construct expectations about the content presented to them (Brown & Yule, 1983b). Such expectations can either enhance or impede learning, which makes it necessary to examine students’ prior knowledge and how it might impact their understanding.

While behaviorists primarily focused on teachers’ role of transmitting knowledge and assessing students, cognitive theorists emphasized students’ role in their learning and assessment processes. The cognitive approach to learning entailed that students should be aware of where they were at in their learning process and should be equipped with the necessary skills to be able to engage in self-monitoring. Learning was, thus, not solely dependent on the teacher as students were continuously involved in processing information and relating it to their own experiences. Accordingly, learners were always engaged in a process of knowledge construction that was enhanced through the interactions between the teacher and the students.

Constructivist Approach to Language Learning

The important role that background knowledge and prior experiences played in students’ learning has given way to the emergence of the constructivist theory, which had in turn a great impact on second language teaching practices. Regan (1999) illustrated that a number of

academic disciplines - including mathematics, science, and second language - have adopted the constructivist view of learning. According to Hackmann (2004), the constructivist theory is based on the premise that individuals are always engaged in a process of knowledge construction by “creating knowledge from their existing knowledge base, beliefs, and personal experiences” (p. 697). In this theory, students’ background knowledge, experiences and beliefs were seen as fundamental elements in their advancement. Increasing students’ engagement in class and encouraging their involvement in the learning process was not likely to take place in a teacher-centered environment and, hence, constructivist theorists called for a student-centered approach to learning. Adopting a constructivist approach to teaching and learning entailed a shift in the roles teachers and students play in the classroom as teachers take up the role of becoming learning facilitators and thus “acting as a ‘guide on the side’ instead of a ‘sage on the stage’” (Hackmann, 2004, p. 698). Such a role allows learners to be active participants in the classroom and gives them a chance to construct and communicate meaning drawn from their own experiences.

Traditional teaching practices were deemed inappropriate in the face of the growing advances in learning theories. Accordingly, a change in language pedagogical practices was necessary. Teaching practices that demanded repetition and memorization needed to be replaced with activities that required interaction and placed more emphasis on communication. A teaching method known as ‘communicative language teaching’ developed in response to the cognitive and constructivist views of learning. Widdowson (1978) introduced the idea of communicative language teaching by arguing that language learners should acquire not only the knowledge of grammar and rules but also the ability to communicate effectively in the target language. The author explains, “We do not only learn how to compose and comprehend correct sentences as

isolated linguistic units of random occurrence; but also how to use sentences appropriately to achieve communicative purposes”(p. 14). Focusing merely on the acquisition of linguistic skills and grammatical structures takes away from the principal function of language in acting as a communication tool.

Richards (2006) pointed out that one way of understanding communicative language teaching was by delineating the principles that guided it. The main feature of the communicative language teaching method was its emphasis on the teaching of communicative competence, rather than grammatical competence. In addition, the communicative language teaching viewed language learning as a process of creating meaningful interactions among interlocutors, rather than, a process of mechanical habit formation. As previously mentioned, the kinds of activities that fulfilled the principles of communicative language teaching were inherently different, in terms of their structure and purpose, from those carried out in the traditional language classrooms. Finally, the communicative language teaching method proposed new roles for teachers and students. In the communicative teaching approach, teachers act as facilitators of language learning which increases students’ sense of responsibility toward their language learning process.

Since communicative language teaching emphasized learners’ ability to use the target language appropriately in different contexts and across various situations, classroom assessments had to reflect language competences that were different from those advocated by the traditional approaches to language teaching. In the communicative approach to teaching, language proficiency is defined in terms of "the student's ability to communicate in an informal social setting as well as the ability to function in a more formal, cognitively demanding academic setting" (Hamayan, Kwiat, & Perlman, 1985, p. 21.), rather than learners’ ability to master and

manipulate different grammatical forms. In general, advances in the educational field—in terms of progressive learning theories, teaching methods, and assessment practices—have resulted in a movement away from traditional assessments toward alternative assessments. Birenbaum and Dochy (1996) explained that the past few years have witnessed a shift from the ‘culture of testing’ toward the ‘culture of assessment.’ The authors described the major changes in the contemporary view of assessment by explaining that:

A strong emphasis is now put on integrating assessment and instruction, on assessing process rather than just products and on evaluating individual progress relative to each student’s starting point. The position of the student with regard to the evaluation process has also been changing from that of a passive, powerless, often oppressed subject who is mystified by the process, to that of an active participant who shares responsibility in the process, practices self evaluation, reflection and collaboration and conducts a continuous dialogue with the teacher. (p.xiii)

Expanding more on the notion of the changing culture of assessment, Shepard (2000) clarified that the content and form of classroom assessments should change in order to capture the subject matter standards and learning goals. This change will result in assessment being more connected to instruction. However, the author argued, “improving the content of assessments is important but not sufficient to ensure that assessment will be used to enhance learning” (p. 10). What is needed is “the culture of classrooms be shifted so that students no longer feign competence or work to perform well on the test as an end separate from real learning” (p. 10). When assessment practices become more informative and less judgmental, teachers as well as students will be able to regard assessment as part of the learning process. Accordingly, the integration of assessment and instruction was crucial in changing the assessment culture of the

classroom.

It is thus clear that the change in the assessment landscape over the past two decades has resulted in a reexamination of the form and function of teachers' assessment practices. Whereas traditional assessment consisted mainly of exercises, such as multiple choice, true and false and fill in the blank that "occurred at the end of instruction ... and was a symbol of completion and a comment on the adequacy of learning" (Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2002, p. 76), the current view of assessment called for the use of alternative assessment practices that reflect the ongoing growth of students and track their performance over time. Such assessment practices functioned as a tool to enhance students' learning and progress. In this view, assessment was also regarded as an interactive process where teachers and students engaged in the monitoring of students' learning.

Alternative Assessments

The definition of alternative assessment has been continuously developing according to its goals and purposes. For example, an early definition of alternative assessment was introduced by Pierce and O'Malley (1992) in which alternative assessment was described as "any method of finding out what a student knows or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction, and is not a standardized or traditional test" (p. 2). In that sense alternative assessments were different from the traditional ones in the way they reflected students' performance. Alternative assessments provided a picture of students' progress over time, whereas traditional assessments only reflected students' performance on a single occasion. By being able to assess students' learning progress, alternative assessments were thus linked to instruction, as teachers were better able to identify students' weakness and strengths and can modify their instruction accordingly. Hamayan (1995) added that alternative assessment "refers

to procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of instruction and can be easily incorporated into the daily activities of the school or classroom” (p. 213). According to Huerta-Macias (1995) the main goal of alternative assessments was “to gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing real-life tasks in a particular domain” (p. 9). Unlike traditional assessments that often measured students’ ability to memorize and recall information, alternative assessments focused on higher-order thinking skills, which required students to generate, synthesis and analyze information. When using alternative assessments, teachers engage students in simulated real-life tasks in order to assess their ability to transfer their knowledge and skills to real world contexts. Alderson and Banerjee (2001) gave a more detailed definition of alternative assessments by explaining:

‘Alternative assessment’ is usually taken to mean assessment procedures which are less formal than traditional testing, which are gathered over a period of time rather than being taken at one point in time, which are usually formative rather than summative in function, are often low-stakes in terms of consequences, and are claimed to have beneficial washback effects (p. 228)

The above definition highlights two important advantages of alternative assessments. The first one is that alternative assessments should be used to serve formative purposes. Since alternative assessments allow teachers to monitor students’ progress overtime, feedback becomes an integral part of the assessment process. Tsagari (2004) illustrated that the ongoing nature of alternative assessments help teachers form a “*feedback loop* that allows classroom teachers to monitor and modify instruction continually in response to results of student assessment” (p. 8). The second crucial advantage of alternative assessments is that they have a positive washback effect. According to Hughes (2003), washback refers to “the effect of testing on teaching and

learning’’ (p. 1) and the extent to which the testing and assessment practices have a positive and/or negative impact on teachers’ instruction and students’ learning. Alternative assessment can have a positive washback effect on teaching as it allows teachers to align their instruction and assessment practices through gathering and generating information regarding students’ learning progress. Such information is used to help teachers modify their instruction to better suit their students’ needs. In addition, alternative assessment can also have a positive washback effect on students as they get a chance to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in various authentic contexts and, thus, receive formative feedback regarding their strengths and weaknesses. Accordingly, all of the above definitions reflected the nature and benefits of alternative assessments in that they were ongoing, authentic, linked to instruction, and have a positive impact on students’ learning progress.

Major Characteristics and Features

It is important to outline the general characteristics of alternative assessment and the ways in which its principles make it inherently different from the traditional approaches to classroom assessment. Aschbacher (1991, p. 1) listed five common characteristics that best describe the form and content of alternative assessment:

1. In alternative assessments, “students perform, create, or do something that requires higher-level thinking or problem solving skills (not just one right answer)” (p. 1). Hence, it is important that teachers give students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning by generating ideas and engaging in performance-based tasks, rather than choosing the right response from a set of items.
2. Alternative assessments involve tasks that are “meaningful, challenging, engaging instructional activities” (p. 1). The purpose of alternative assessments is not only to

assess learning, but also to advance it. Accordingly, such assessments shouldn't take time away from instruction and could be easily integrated with regular classroom activities.

3. In alternative assessments, "tasks are set in a real-world context or close simulation" (p. 1). Therefore, alternative assessments should employ authentic tasks in order to maximize learning and examine student's application of knowledge in real life-like situations. In addition, when students engage in meaningful tasks that they might encounter outside of the classroom, their interest in the subject matter develops as they can connect the classroom to real-world contexts.
4. Alternative assessments focus on process as well as product. Alternative assessment is an ongoing process that requires students to produce, revise, assess, and refine their work. Accordingly, alternative assessment does not only give information about a students' performance level in a subject matter but also reflects many aspects about students' learning process. For example, Genesee and Upshur (1996) explain that, unlike traditional assessment, alternative assessment practices can reveal information about the factors that affect students' learning and achievement, such learning strategies (through students' journals) and social behavior (as reflected through students' collaboration with their classmates).
5. Alternative Assessments ensure that "the criteria and standards for performance are public and known in advance" (p. 1). One of the fundamental features of alternative assessment is its emphasis on the involvement of students in the assessment process. Standards, learning goals and assessment criteria are shared with the students so that they know what constitutes quality performance and how to track their learning

progress towards those goals and standards.

Characteristics of Alternative Assessment in the ESL Classroom

In his review of the major features of alternative assessments, Hamayan (1995) described five gains that alternative assessment practices offer second language learners. Some of these gains reflected the characteristics that were mentioned in Aschbacher (1991) study and others were more specific to second language learning. For example, like Aschbacher (1991), the author talked about the authenticity of the tasks provided in the alternative assessments and its impact on students' learning. Characteristics that were more specific to second language learning included the choice of tasks that were appropriate for students coming from diverse backgrounds and the holistic, rather than the disconnected view of language. In addition, by giving preference to monitoring students' learning process, alternative assessments offered second language teachers a chance to examine their students' performance and language skills in other content areas. According to Hamayan (1995), there are five advantages that alternative assessments offered second language learning and teaching:

1. "Proximity to actual language use and performance" (p. 213). Alternative assessments are based on the use of authentic activities that simulate real-life situations, which is of great benefit to second language learners. The author explains that in the second language classroom, alternative assessment practices are based on "activities that have authentic communicative function rather than ones with little or no intrinsic communicative value" (p.213). Such use of authentic and communicative assessment activities is in congruent with the larger communicative approach to language learning and teaching, which enhances the integration of instruction and assessment.
2. "A holistic view of language" (p. 214). Alternative assessment takes into account a

more holistic view of learners where their social and academic contexts are taken into consideration when designing assessment practices. The author argues, “through alternative assessment approaches, language can be assessment not so much as structure but rather as a tool for communication and self-expression” (p. 214).

Accordingly, by using alternative assessment, the four skills of language learning – listening, speaking, reading and writing — can be assessed as a whole integrated system rather than a disconnected one.

3. “An integrative view of learning” (p. 214). Since alternative assessment practices are intended to capture students’ various skills and abilities, the author explains that alternative assessment could also be used not only to measure second language learners’ proficiency, but also their language proficiency in the context of other subject matter. For example, teachers could engage students in assessment activities that would reflect their ability to communicate in areas of science and/or social studies.
4. “Developmental appropriateness” (p. 215). One of the main goals of alternative assessment is to “set expectations that are appropriate within the cognitive, social, and academic development of the learner” (p. 215). Such a characteristic is valuable for ESL learners who come from diverse cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds.
5. “Multiple Referencing” (p. 215). When assessing ESL students’ language proficiency, teachers should obtain information about the learners from various sources. The author gives an example of a typical portfolio that teachers use when evaluating ESL students’ language proficiency. Such portfolios should not be limited to the inclusion of writing samples, and scores from standardized tests, but should also include teachers’ observation notes and rating of students’ work in subject matter areas where they use

English as medium of instruction.

Combined, the characteristics listed by Aschbacher (1991) and Hamayan (1995) showed that alternative assessment offered a new approach to classroom-based assessment that is in line with the current ESL communicative language learning theories and teaching methods. It was not, however, a mirror of what the experience of the teachers in my study knew and believed prior to the introduction of ECART.

ESL Teachers' Beliefs and Assessment Practices

A number of studies—in different subject matter—have indicated a strong relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom assessment practices. Wilson and Wineburg (1993) conducted a study that examined the different assessment approaches of history teachers. The authors found out that teachers' assessments practices varied as a result of their beliefs regarding the teaching and learning of history, the nature of historical knowledge, and the importance of historical inquiry. Johnson, Baker, Malone, and Michelson (1995) examined the beliefs of twenty-five elementary language art teachers regarding their classroom-based assessments. The results of this study showed that teachers differed in their beliefs regarding the purposes of assessments and, thus, used different assessment strategies. In addition, the teachers explained that their teaching and assessment practices were largely influenced by the accountability system that was externally forced on them. Delanshere and Jones (1999) carried out a study that examined high school teachers' beliefs regarding assessment in mathematics. The result of this study showed that teachers' assessment practices were influenced by their views of the curriculum, their beliefs regarding teaching and learning, and their understanding of the purposes and functions of assessments. Thomas and Oldfather (1997) also pointed out that assumptions

and beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how it was constructed has a great impact on teachers' assessment practices. The authors eloquently explained:

If one believes knowledge is based on a static, objective reality that is gradually discovered over time, one develops assessment practices that assess students in their progress toward the acquisition of known knowledge possessed and transmitted by the teacher...If, on the other hand, one believes knowledge is dynamic, socially constructed, and constantly changing over time, one does not expect all students to acquire exactly the same knowledge. Multiple perspectives and multiple interpretations will be valued.

(p.113)

Accordingly, teachers' beliefs influenced their assessment practices and directed the choices they made when selecting activities and tasks for assessment purposes.

In the field of foreign language teaching, there is a lack of research that addresses teachers' perceptions and beliefs regarding the use of alternative assessments in the EFL context (Chan, 2008). Bliem and Davinroy (1997) explained, "existing research on teachers' beliefs and knowledge about instruction has treated assessment either not at all or superficially" (p. 1). Pelly and Allison (2000) surveyed fifty-eight EFL primary school teachers in Singapore regarding different forms of assessment. The results of this study indicated that teachers were aware of the prevailing culture of testing in Singapore and were not against it. Cumming (2001) interviewed forty-eight ESL university instructors regarding their writing assessment practices and found that teachers' assessments of students' work depended on the purposes of the course (general English course versus English for specific purposes course). Lu (2003) examined the beliefs and assessment practices of two EFL university instructors in Taiwan. The results of his study revealed some inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and actual assessment practices in the

classroom. Research that examined ESL teachers' beliefs and use of assessment has focused so far on limited educational contexts (university-level) and certain language skills (mainly writing). In addition, the above studies did not look at alternative assessment per se, rather they examined EFL teachers' beliefs regarding their assessment practices in general.

Since teachers' beliefs influence their behaviors in the classroom, one could argue that, in the context of United Arab Emirates, implementing assessment reform strategies without considering EFL teachers' beliefs might not lead to the intended and desired outcomes such reform is seeking. As Bliem and Davinroy (1997) asserted:

The precise way in which teachers implement new forms of assessment and whether the reform succeeds or fails will depend largely on their beliefs and knowledge regarding measurement and its relation to instruction. Thus, if researchers aim to improve education by altering assessment practices, we must understand the belief system underlying teachers' ways of evaluating their students' learning. (p. 1)

Accordingly, research that examined EFL teachers' existing beliefs regarding the use of alternative ways of assessments in United Arab Emirates was needed in order to ensure the alignment between teachers' instructional and assessment practices and the larger assessment reform movement the UAE educational system is currently undergoing.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

Since the purpose of this study was to examine Emirate teachers' beliefs and use of ECART, as an alternative assessment in EFL classrooms in United Arab Emirates, I used a qualitative research methodology, specifically a multiple case study design. Research that examined teachers' beliefs regarding assessments has often relied on the use of questionnaires and rating scales to determine the relationship between teachers' beliefs and other variables such as years of experience, subject matter, and grade levels (Brown, 2004; Hargreaves, 2005; McNair et al, 2003). Munby (1984) explained that the drawback of using such quantitative research methods, when examining the underlying beliefs of teachers, was that the measuring items were thought of by researchers, rather than the teachers. Such controlled instruments did not give voice to the teachers to reflect on their own beliefs and experiences. In addition, questionnaires and rating scales usually fail to capture the contextual factors that impact teachers' beliefs and practices. Pajeras (1992) highlighted that understanding teachers' beliefs:

Requires making inferences about individuals' underlying states, inferences fraught with difficulty because individuals are often unable or unwilling, for many reasons, to accurately represent their beliefs. For this reason, beliefs cannot be directly observed or measured but must be inferred from what people say, intend, and do. (p. 314)

For that reason, adopting a qualitative research methodology in the present study was appropriate as it provided an in-depth understanding of the various factors that shaped teachers' beliefs and impacted their practices. Guba (1990) explained that qualitative research helps researchers examine the subjective and changing realities, which “exist in the form of multiple mental

constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the person who holds them” (p. 27). Accordingly, using a qualitative research approach to examine EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices helped me unravel the way Emirate teachers made sense of their own experiences and how their beliefs and perspectives were embedded within the context of UAE.

Case Study Research

The current study focused on understanding the various ways in which EFL teachers perceived and implemented ECART in the UAE classroom. In order to examine how different EFL teachers interpret, view, and use alternative assessments in the classroom, a multiple case study design was used “in which multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue” (Creswell, 2005, p. 439). Case studies allow researchers to conduct an in-depth description and analysis of a phenomenon that is bounded by time and space (Creswell, 1998). In addition, a case study design is useful in providing answers to “what” and “how” research questions (Creswell, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), a case is a “thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p.27) and a case study is “a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (p. 41). A case study approach is appropriate when the researcher intends to investigate “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Researchers using a case study methodology cannot divorce the phenomenon under study from the context within which it occurs. Accordingly, in the current study, EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding the use of alternative assessments were examined in relation to the educational reform context that is currently taking place in United Arab Emirates.

Case studies range from a single case study to a number of cases that are referred to as multiple/collective case studies. Yin (2003) promoted the use of multiple case studies and argued “even if you can only do a “two-case” case study, your chances of doing a good case will be better than using a single-case design” (p. 53). Stake (2000) explained that a collective case study is one that consists of several cases in order to examine a "phenomenon, population, or general condition" (p. 437). Collective case studies could be conducted in one setting or could come from multiple sites (Harling, 2002). There are various categories of case studies, such as exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive (Yin, 2003). The current study is categorized as an exploratory collective case study since little is known about EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding alternative assessments in United Arab Emirates. The unit of analysis in this exploratory collective case study was a group of EFL teachers who were using an alternative assessment method (ECART) in the language classrooms in UAE.

Sampling and Selection Criteria

Sample size is often determined by the style of research, i.e., qualitative versus quantitative research. When conducting collective case studies, qualitative researchers have agreed that the larger the number of cases, the greater the lack of depth in any single case. In his seminal work on qualitative research designs, Creswell (1998) explained this agreed upon stance among qualitative researchers—in terms of the small sample size in collective case studies—by arguing:

When a researcher chooses multiple cases, the issue becomes “How many?”—which I cannot answer except to indicate the lack of depth issue. Typically, however, the researcher chooses no more than four cases. What motivates the research to consider a large number of cases is the idea of *generalizability*, a term that holds little meaning for

most qualitative researchers. (p. 63)

Accordingly, the data for this study was collected from four EFL Emirate teachers in AlAin in United Arab Emirates. I chose to conduct the study in two school settings in order to examine the impact of context on teachers' beliefs. The participants were chosen through purposeful, rather than random sampling. Purposeful selection of participants is commonly used in qualitative research and is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2001, p. 60). Accordingly, Patton (1990) argued that purposeful selection allowed researchers to "select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 169). Some considerations for choosing the target participants were:

- Grade level: Participants were chosen from grade 6 since this was the grade where the ECART alternative assessment tool was first introduced to the students. Accordingly, students' receptiveness to such a new assessment method had an impact on teachers' beliefs and the way they approach alternative assessments.
- Country of origin: My participants included Emirate nationals only in order to minimize the impact of culture on their beliefs. In addition, since the country is promoting a policy of Emiratization of the teaching force—where the nationalization of teaching staff is scheduled to reach 90 percent by 2020 (Al-Abed, Vine, & Hellyer, 2005)—it was important to focus on the national teachers who were gradually replacing the expatriate ones.

Data Collection

The data collection took two months starting from mid-March 2013. Multiple sources of information were collected in the current study. Yin (1994) explained, "the case study's unique

strength is its ability to deal with full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (p. 8). In order to ensure that my study adequately captured EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding alternative assessments in UAE, various data sources were collected through interviews, classroom observations, teaching artifacts and lesson plans, policy documents, audio-recorded class discourse. Through the use of a variety of data sources, I hoped to be able to triangulate the data in such a way that would enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Interviews. Teachers participated in four semi-structured interviews, which took about 60 minutes each (see Appendix A). In addition to acting as an icebreaker, the purpose of the first interview was to establish a profile of teachers’ educational background, their personal experiences as L2 students and teachers (including their experiences with assessment methods), and their professional background. The answers to this interview highlighted teachers’ beliefs regarding L2 learning, teaching, and assessment and also helped me in identifying the different factors that shaped teachers’ beliefs. The second interview focused on teachers’ beliefs regarding the use, effectiveness, and drawbacks of the ECART. The third and fourth interviews took place after classroom observations and served to explore the consistency/inconsistency of teachers’ reported beliefs and their actual instructional and assessment practices. These interviews were conducted within a day after each classroom observation where teachers were presented with teaching episodes so as to make sure they did not have a hard time remembering what they did and the decisions they made in the classroom. In addition, these interviews helped me to elicit information regarding the impact of context—classroom, curriculum and instructional materials, professional development, social norms—on teachers’ assessment practices. Semi-structured interviews are useful when seeking in depth knowledge about participants’ experiences as they

allow them to share their perspectives and beliefs on their own terms; since the interviewer is not attempting to have full control over the interview. Abernethy, Chua, Luckett and Selto (1999) advocate the use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method by arguing:

Semi-structured interviews are a particularly useful means of eliciting information in circumstances where the researcher is keen to secure the actors' view of the world or where extant research does not permit either tight concept definition...or hypothesis development. (p.5)

Bertrand and Hughes (2005) explained that semi-structured interviews often start with a basic checklist of areas to be covered in the interview in the form of questions. Then, the interviewer guides the interview while permitting the various aspects of the subject under investigation to arise naturally. Such format is likely to result in a wide variety of responses due to its flexibility and the opportunity it provides for follow-up questions. In addition, semi-structured interviews encourage participants to engage in a free and open discussion, which allow them to share their experiences, knowledge, and beliefs about the interview topics, thereby ensuring both adequate data collection and focus on the factors and dimensions related to the study.

Classroom observations. I observed five classes for each teacher, however I chose to transcribe and analyze only three classes that best reflected teachers' instructional and assessment practices in the context of the ECART. I sought teachers' insight regarding which classes to observe, preferably ones that were tied together with a specific theme in order to facilitate discussions regarding teachers' instructional and assessment practices of specific units of the ECART. Classroom observations, thus, informed my interviews as they assisted me in examining the extent to which teachers' behaviors and classroom assessment practices were

reflective of their reported beliefs about EFL teaching and assessment. In addition, classroom observations helped me in opening up discussions with teachers regarding the impact of the educational context on their implementation of the ECART in their language classrooms. In order to ensure the effectiveness of classroom observations, the following guidelines were employed:

- *Pre-observation orientation session*: Before classroom observations, Richards and Lockhart (1994) explained that it was important to meet with the teachers in order to discuss the nature of the class observed and the materials used. In the current study, I made sure to briefly discuss with the teachers the goals of the lessons observed and the assessment procedures they planned to carry out.
- *Focused classroom observation*: It is important to identify a focus for classroom observation because “the value of the observation is increased if the observer knows what to look for” (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 24). Since the purpose of the interviews was to explore EFL teachers’ beliefs regarding the ECART—as an example of an alternative assessment method—my classroom observations focused on the extent to which teachers’ assessment practices reflected an understanding of the guiding principles and features of alternative assessments.
- *Field notes*: Drew, Hardman, and Hosp (2008) illustrated that during classroom observation, the researcher should take in-depth field notes that include a “description of the setting, events, statements, and actions observed; a record of affective aspects of the observation, including observer responses and attitudes; and reflections and preliminary sense making” (p. 198). For example, in the current study, one of the aspects that my field notes focused on was a description of the classroom setting (an example would be

the extent to which the classroom setting allowed for a learner-centered environment, which enhanced learners' engagement with the assessment process).

A total of 20 hours of instructional time was observed and recorded. There are various tools for collecting data through classroom observation, some of which are note taking, audio recording, and video recording (Griffie, 2005a, 2005b). In this study, audio recording and note taking were used to collect data in the classrooms. Note taking is an important data collection tool in classroom observation as it reflects "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.107). In addition to note taking, audio recording was used to mainly compensate for any information that I missed during the note taking process.

In the current study, classroom observations provided a context for discussions about teachers' assessment practices, the extent to which they were consistent and/or inconsistent with their beliefs, and how the context impacted their practices. In addition, field notes from my observations helped me develop follow up and clarification questions for the interviews that could have gone unnoticed otherwise. Observations also enhanced my data analysis, as I was able to compare across different types of data sources, which further supported my interpretation of EFL teachers' assessment beliefs and practices in UAE. Supplementing interviews with classroom observations is critical in qualitative research as they "provide a check on what is reported in interviews" (Patton, 2002, p. 306). In other words, classroom observations assisted me in verifying whether the participants' reported beliefs regarding alternative assessments match their actual teaching practices. My role in the classroom was that of an *observer as participant* (Glesne, 2006). Mertler (2008) explained the role of the researcher as an *observer as a participant*, "Typically, in this role, the researcher is seated in the back of a classroom, for

example, simply observing and taking notes. The researcher does not teach, offer advice, provide assistance, speak, answer questions, or participate in any other way” (p. 81). Accordingly, during my observation, I did not take part in any classroom activities or interfere in any way with teachers’ instruction.

Artifacts. An additional data source would be the collection of different artifacts, such as lesson plans and handouts, assessment materials, and policy documents. These artifacts were used in order to complement the information gathered from interviews and classroom observations. In addition, I used these artifacts to start conversations with the participants during the interviews and gave them a chance to comment on them and express how they believed such artifacts represented their beliefs about assessments or impacted their practices.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the coding and analysis of data is considered a continuous process that occurs throughout the data collection phase (Glesne, 2006). Preliminary data analysis, which takes place during the data collection process, is considered an important stage in analyzing qualitative data. Grbich (2007) argued that conducting preliminary analysis of qualitative data was necessary, as it did not only assist researchers in capturing patterns in the data that could go otherwise unnoticed, but also alerted them to unanticipated problems and areas that may require further examination. Accordingly, preliminary analysis began with the first interview and observation that I conducted, which enhanced my subsequent data collection process by refining my interview questions and what I was looking for in the classroom observations. For example, in the first interview teachers talked about what it meant for them to be a “good” English teacher. Following this lead of teachers’ reflection, I realized that the teachers in my study held conceptions of a “good” teacher that went back to the teachers they had as past language

learners. Such interpretation helped me ask them further questions regarding the characteristics of their past teachers and how they used to teach and assess students.

In addition, it became obvious in the classroom observations that teachers replicated many of the practices their past teachers used to carry out. For example, one of the participants indicated that her English language teacher used to require students to memorize passages of composition and write them in the exam. She believed that such strategy helped her, as a language learner, to memorize the correct use of certain language structure. Accordingly, she replicated this strategy with her students, as she believed it would enhance their acquisition of certain grammatical features. This example shows the interaction between the research questions and interests I brought to the interviews and the ways that responses helped to shape my subsequent data collection decisions.

The data generated from the interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts for each teacher was initially analyzed as a separate set. Within the data set for each teacher, I looked across types of data for evidence that warrant the assertions and interpretations I was developing. However, as these developed, I also began a cross-case analysis, by looking at patterns, similarities, surprises, and contrasts across the four teachers' experiences. In multiple/collective case studies, Stake (2006) explained "the researchers have an obligation to provide interpretation across the cases" (p. 39).

A cross-case analysis of the four teachers was conducted to compare and contrast their beliefs and practices regarding the use of ECART. Cross-case analysis has enriched my interpretation of the data as it enabled me to delineate the common factors that contributed to teachers' receptiveness to English language reform in UAE. In addition, it helped me make sense of the difference and similarities among the cases, identify the common beliefs and discrepancies

among teachers, explore the relationship that existed among them, and examine how the context of school accounted for some differences in how teachers experienced the ECART reform. Accordingly, the results of the current study are reported in terms of themes that were developed as a result of a combination of within and across case analysis of participants. Organizing my findings in thematic chapters (see chapter 4-7) helped draw a picture of the lived experiences and the common challenges that Emirate teachers faced in the context of English reform in UAE.

The approaches used in analyzing qualitative data are diverse and there is no one right way of doing it (Anfara, Brown, and Mangione, 2002). Creswell (2005) explained, “Unquestionably, there is not one single way to analyze qualitative data-it is an eclectic process in which you try to make sense of the information. Thus, the approaches to data analysis espoused by qualitative writers will vary considerably” (p. 258). In the current study, I used the *constant comparative analysis* method. Constant comparative analysis is considered one of the most extensively employed analytical tools in qualitative educational research (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) described this method by highlighting:

The basic strategy of the constant comparative method is to do just what its name suggests—constant comparison of piece data. The researchers begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instance. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated. (p. 159)

Even though this method of data analysis was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and aimed at building grounded theory, it is currently widely used by researchers as a tool of analysis in qualitative research whether or not they are seeking to build substantive theory

(Merriam, 1998). The constant comparative method is recognized as one of the most effective means of qualitative content analysis since “at the heart of this method is the continuous comparison of incidents, respondents’ remarks, and so on, with each other” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). Defining the unit of data that would be used when coding is one of the fundamental decisions qualitative researchers should make early on in the data analysis process. Merriam (1998) explained that the unit of data in the constant comparative analysis “can be as small as a word a participant uses to describe a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident” (p. 179). Yet, Merriam (1998) highlighted that even though the researcher could assign a code to a text chunk of any size, the unit of data must meet two criteria: a) it should be heuristic in the sense that it reveals “information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information” (p.179) and b) it should stand by itself, “that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 345 as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 179-178). The unit of data in the current study was words and assertions that reflected teachers’ beliefs whether directly or indirectly, such as “I believe/I don’t believe” “I think/I don’t think” “I like/I dislike” and “I feel.”

The constant comparative method is mainly inductive as it allows for major themes and categories to emerge from the continuous examination and comparison of the raw data. In order to construct categories, three steps were taken to code the interview transcripts, classroom observations, and artifacts: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Lichtman (2012) gave a detailed explanation of the above three steps:

Open coding is the first step—raw data are examined to begin to develop names and categories. Axial coding is the second step of the constant comparative method. Moving

from the open codes, the researcher relates the initial codes to one another. Finally, the researcher applies selective coding in which choices are made regarding the most important codes. (p. 258)

After completing the coding process, I read through my codes, compare them with each other and construct tentative categories “that are then compared to each other and to other instances” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). For example, some codes were “image of teacher” and “teachers as language learners.” I grouped these codes in a category titled “past language learning experiences,” which later evolved to the theme of “apprenticeship of observation.”

This process of data analysis was not linear; rather it went through several cycles in order to ensure the accuracy and consistency of all categories. Mellon (1990) asserted, “By constant comparison of all current incidents in a category, the researcher begins to develop ideas about the category, its dimensions and limitations, and its relationship to other categories” (p.72). The construction of categories would lead to the final stage of my data analysis, which is the formulation of patterns and themes that would illuminate the relationship among the different categories. Merriam (1998) eloquently referred to the importance of this stage by arguing:

Nevertheless, data often seem to beg for continued analysis past the formation of categories. A key here is when the researcher knows that the category scheme does not tell the whole story—that there is more to be understood about the phenomenon. This often leads to trying to link the conceptual elements—the categories—together in some meaningful way. (p. 188)

Using the constant comparative analysis method to interpret and analyze the data in the present study was appropriate; as it did not only allow me to examine the beliefs and use of alternative assessment by each teacher separately, but also assisted me in conducting a cross-case analysis

of the four teachers in order to identify similarities and differences in their beliefs and practices.

Verification Procedures

Ensuring the quality and authenticity of research findings is an important aspect of qualitative research. The following steps were taken in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the current study:

- Internal Validity: in qualitative research, internal validity refers to “how research findings match reality” (Merriam, 1998, p. 201). In this study, the internal validity was dealt with through:
 - Triangulation: Data from different sources, such as interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were collected and compared. By juxtaposing different perspectives and data sources, triangulation allows qualitative researchers to “make visible the often invisible principles of practice that guide members' actions, interactions, production of artifacts, and construction of events and activity of everyday life” (Green, Dixon, & Zaharlick, p. 208).
 - Persistent observation: In qualitative research, time spent with the participants and in the field of study is of great importance. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, “if prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth” (p. 304). Accordingly, I spent two months in the two sites where the data was collected in order to have a better understanding of my participants’ views and identify the various factors that were relevant to my research purposes.
 - Member checking: Member checking was used to allow participants to review the original transcripts in order to delete/change any parts they believed did not reflect the intended meaning of what they want to convey.

- Peer debriefing: Peer debriefing involves extended discussions by the researcher to a person who is unrelated to the study in order to explore the plausibility of the analysis and findings. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) described a peer debriefer as "a disinterested colleague who engages in discussions of the researchers preliminary analyses and next methodological strategies in an emergent design. These discussions make more explicit the tacit knowledge that the researcher has acquired" (p. 408). Accordingly, asked one of my colleagues to be my peer debriefer in order to provide me with constructive feedback regarding my study analysis and results.
- External Validity: In quantitative research, external validity deals with the applicability of the findings of one study to other contexts or with other subjects, which is referred to as the generalizability of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (1998) explained that the concept of generalizability is not applicable to qualitative research as “ a single case or small nonrandom sample is selected precisely *because* the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (p. 208). Accordingly, qualitative researchers have used the concept of transferability, rather than generalizability, to refer to the extent to which the readers find insights from the study that could match their situations and, thus, be transferable to their setting or context. Walker (1980) referred to this understanding of the transferability of the findings of qualitative research by highlighting, “it’s the reader who has to ask, what is there in this study that I can apply to my own situation, and what clearly does not apply?” (p. 34). In order to enhance the transferability of the results of qualitative research, Merriam (1998) suggested that researchers should provide a rich thick description of the

phenomenon under study. By doing so, researchers “enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, P. 316). Accordingly, in order to ensure the external validity of the current study, I provided a rich description about the different beliefs EFL teachers held in regards to English teaching, learning, and assessment, including the use of ECART in UAE, how their beliefs impact their assessment practices, and the various ways in which the educational context shaped their beliefs and practices.

- Reliability: In quantitative research, reliability refers to the extent to which the results of one study could be replicated. However, in qualitative research the replication of a study does not make sense due to the deep contextualization of the phenomenon under study and the multiple and changing realities of the experiences of participants. Merriam (1998) explicated the difficulty of applying the traditional notion of reliability to qualitative research:

Because what is being studied in education is assumed to be influx, multifaceted, and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at getting it, and because the emergent design of a qualitative case study precludes a priori controls, achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible. (p. 206)

In qualitative research, the concept of reliability is approximated through concepts of *dependability* or *consistency* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By ensuring the dependability or consistency of the findings of a qualitative study, “rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable” (p. 206). The dependability of qualitative

research can be ensured through the examination of the researcher's position and biases, triangulation, and audit trail, which is a detailed description of how the data was collected, coded, and categorized, in addition to, any important decisions that were made during the inquiry process (Merriam, 1998). Accordingly, I address in the following section some biases that I brought with me when conducting this study.

My Role as a Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered the primary instrument of data collection and, thus, making clear the researcher's position in relation to the phenomenon under study is important in order to ensure the dependability (reliability) of the research findings (Merriam, 1998). In this section, I reflect on my early experiences of learning English as a foreign language, my professional coursework in the TESOL program (Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages) at Michigan State University (MSU), and how all of the above experiences might have had an influence on my data collection procedures.

Being a learner of English as a foreign language in the early 1990s, I was exposed to a traditional approach to language learning where drills, memorization, repetition of the phonological, lexical and grammatical rules of English language were the means adopted by teachers to ensure students' internalization of the target language. Yet, such an approach did not help me as a learner to regard English language as a means of communication, but rather, as a language system whose usage was limited to the classroom setting. In addition, language assessment was fairly traditional as it occurred at the end of instruction and was seen as teacher-controlled since learners never got a chance to revise, edit, or assess their work or that of their peers. My passion for learning English and my longing for more meaningful activities and

opportunities that would enhance my language learning have fueled my interest to pursue higher education in English language and teaching.

During my master studies in the TESOL program at MSU, my ideas and assumptions about English language teaching, learning, and assessment were deeply challenged due to my exposure to the learner-centered and communicative approaches of second language education that adhere to language as a resource of exchanging meaning between learners in and outside of the classroom through interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning. Such approaches also regard language assessment as an interactive process between learners and teachers and emphasize the learners' role in the assessment process. I had a chance to employ these approaches through teaching courses in ESL and Arabic as a foreign language at MSU. Accordingly, my own perspectives on language learning, teaching, and assessment were shaped by my early experiences as a foreign language learner and later by my professional course work and teaching at MSU.

It was, thus, important for me to reflect on such experiences and examine my personal biases before conducting the current study as they might have an impact on my interviews and classroom observations. I realized that I could be more judgmental of EFL Emirate teachers' instructional and assessment practices in UAE, which in turn could influence my interpretation of their reported beliefs and behaviors in the classroom. I made sure to avoid making assumptions about teachers' decisions in the classroom and sought clarification whenever possible.

As mentioned above, the next four chapters are thematically organized and, taken together, they represent the answers to my research questions. Chapter 4 details the context of the study and a description of the four participating teachers. Chapter 5 examines the

participating teachers' preexisting beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment as they have experienced them before the introduction of the ECART. Chapter 6 explores the process of the ECART and teachers' perceived challenges to enacting such reform. Chapter 7 examines teachers' beliefs in the context of the ECART reform and the ways in which they have changed and adapted their practices accordingly. Chapter 8 provides a discussion of the findings and the implications of the current study.

Chapter 4

Context of the Study

Setting the Stage

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is situated in the Southeast of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering Oman to the east and Saudi Arabia to the south. The UAE is a federation of seven Emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Fujairah, and Ras Al Khaimah. Abu Dhabi is considered the wealthiest of the seven emirates, as it “owns more than 7 per cent of the world’s (and 90 per cent of the UAE’s) proven oil resources and over 3 per cent of the world’s proven natural gas supplies” (Jafaar & Mansouri, 2013). This study took place in AlAin, the second largest city in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, the capital of United Arab Emirates. AlAin, which literally means “The Oasis” is also famously known as the Garden City of UAE. Driving for two hours from my hometown to AlAin in March of 2012 was the beginning of an exciting journey of talking to Emirate English teachers and learning about their beliefs. The weather was sunny and pleasant, and I was welcomed with endless palm trees and green landscape on both sides of the free way. Once I entered the city, I was amazed at the tree-lined streets and the neat roundabouts that are filled with flowers and decorations. Buildings were a maximum of ten stories high, as the authorities of AlAin do not allow the construction of high-rise buildings in order to preserve the natural beauty of the city. Jabel Hafeet—a high mountain that surrounds the city—gives it a unique and distinguished atmosphere that is different from other emirates.

The population of AlAin has increased from 120, 000 in 1983 to over 374,000 in 2007 making it the fourth largest city in the UAE in terms of population density (Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council; Yagoub, 2006). Accordingly, AlAin is considered an important economic and social hub due to the high number of Emirate nationals residing there, as well as the various

cultural and heritage sites that are spread out across the city. For that reason, the Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council (2011) describes AlAin as:

The soul of the Emirate. Its spirit emerges from the unique conjunction of Jebel Hafeet, the nurturing oases and the majestic desert that have together sustained over 5000 years of continuous settlement. It now exemplifies both the ancient Bedouin traditions and the modern aspirations of the Emirate.

In addition, AlAin is the birthplace of late president of UAE Sheikh Zayed AlNahyan. Late president Sheikh Zayed AlNahyan was elected the first president of UAE in 1971. He is considered the founding father of United Arab Emirates as he was able—in a relatively short time—to transform the UAE from a country that relied mainly on fishing and agriculture for living to becoming a modern state that has successfully developed “in all areas of life; social services, health and education, communications and technology, trade and finance, at a rate almost unmatched anywhere or at any time” (UAE Yearbook, 1999). Being his birth place, AlAin had a special place in late president Sheikh Zayed’s heart as he “established himself not only as someone who had a clear vision of what he wished to achieve for the people of Al Ain, but also as someone who led by example” (UAEInteract, 2004, p. 14). Accordingly, late president Sheikh Zayed AlNahyan ensured the development of education in AlAin by establishing on its grounds the first higher education institution in the country, University of United Arab Emirates in 1976 (UAEU). Since then, the city of AlAin has witnessed massive development in the education sector as part of a larger education reform plan led by Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC).

ADEC oversees and drives all educational reform initiatives in public schools, the latest of which was launched in 2010 and titled the “New School Model” (NSM). Within this model,

ADEC aims to improve the quality of education provided in public schools by introducing new curriculum and teaching methods that foster a child-centered learning environment and, thus, develop students who are creative and independent thinkers. According to ADEC (2013), such a comprehensive new school model of teaching and learning aims at:

Developing students, teachers, the learning environment and community at large -- facilities, classrooms, school leadership and management and parental involvement.

Within this model, a new curriculum, advanced teaching methods and learning materials and resources are introduced in order to enhance student performance by developing the student as a communicator, a thinker and a problem solver, appreciative of the UAE heritage and culture, able to develop positive relationships, a confident, healthy, creative and innovative person.

The New School Model has already been put into effect in all public schools in Abu Dhabi and AlAin since 2010. There are around 43 Cycle-2 schools in AlAin (Grade 6-9), 19 of which are girls-only schools. Data for the present study were collected from two schools in the city of AlAin: Almajd and Om Habiba Cycle 2 girls-only schools. Both schools are under the supervision of ADEC and are part of the New School Model system.

The Schools

My research was situated in two schools within the New School Model system. I focused in the experiences of four teachers, two in each school. As such, I was able to research multiple perspectives on the ECART curriculum and learn about the professional development offered at each school in the form of coaching by an individual assigned to each school who has expertise in the new curriculum.

Almajd School. Almajd school is located close to the downtown of the city where many services and facilities are available, such as restaurants, coffee shops, and hospitals. The school looks over a line of residential apartments and, thus, the neighborhood feels lively as there was always somebody walking down the street. Driving up to the school in the morning, I see parents dropping off their children, school buses lining in the parking lot, people going off to work and the neighborhood seems very crowded. Everyone is rushing so as not to be caught up in the traffic of the one street that leads both to the school and the residential area. The outside building of the school extends vertically covering a large landscape and is two-stories high. Ahead of the entrance of the school is a big falcon statue with the UAE flag hovering on top, which symbolizes the boldness, power, and luxury the UAE prides itself on. Almajd School has a student enrollment of 848 of which 233 students are in grade six. English teachers gathered in one big office and two of the three teachers teaching grade six agreed to participate in this study.

The entrance of Almajd School was beautifully decorated with students' work, achievements, and names of top scoring students in all subject matters. In addition, a big Arabic calligraphy sign that reflects the word "Read" extended along one of the walls, which constantly reminded me of the value of literacy. On the side of the entrance there was a visitors' lounge and trays of tea and coffee where one can sit and have a drink. When walking in the corridors of the school, one gets the feeling that strangers are welcomed and would be helped around. Most of the time, the principal was seen walking around, talking with teachers, and checking on students. Even though she was busy and was rarely seen by herself in the office, she always gave the impression that she was approachable. The first question she asked me upon receiving her approval to conduct my study in her school was "What is the fate of grammar instruction in the course of this reform? Parents are asking me why aren't we teaching grammar and I don't know

what to say.” She seemed distressed regarding the changes the English curriculum was undergoing as a result of the reform.

Om Habiba School. Om Habiba School is located in the outskirts of the AlAin city. Even though there was ample space surrounding the school, Om Habiba School is a relatively smaller one compared to Almajd School. It has a student enrollment of 387 of which 81 students are in grade six. I hardly saw parents dropping off their children as most of the students were bussed to school. When entering Om Habiba School, one is faced instantly with a big billboard that has the school’s mission statement that entails its dedication to graduating students who are creative in their thinking and skills through the continuous support of Abu Dhabi Education Council. Upon entering from the main door, there is a closed visitors’ lounge and a lady that serves tea and coffee, in addition to accompanying visitors to their destination. Since it is a small school, strangers could be identified easily and I was often asked about my identity when seen walking around. Students’ works were not visible except in the classrooms or hanging on the walls adjacent to the classrooms, which gave the school a bit of a formal atmosphere and a less of a student-centered touch. English teachers gathered in a small office where they shared desks, a bathroom, and a little kitchenette, which created a cozy and friendly atmosphere among them. There were two English teachers in grade six and both of them agreed to participate in the current study.

Students in both schools were mostly Emirates with some students from neighboring Arab countries, such as Syria and Egypt. In addition, both schools were under the supervision of ADEC, which was stated in their mission statements and reflected through discussions with the teachers and principals. Accordingly, there were not any massive differences in the context of the

two schools in terms of schools' policies and students' linguistic, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

The Teachers

The purpose of this study was to explore EFL teachers' beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment in the context of ECART reform and the extent to which their beliefs impacted their instructional and assessment practices. In addition, the some contextual factors—classroom environment, curriculum, and professional development—were also examined in order to unravel their effects on teachers' understanding and implementation of ECART. Accordingly, it was important to select experienced teachers to understand the various ways they negotiate their beliefs and adapt their practices to fit the new context of English reform. Purposeful selection was used to select the participating teachers to a) they were Emirate nationals to minimize the impact of culture on teaching and b) they were all grade 6 teachers since this is the grade where ECART is first introduced to the students.

Four teachers from two different schools participated in the current study. Demographic data of the participants is presented in Table 1. In addition, a brief narrative description of teachers and their classrooms is also provided in order to draw a picture of each teacher individually in terms of their background education and their motivation to teach, which had a great impact on how they received and implemented English curriculum reform.

Aziza. Aziza was a sixth grade teacher and the coordinator of the English program at Almajid School. She has been an English teacher for 14 years to various grade levels, however she has been exclusively teaching grade 6 for the past 4 years. Aziza held a bachelor's degree in English literature and indicated that she did not receive any teacher preparation courses at college since the program for English pedagogy at the department of education was closed at that

time. However, she reported taking four courses in the education department regarding methods of teaching, classroom management, and education in the UAE. Such courses were offered in Arabic and did not target any specific subject matter.

Table 1. *Demographic Data of Teacher Participants*

Teacher	Total Years of Exp.	Years of Exp. in 6 th Grade	Education	Teacher Education
Aziza	14	4	English Literature	None
Mona	15	1	English Literature	None
Shorouq	9	7	English Literature	None
Amal	11	7	English Literature	None

Aziza was an enthusiastic, dedicated, and hardworking teacher. She was always seen printing out handouts and pictures from the Internet that would be of interest to her students, hanging their work on the classroom walls, and using media and technology such as iPads to enhance students' learning. She was also very proud to be among the few national Emirate teachers who teach English as a second language in UAE. She believed that her family played an important role in her choice of becoming an English teacher at a very young age:

My family is an educated one, my father speaks English and this encouraged me to learn English. My family motivated me to learn English as my dad used to refer to the

importance of learning English by saying that almost the entire world now knows how to speak English and the future will be brighter for those who can speak the language.

In addition to family influence, Aziza believed that students should also have a strong desire and be self-motivated to learn a second language. As an ESL learner, Aziza recounted “my grades used to go down when I had a weak English teacher, but I think what really helped me was that I depended on myself the most to learn English because I loved the subject.” She described herself as an independent learner and believed that learning a second language should not be limited to the classroom as students could still resume their language-learning journey on their own outside the classroom. Reflecting on the experiences that helped her learn English at school, Aziza explained:

When I was in grade nine, the gulf war started and it was the first time that the national TV airs foreign news channels such as CNN. I was amazed with the live streaming of news in English. You know it was very useful. I used to have the dictionary next to me and I would listen to the news and look up the words I didn't know. I learned a lot from this experience. It really improved my listening and also helped me with pronunciation and that helped me in school as well. I believe I was an independent learner.

Accordingly, for Aziza, students played an important role in their language learning progress.

Aziza was very well respected and looked upon by the principal as an example of a highly qualified EFL teacher. Accordingly, she was promoted by the administration to the position of English coordinator, which has put an extra load of work on her shoulders. In addition to teaching, Aziza has, thus, become responsible for organizing meetings with English teachers and following up with them regarding their work. She seemed serious and occupied most of the time. I rarely saw her sitting at her desk, which made it difficult for us to have

informal conversations. As a result, I made an effort to always arrive early at the school so I could accompany her on her way to the classroom and chat with her regarding the objectives of her lessons and any assessment practices she was using. Despite the responsibilities Aziza had towards her students and the school administration, she was willing to share her experiences and insights regarding EFL teaching and learning in UAE through the formal interviews.

Aziza had a total of 60 students in her classes. The first time I entered her classroom, I was amazed at the layout of the room. Unlike most of the classrooms in UAE public schools—where seats are arranged in rows—Aziza’s classroom setting was arranged in circles and students were seated in groups rather than pairs. Aziza gave the students five minutes at the beginning of each class to rearrange the seats from the traditional layout used in the previous classroom sessions. Her classroom felt warm and cozy and the students looked excited and eager for the new lesson. They were always raising their hands and competing to answer her questions. My amazement did not stop at the classroom layout but extended when Aziza got her iPad out of her purse, played a short clip, passed it around to the students, asked them to notice certain features, then discussed it as a whole classroom. Coming from a traditional schooling background, it was unusual for me to see such a change in a public classroom.

Mona. Mona had fifteen years of English teaching experience in high school. However, she was assigned to teach sixth grade a year before the start of the current study. She admitted that she was not used to teaching young children and that she was having difficulty controlling them. Mona held a bachelor’s degree in English literature. Like Aziza, Mona did not receive any teacher preparation coursework. Even though Mona had been teaching English for such a long time, she indicated that she never wanted to become a teacher:

It was a family choice. I did not want to become a teacher. We are a conservative family and it is preferred in our family that women work in segregated jobs. So I applied in the education department and they placed me in the kindergarten program. I did not want that so I applied in the English language and literature program. After I graduated I applied for a teaching job in the ministry and they placed me in a high school.

Mona was currently seeking a graduate degree in a field that was not related to teaching as she expressed her desire to get out of the teaching profession upon receiving her degree.

For Mona, motivation was a key factor in the success of second language learning. Reflecting on her English learning in school, “I was excited that I would learn a new language, I used to love the English language, and watch English series and read the Arabic subtitles.” However, she was struggling with her current students mainly because she believed they lack motivation:

They have to have motivation to learn the language. If they don't have motivation, it's useless anything I do. Sometimes I get slight positive reaction from the unmotivated ones, but it's not like the students who have motivation to learn the language.

Mona had a total of 90 students in her classes, which she believed was overwhelming and made it very difficult for her to “work individually with each one of them.” Walking with Mona towards one of her classrooms, she warned me “this is the worst class in school.” As we got into the room, students were walking around, talking, laughing, and no one appeared to notice that we were in the room. A couple of minutes later, Mona raised her voice to greet the students and introduced me to them. Students were divided into groups and given handouts to work on. As I sat by the corner at the end of the classroom and watched Mona talking and none of the students seemed to pay attention, I was able to understand her struggle with the students. Mona tried to

create a student-friendly environment in the classroom by allowing students to freely talk together and walk in the classroom, yet she ended up trying to control the students by calling on them and often screaming at them, which they did not appear to take seriously.

Sherooq. Sherooq is an energetic sixth grade teacher who had been teaching English for 9 years. She held a bachelor's degree in English literature and, like Aziza and Mona, she did not have any teacher preparation coursework in college. Reflecting on her decision to become a teacher:

I always wanted to become a teacher, but I decided to become an English teacher in college when I passed all the English introductory placement tests. My professors were amazed and asked where did you learn English, how come your English proficiency level is high like this. So I got into the English language and literature program as the education department has closed their English teaching program at that time.

Sherooq later clarified to me that her high proficiency level in English and the way she passed the English placement tests in college was a result of how she was taught English at school.

Sherooq learned English in a traditional way that relied mainly on repetition and memorization. She believed that a traditional approach to language teaching and learning was what worked best with Emirate students because “it forces them to study.”

Besides teaching, Sherooq also participated in all the meetings held by ADEC and was considered by the principal as the spokesperson of the English department when it came to delivering the departments' views regarding the new English curriculum to ADEC's representatives. She explained, “when we are in a meeting with one of the advisors from ADEC, the principal always encourages me to tell them about the hardships we are facing, the lack of a curriculum, and various issues with the ECART.”

In the classroom, Shorooq acted as a strict teacher who often raised her voice to manage the class and students seemed to fear her. Her classroom was arranged into rows and she was often seen in the front of the class explaining and writing on the board. Students usually either worked individually or in pairs and there was very little room for group work. Students respected her and always raised their hands before speaking out. The classroom seemed quiet most of the time as the verbal exchange usually occurred in a question and answer form between Shorooq and the students. The general feel of the classroom was that of a teacher-centered one with some instances of students' engagement.

Amal. Amal had been in the field of English teaching for the past eleven years. Like the other participating teachers in this study, Amal held a bachelor's degree in English literature with no previous coursework attained in a teacher preparation program. Unlike Shorooq, Amal's demeanor was that of a quiet and calm teacher who seemed to follow Shorooq's lead most of the time. She often referred to Shorooq when asked about the units or skills to be covered, the exam dates, and the materials used in class. In addition, she didn't attend the ADEC meetings as she explained, "Shorooq attends them and informs me of what they have discussed."

Amal was a firm believer in the impact of motivation on students' learning. As an ESL learner, she narrated:

It was very interesting that we were learning a new language. I enjoyed it so much that I was learning something new. I had passion for learning a new language. The teachers didn't do interesting things to draw us to the language but I was self-motivated that I was learning a new language.

Accordingly, Amal worked on motivating students in her classroom by giving them words of encouragement and praise. Even though Amal learned English in a traditional classroom where

“the teacher was the main figure in the classroom not the students...the role of the teacher was to ask questions and the role of the students was to answer,” she nevertheless tried to balance between a teacher and a student-centered environment. Her classroom was lively and she often asked students to draw information from their background knowledge.

The above four teachers had two aspects in common. As ESL learners, they were all exposed to a traditional approach to language learning. As teachers, none of them received any professional coursework in teacher education or English pedagogy. Their backgrounds and how they reached the teaching profession had shaped their beliefs regarding English teaching, learning and assessment, in addition to, how they received and implemented English curriculum reform. The next chapter goes into more details regarding the Emirate participating teachers’ preexisting beliefs about English teaching and learning and the different factors that shaped such beliefs.

Chapter 5

Teacher Learning and Beliefs

This study looks at Emirate teachers' beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment and the extent to which their beliefs impact how they receive and implement reform through the ECART framework. Research shows that teachers' beliefs are built up gradually over time and serve as a reference for teachers in their decision-making process in the classroom (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are formed early in life as a result of their experiences with schooling and instruction. Such experiences result in an "apprenticeship of observation," which refers to the numerous hours teachers spend observing teaching behaviors as students (Lortie, 1975). Accordingly, it was important to begin this study by examining Emirate teachers' past language learning experiences in order to understand the sources of their current beliefs regarding ESL teaching and learning and the ways these beliefs shaped the teachers' classroom practices.

Past Language Learning Experiences

Research shows ESL teachers' prior experiences as language learners greatly shape their beliefs regarding language teaching and learning (Tillema, 1994). ESL teachers' beliefs are, thus, formed through the "accumulation of experiences" they gained as language learners and, later, as novice teachers (Johnson, 1999). Therefore, in order to answer the first research question of the current study—What beliefs do EFL teachers in UAE hold regarding the teaching, learning, and assessment of English language? — it was necessary to examine teachers' prior language learning and early teaching experiences. The four teachers in the current study were interviewed once before I observed their classes in order to learn about their personal experiences with language learning and teaching and to elicit how such experiences influenced their beliefs about

English teaching, learning, and assessment (see Appendix A for interview questions). Below I will summarize, from the first interview, the background experiences of the four teachers as these have influenced their beliefs about language learning.

Traditional Teaching and Learning

Reflecting on their past experiences as language learners, the four participating teachers began their English learning in grade four through high school. The teachers described the classroom environment where they learned English as a traditional one. Desks were arranged into rows, teachers dominated the classroom talk, and students' interaction with each other was minimal to nonexistent. Coming from an educated family who encouraged her to learn English, Aziza explained that even though she attended the best public school in the city of AlAin, English was still taught in a traditional grammar-oriented way. Aziza narrated:

They taught in a traditional old way. It was all about transmitting knowledge. There is a book from which we would read a passage and answer questions, describe a picture, or solve grammar drills. They focused more on grammar, we learned lots of grammar, but to be honest with you, we had no idea when to use it. The grammar was separate from the lessons we covered.

As Aziza described above, learning English through what she called “transmitting knowledge” involved knowledge as a commodity or a message to be moved from one person to another. The teacher, as the sole knowledge provider in the classroom, left no room for the students to share their views and/or background knowledge with the teacher or other students. In such a learning environment, transmission of knowledge took place through extensive lecturing that focused on discrete aspects of language structure, such as grammar, vocabulary, and translation at the expense of encouraging students to use and communicate in the target language.

Sherroq's description of her English learning environment was similar to that of Aziza. She believed the way English was taught in the past was "completely different from how it is right now." She explained that back then teachers dominated the classroom talk and students were expected to be quiet and follow the teachers. Sherroq gave a brief description of how a regular English classroom session looked like when she was in school:

Before the teacher used to talk all the time and then she gives an exercise to the students that they have to complete. If the students have questions, they could ask the teacher after they complete the exercise and that's about it. The teachers would also give us worksheets and drills to work on and then we hand it to her. The teachers used to write everything on the board and we used to copy anything she writes. The interaction was mainly between the student and the teacher. We rarely worked in groups.

It is clear from Sherroq's description that English was taught at her school in a traditional behaviorist approach where teachers talked for most of the classroom time and students had minimal opportunities to engage in classroom discussions, as the discourse interaction was limited to a question-answer routine. Activities relied on the completion of drills and exercises to ensure learners' memorization of certain aspect of the language. A traditional approach to language teaching did not provide students with meaningful or authentic contexts to practice the language as it measured how much vocabulary and grammar concepts learners could retrieve from memory, rather than apply through communication.

In a teacher-centered environment, teachers often presented themselves as the sole possessor of knowledge and the main figure in the classroom. Mona explained that her role as a language learner was very limited in the classroom and all her questions had to be directed to the teacher, "If I have a question, I had to ask the teacher...I didn't use any outside sources or

references.” Aziza added that such an approach to teaching defined the role of the teacher and the students in the classroom, “The teacher used to give us ready-made pieces of information. So our role was to receive and the teacher’s role was to give.” Like Aziza, Amal noted that her English teacher “was very strict. She was the main figure in the classroom not the students. The role of the teacher was to ask questions and the role of the students was to answer.” In such a traditional classroom environment, students were expected to be obedient to their teachers, follow their orders, and never challenge their authority. Describing one of the English teachers she had in school, Mona narrated, “she was very tough and even had a stick with her in the classroom, she would just put it next to her.” Mona’s recollection of her English teachers showed that they played an authoritarian role in the classroom. She recalled, “some teachers were really strict and used to test us orally almost every class which was terrifying...you would find them holding their grade book and calling on us and asking us questions.” Accordingly, Mona reported that she used to exert a lot of effort on her own to learn English language because of the intimidating nature of her English teachers.

Even though the four participating teachers reported having similar English learning environment as language learners, they reacted differently toward their past language learning experiences. Aziza believed the traditional approach to language teaching she encountered, as a learner, did not help her much because she “was passively receiving knowledge instead of researching and actively seeking it. So when a teacher just keeps on transmitting knowledge to the students, they kind of receive it fast and also discard it fast.” She believed that students’ active participation in their language learning process was crucial, which moved her, as a language learner, to seek knowledge on her own outside the classroom through watching English movies and listening to news. Mona shared a similar criticism with Aziza regarding the passive

role that students played in the traditional English classroom. She explained that students played a minimal role in their language learning progress, as they were not provided with any opportunities to explore English language on their own:

We mainly used the textbook...we didn't do any research...it was all exams and homework...the students never had an extended role outside the class that contributes to their language learning.

On the contrary, Sherooq advocated for the traditional grammar-oriented approach to teaching. When describing the role of her past English teachers she stated:

The role of the teacher back then was that of a transmitter of knowledge and I believe that is the best role a teacher should have. For example, the teacher would give us a grammatical rule like "when you see 'she' you have to put an 's.'" The teacher would repeat this rule and give us lots of examples and drills until the rule is engraved in our minds. So the teacher's role was to fill our minds with information. We didn't know how to use this information in different contexts but at least we had solid knowledge in our minds.

In addition to the role of the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge, Sherooq referred to the importance of having a prescribed curriculum and textbook when learning a second language.

She explained:

We had a really good curriculum, it was like a reference for us, we knew the vocabulary we needed to study, we knew the grammar and the rules that we have to study, we knew the composition that we have to memorize. The curriculum was structured in a way that allowed the learning of English language to go step by step which was great.

Sherooq's description of how the English curriculum and textbooks were structured in the past reflected a traditional linear approach to language learning, which Nunan (1996) described as similar to the construction of a wall. He explained that in traditional language teaching:

The language wall is erected one linguistic "brick" at a time. The easy grammatical bricks are laid at the bottom of the wall, and they provide a foundation for the more difficult ones. The task for the learner is to get the linguistic bricks in the right order: first the word bricks, and then the sentence bricks. If the bricks are not in the correct order, the wall will collapse under its own ungrammaticality. (p. 65)

Like Sherooq, Amal had a positive attitude toward the role her English teachers played in the classroom. She believed that in a traditional approach to language teaching, "The teacher's role was not limited to only being a teacher but extended to being a care giver and a discipliner. In that role, the teacher transfers her values to the students in every possible way through her teaching and instruction. The students' role was mainly to study their lessons, revise them, come to class prepared, and listen to their teacher." Looking up to the teacher as a caregiver and a discipliner gives the teacher an authoritative power over the students, a traditional role that Amal seemed to agree with and advocate for.

Amal also stated the benefits of having a prescribed curriculum and textbook as she recalled, "we exclusively depended on the teacher and the textbooks to get the information. We didn't get any information from outside sources." She further went on to describe how such an approach to teaching helped students to learn the language since "the old system relied mainly on the transmission of knowledge through recitations which forced the students to come to class in order to learn, not to play." It was clear from Amal's description of how she learned English that

she was not critical of the traditional approach to language teaching, on the contrary she believed that it worked for the benefit of the students.

It is clear from the above description of teachers' past language learning experiences that they were all taught English in a manner that was not focused on communication traditional and was, in their view, a traditional manner. However, they perceived their experiences as foreign language learners differently. Aziza and Mona saw little merit in the traditional approach to language teaching and learning as they conveyed how students acted as passive recipients of knowledge. On the other hand, Amal and Sherooq considered the dominant role that teachers played in the traditional approach to language learning to be crucial to students' success in learning English.

Assessment through Tests

The four participating teachers highlighted that since English teaching was carried out in a traditional way, so was assessment. In a teacher-centered environment, the teacher was considered the sole assessor of students' language development who used tests as the main language assessment tool in the classroom. Aziza recounted, "The assessment was mainly through tests. We used to study, they give us a test, we get a grade for it... and that was it about assessment." Aziza further explained that students did not have any role in the assessment process and they were usually informed regarding their performance at the end of the semester, which did not leave them any room for revising past performances. She recalled:

I don't remember we used to have discussions about our grades during the semester...the only time the teacher would talk with us about our grades or performance was at the beginning of each new semester regarding how we did the previous one.

Like Aziza, Mona described the way she was assessed as a student by saying, “It was all about testing and quizzes. I used to be tested in grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension and composition.” Mona added that students did not discuss their grades with the teachers and the only way for them to understand their mistakes was if the teacher went over the answers of the test with the whole class. Of this she said, “the teachers didn’t discuss the grades individually with the students, but would rather answer the whole test and that’s how we knew what we did wrong.” It was clear from Aziza and Mona’s recollections of how they were assessed as language learners that they were usually alienated from the assessment process in the sense that teachers alone had the power to determine what was being learned and how it was assessed.

Amal highlighted a further dimension of traditional language assessment, which was its relationship to learning. Amal explained that her teachers were not only strict in how they ran the classrooms, but also in the way they assessed the students through testing. For her, the overreliance on tests, quizzes, and comprehension questions were somewhat unfair, as these forms of assessment did not enhance students’ learning. Amal believed such assessment tools were successful in pointing out her mistakes, but not in helping her develop the appropriate skills needed to avoid such mistakes. She recalled that in reading assessment:

The exams were very difficult. I used to lose lots of grades in the reading comprehension section, especially when I have to make inferences. I don’t recall the teacher ever showing me how to correct this or what strategies would help me overcome this problem.

In traditional language testing, teaching and learning were separated from the assessment process, so the tests sole function was to document learners’ achievement in acquiring certain linguistic structures. Law and Eckes (1995) described the purpose of traditional language testing as a measurement that reflected what second language learners knew at a particular time, but did

not tell much about the progression of their learning. In that sense, the above excerpt showed that teachers' use of traditional language tests did not enhance students' learning as they were used to solely check their acquisition and knowledge of language features at a single occasion, rather than a mean to unravel the difficulties they face in their language learning progress.

Contrary to Amal, Mona believed that language tests were successful assessment tools as they filtered the high performing students from the low performing ones. Additionally, she illustrated that language tests advanced the learning of the proficient students, but were not that helpful for the less proficient ones. She explained:

These test were like black and white there was no chance for the students to get extra grades or points, but they were able to learn the language. The good hard working students were able to pass and the rest failed. So the old assessment was successful and served the high achieving students better because they were able to learn from them...but those who didn't study well and would just turn off their minds did not gain much from the old assessment.

Mona seemed to place the responsibility of students' failing the language tests on students' lack of studying and preparing for the tests. For her, the purpose of language testing was to differentiate between the hardworking students and those who chose to "just turn off their minds". As a student, Mona considered herself to be one of the few advanced language learners in her school and she credited her high proficiency level to the continuous testing she experienced as a language learner. Reflecting on her experience of entering college, Mona acknowledged the teaching and assessment approach her teachers adopted in school as the reason she scored high on her English admission tests, "I scored high in English and was placed in the highest proficiency level. That was a result of the way teachers used to teach and assess us, so I

graduated from school with good knowledge about English.” As a language learner in school, Mona was used to scoring high on tests that assessed her previously memorized knowledge, which prepared her to successfully pass the English language entrance exam in college. Accordingly, for her, the benefits of traditional language testing were not only limited to school-level, but extended to higher education.

A common theme the four participating teachers addressed was the purpose of the English language tests they undertook as language learners. Sherooq recounted the language tests she experienced, as a student, and explained that the main goal of such tests was to assess her memorization and retrieval of certain language features. She gave an example of how her English teacher used to assess writing:

In writing, the teacher would show us how to write a letter by explaining the features of it, then she would write one on the board and we would copy it. In the writing exam, we had to write the same letter the teacher had previously written on the board, so we had to memorize it till it was engraved in our minds. I remember in high school, if we wrote anything different in the writing exam than what the teacher modeled for us, she would mark us off. So we had to copy what the teacher wrote on the board and paste it in the exam. Sometimes she would get us an exercise with the passage already there but missing some words that we had to fill out.

Upon giving the above example, Sherooq expressed gratitude and appreciation for her high school English teacher because she believed that her way of teaching and assessment reflected how much she cared for her students:

I really loved and appreciated our high school teacher because of how she taught us and how determined she was to deliver the information and knowledge to us, it was like you are going to learn English whether you like it or not.

Amal had a similar experience to that of Sherooq in terms of writing assessment. Like Sherooq, Amal was not allowed free writing in her school. Amal remembered, “the teacher used to give us a passage and ask us to memorize it and then we would copy this passage in the exam.” Even though such an assessment practice impeded students’ creative thinking and passively assessed students’ writing as it measures their ability to replicate, rather than produce, Amal viewed it as a useful way of teaching students how to write. She argued, “Nowadays the new reform criticizes memorizing and copying and considers it a traditional method, whereas most of the private and well known schools in UAE are still doing that because it’s how students learn how to write best.”

Teachers’ description of the assessment practices that were prevalent in the past showed that traditional language testing was the common approach used when assessing English language. Teachers’ main criticism of such an approach to assessment was the lack of students’ engagement in the assessment process. Nevertheless, some of the teachers conveyed a positive attitude toward the usefulness of such tests in allowing students to memorize and retrieve various language features, which helped students in creating a strong English structural background.

Professional Coursework and Development

Research shows that second language teaching is a highly complex process, which is built through experiences that teachers had in their classrooms as language learners, and later as participants in professional programs (Freeman and Johnson, 1998). Accordingly, it was

important to shed light on teachers' professional background in order to understand how it affected their beliefs and practices regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment.

Teacher Education Background

None of the participating teachers had any teacher education background in general or second language preparation in particular before entering the field of English teaching. All of them graduated from English literature programs where they did not receive any specialized courses in English pedagogy. In the past, applicants for English teaching positions in UAE were not required to have pedagogical background knowledge in the field of language teaching as long as they graduated from English literature programs. Amal reported,

I studied English literature in college and didn't take anything related to English pedagogy...after I graduated I realized that I only have two paths, either a translator or a teacher so I applied for a teaching position and got one.

Amal admitted that her degree in English literature did not prepare her to teach English language. She said, "nothing that I did in college benefited me when I started teaching. It was really hard at the beginning." In addition, she highlighted that, like school, teaching was very traditional at college where "the book was the main source of information." Sherooq narrated a similar experience where she confessed that she lacked any pedagogical knowledge about the field of teaching English when she started teaching. She elaborated, "After I graduated, I was hired into this school and at that point I had no idea about the field of teaching English as all the courses I took in college were English literature courses." Like Amal, Sherooq described the teaching and learning environment at her college as a traditional one where "the students listen, write, and then get tested. Sometimes we did some research and wrote reports but it was minimal." Mona's experience echoed that of Amal and Sherooq in that she did not take any teacher educational

courses or language teaching courses when she was in college. She remembered that her initial teacher training was limited to a 2-month training the ministry provided her when she was accepted at an English teaching position.

Even though Aziza indicated that the courses she took as an undergraduate were not related to the teaching of English as a second language, she interpreted her experience differently from the other participating teachers, as she believed she was still able to draw from them when she started teaching. She gave an example of linguistics and phonetics courses she took in college that she was able later to use in teaching pronunciation and phonics to English language learners. She explained, “the school I worked at used to teach letters instead of sounds, but I taught the alphabets in terms of phonics which was not required of teachers at that time, but I used my knowledge of it and taught it in that way.” In addition, her learning extended to observing her college teachers. Her observation during the years she spent in college led her to adopt some of the strategies she saw her teachers use in class. Of this she recalled,

In the English department we took writing and listening classes. I benefited a lot from these classes as they gave me ideas in how to teach English in school. I remember in the listening class, the teacher used to show us movies and ask us questions afterward. So I currently use similar strategies when teaching.

In-service Teacher Training

Three of the participating teachers have indicated that the main source of teacher training they received was from the veteran teachers they encountered at the beginning of their teaching career. For example, Amal acknowledged the help of the veteran teachers in understanding how to go about teaching English. In addition, she explained that she used to attend educational training courses; however “they were mostly about general pedagogy not English-specific

teaching courses.” For Amal, the impact of veteran teachers on her teaching was greater than any professional inservice teacher training she received. Aziza, also, highlighted the importance of veteran teachers in helping her transition into the teaching profession. She explained:

The older teachers in schools helped me a lot...they were experienced and I learned from them how to teach English. They were very welcoming as they used to allow me to observe their classes.

Aziza added that the veteran teachers “used to teach and assess in a traditional way,” which was similar to what she encountered as a language learner. Mona elaborated more on what she learned from the veteran teachers who worked at her school:

They used to show me how to teach English, allowed me to observe their classes, and used to revise my lesson plans. I used to observe and learn from more than one teacher...they start their lessons with dividing the blackboard into sections where they write vocabulary and questions. They used to have objectives but they won’t write it on the board or share it with the students. Also the assessment was mainly tests.

Mona’s description of how the veteran teachers went about teaching English reflected a traditional “chalk and talk” method to language teaching, where teachers laid out the lesson on the blackboard and lectured the students. Assessments were also carried out in a traditional way usually in the form of tests. In addition, the veteran teachers disengaged the students from the learning process by not sharing the learning objectives of day-to-day lessons with them. Such a classroom environment reflected a traditional approach to language teaching and learning where veteran teachers acted as the sole authority recognized in the classroom, and thus, maintained a high degree of control over the materials and assessment presented to the students. To that end, students’ role was just limited to following the orders and instructions of the veteran teachers.

Unlike the other participating teachers, Sheoorq did not express her gratitude to the veteran teachers she encountered when she started teaching. She added:

I was not welcomed when I started teaching in this school because most of the teachers were Arab expats and I was coming to replace one of them. I did not even know how to write a lesson plan let alone teach.

Sherooq made up for her lack of knowledge of teaching English by attending workshops and training sessions offered by the ministry of education regarding pedagogy, lesson planning, assessment. She admitted that she lacked any pedagogical knowledge about the field of teaching English when she started teaching. She elaborated:

After I graduated, I was hired into this school and at that point I had no idea about the field of teaching English as all the courses I took in college were English literature courses. Even when I was in college they were using the traditional way of teaching where the students listen, write, and then get tested. Sometimes we did some research and wrote reports but it was minimal.

The four participating teachers revealed their lack of any content-specific knowledge of pedagogy upon entering the teaching profession. Their professional background knowledge was limited to the subject matter of English literature, which made them feel at lost when they started teaching. They believed, except for Sherooq, that the veteran teachers socialized them into the teaching profession. According to Feiman-Nemser (2001) the close contact of a novice teacher with a more experienced one helps beginning teachers form their professional identity and construct professional classroom practices. Through observation, the participating teachers were able to learn from the teaching practices modeled to them by veteran teachers. However, such

teaching practices were mostly traditional and, thus, similar to those they encountered as language learners.

Accordingly, it is noteworthy to say that the first interview in the current study helped me lay the grounds for a deeper examination of teachers' beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment in UAE since it unraveled some of the main sources from which teachers construct their knowledge of teaching a specific subject.

Teachers' Beliefs: ESL Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

In the above section, I discussed the participating teachers' educational background, such as their past language learning experiences, the professional coursework they undertook in college, and the way they were inducted in the teaching profession. Such past collective experiences played an important role in shaping teachers' beliefs regarding teaching and learning. Following is a description of teachers' reported beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment in UAE.

Image of English Language Teacher

Research on teachers' beliefs shows that one of the distinctive features of beliefs is their "episodic structure" (Nespor, 1987, Goodman, 1988). Nespor (1987) explained that beliefs reside in the form of episodes or events that are drawn from past experiences. Such episodic memories influence teachers' understanding of subsequent events, hence serve as an inspiration for them when making decisions in the classroom. In addition, the episodic structure of beliefs drives teachers to form "guiding images" or "intuitive screens" through which they interpret their past learning experiences (Goodman, 1988). For example, Aziza described an image of what a good English teacher should be like. For her, a good English teacher had to be knowledgeable and proficient in the English language, just like her fifth grade teacher who was "good and proficient

in English and used to put lots of effort when teaching us...she was a hardworking teacher and I used to compare any teacher to her.” Accordingly, Aziza frequently talked about the importance of having good mastery of English language. The school principal recognized her hard work and considered her an innovative teacher due to the various ways she used technology to motivate students, which resulted in her promotion to the position of English coordinator.

On the other end, Mona’s image of a good teacher stemmed from her rejection of the persona her English language teachers displayed in class. Mona rejected the traditional authoritarian image of English teachers mainly due to her past experiences of being a language learner in a traditional classroom environment. She explained that her teachers constantly intimidated her:

There are things that I reject because I was exposed to as a student...for example, terrifying the students and asking them on the spot...like asking the students questions regarding a topic they took the previous day and expecting the student to remember...such a class is usually stressful from the beginning...

Mona tried to create a student-friendly environment in classroom. Amal held an opposite belief to Mona where, for her, a good English teacher should be strict and in control of how learning took place in the classroom. As a past language learner, Amal admired the authority of her English teacher and the firmness she displayed in the classroom, which forced the student to “come to class in order to learn not play...that’s why the teacher has to be strict when teaching a language.” Sherooq echoed Amal’s conception of how a good teacher should act in the classroom. In addition, she explained that her English teachers used to dominate classroom talk and lecture all the time, which was useful to her language learning as she was receiving lots of input. She, thus, declared “I believe that the purpose of teaching in schools is to keep putting

input and information into students' minds, once the students get into college that would be the time where they can produce an output." Accordingly, Sherroq saw that a teacher's main role in the classroom was that of a transmitter of knowledge because it was "the best role a teacher should have I believe." Accordingly, teachers' apprenticeship of observation during their school years helped them create images of what effective and/or ineffective English teaching practices looked like.

Benefits of Traditional Teaching and Learning

The past language learning and teaching experiences of the four participating teachers took place within a traditional context of language learning and teaching. Even though the teachers now acknowledged the benefits of a student-centered communicative approach to language teaching—based on their memories of feelings they had as learners and also on new practices and theories to which they were now being exposed—they still valued many aspects of the traditional approach. Over the course of the four interviews for each teacher, it became apparent to me that Sherroq and Amal, who both taught at Om Habiba school, clearly favored a traditional approach to teaching and learning where teachers were regarded as the source of knowledge in the classroom and students' roles were to receive this knowledge. For Sherroq, the purpose of teaching was to fill students' minds with information they can later retrieve and use in college. Sherroq deeply believed that repetition was the most effective language learning strategy and explained that she used it with her students even though it was against the new reform policy for English language and teaching in UAE. Another reason that Sherroq mentioned to clarify why she used repetition as a method of teaching was her belief that Emirate students were unmotivated and giving them drills was the only method working for them. She believed:

Some of the students were not ready to learn and it's impossible to get into their mind, like they have locked their minds down...I have been struggling with this since I started teaching...you can't get them motivated because they are just lazy...I think that the only thing that kind of works with them is the repetition...If I don't keep on repeating whatever I am teaching them over and over again, it won't stick in their minds...I have to give them lots of drills...

Sherroq, thus, firmly believed that a traditional approach to English language teaching and learning was what worked best with her students. She even went further to describe that the teaching of English in current school should look like *elkutaab*; an Arabic term that referred to an ancient method of teaching that was common in the Middle East, including United Arab Emirates and involved an old man—usually a religious figure—teaching a circle of students literacy and Quran through repetition and memorization.

Amal agreed with Sherroq regarding the benefits of the traditional approach to language teaching. She believed that teacher's main role was to transmit knowledge through lecturing and students' role was limited to listening and reciting back what the teacher said. Amal reflected, "The old system relied mainly on the transmission of knowledge and recitations...students came to class in order to learn not to play...transmission and lecturing are really good strategies when teaching any language." As a result, Amal believed that repetition and memorization were strategies vital to English language learning. Amal kept referring to the involvement of students in activities and task-based learning as a playful act that did not enhance students' learning:

The teacher has to teach the language over and over again so that the students can memorize the language...but now I keep engaging students in playful activities in hope of learning English...No they won't be able to learn the language like this...learning a

language requires that the student memorizes vocabulary and show their learning of the words through dictation, not playing...

Amal gave an example from her past English learning experiences to assert that memorization, repetition of grammatical structure, and drills enhance language learning:

I remember when I was young, I wasn't that good at English grammar, so everyday after school I would write the rules the teacher gave us for like 2 or 3 times, like for example the past participle, I learned it this way until I became excellent in it.

Amal, continuing her reminiscence, said that she was taught English as a language learner where "many things were done in the right way." Amal was skeptical about newer approaches to English teaching and assessment. She perceived the student-centered approach to language learning that promoted communication in the target language by means of student involvement to be a playful practice that did not enhance language learning. She argued:

In the past, there weren't as much activities as now, but things were done correctly...a child won't learn if you leave him/her to do things on their own...I have to be always telling them what to do...I have to force them to study and memorize...not to let them play in the hope of learning through playing...I don't approve of this approach unless it is done in a way where students apply what they had already memorized so I can let them play to pick up some things here and there

Amal strongly believed in the effectiveness of memorization as a useful learning method. She explained that rote memorization was a common learning strategy for her as a past language learner that she continued using as a teacher throughout her teaching career. She reflected:

In writing, the teacher used to give us a passage and asks us to memorize it and I would then copy this passage in the exam...I use this strategy now with the low performing

students by letting them memorize until they reach a stage where they can write on their own.

Accordingly, teachers saw many benefits to the traditional way of teaching and learning because they believed that it enhanced their knowledge as past language learners. In addition, the way teachers were socialized into the teaching profession has also reinforced their beliefs regarding what good English teaching should look like. Accordingly, teachers were constantly comparing between their old learning and teaching experiences and their current struggle with the reform, which often made them fall back on the old traditional teaching methods.

Drawback of Traditional Teaching Methods

Aziza and Amal who both taught at Almajid School highlighted that there were some drawbacks to the traditional approach to language teaching and learning and, thus, expressed their belief that a good teacher should be able to balance between a teacher-centered and a more student-centered method of teaching. Aziza criticized the traditional way of teaching English that relied mainly on grammar instruction and ignored the application and use of the target language in different context. She related from her own experience that her teachers:

Focused more on grammar, we learned lots of grammar, but to be honest with you, we had no idea when to use it...the grammar was separate from the lessons we took...when I was young, I didn't think about it, but when I grew older I started thinking why was it this way? Why didn't our teachers use to teach us grammar within a context...that was a problem back then...

She also noted that teacher's content knowledge was not a sufficient indicator of good teaching, but how such knowledge was displayed in the classroom mattered as well. She was not in favor of the knowledge transmission approach her past teachers used to follow in class, where

teachers projected their knowledge to the students and did not consider students' role in the learning process. She believed that such:

Way of teaching and learning was not useful because students were passively receiving knowledge instead of researching and actively seeking it...so when a teacher just keeps on transmitting knowledge to the students, they kind of receive it fast and also discard it fast.

Like Aziza, Mona made reference to the lack of students' engagement in the language classroom in the past. She believed that students should contribute to their own language learning progress by using outside sources. For example, she explained that she usually encouraged students to seek knowledge from the school library as "it makes them more responsible since they have more choices now." She explained that another way of engaging students in the learning process was by helping them see how the target language could be present in their everyday life:

Sharing with them the purpose of learning English. For example, I ask them questions like why do we learn it, where do we use it, where do we see it (like signs in the street, airport...) so to give them a sense that English is present in their life one way or the other.

Role of Tests in the Assessment Process

Three of the participating teachers considered tests as an efficient and valid tool for assessing language proficiency. For example, Mona kept going back to how she was assessed as a language learner—through traditional tests and quizzes—and the various benefits such assessment had on her language learning. She explained that the main objective of traditional assessment was to filter the high achieving from the low achieving students. That's why Mona

believed that comprehension questions, tests, and quizzes are the most appropriate tools that best reflect students' acquisition of English language. She explained the common tools she used in gauging students' understanding:

I give them comprehension questions to give me feedback whether the students learned or not...I give them matching questions, they match the character with the characteristics...I give them spelling and vocabulary tests.

Talking about her assessment practices in the classroom, Sherroq believed that assessment comprised for her "all the tools that can help me know everything about what the student knows in reading, writing, listening, speaking and grammar...I use tests, quizzes, question and answer." For Sherroq, "all the tools" of assessment reflected tests, quizzes, and oral and written questioning only. In addition, Sherroq believed that students' results on tests were the best indicators for their learning, unlike performance-based assessment that did not reflect students' real knowledge of English language and structure. Amal echoed Sherroq's beliefs regarding the efficiency of tests in assessing language proficiency and added that traditional assessments were more manageable for, both, students and teachers as they were specific to the knowledge covered in the classroom, which facilitated for the students the retrieval of knowledge they had already memorized. On the contrary, Aziza was against teachers' heavy reliance on tests as the sole means of assessment. Reflecting on her own experience as a second language learner, she explained that her teachers' use of tests to constantly assess students hindered their progress in certain language areas, such as writing, which she believed was not fair for the students. Aziza explained that since assessment was not linked to instruction, students were not aware of their strengths or weaknesses. She elaborated:

The writing assignment would be out of 20 and the teacher would read the whole text and give me an overall grade without any details...so I didn't know what I had done well.

There are many things that a teacher should look at when assessing writing such as ideas, the structure, the grammar, but we didn't know then how was our performance in regards to these areas. The grades did not show us how we can do better.

Accordingly, Aziza expressed her strong belief that adopting tests as the only way of assessment was not enough to draw a holistic picture of students' language learning progress since traditional tests only measured discrete language skills, such as reading and writing. She noted:

For me I like it more to assess students from different angles rather than just exams. For example, through presentations, a product that she produces, a research she conducts, her impressions about the lessons...This way assessment is not about tests, quizzes and memorization anymore...it's more about application.

Aziza's beliefs regarding language assessment reflected more of a performance oriented approach to learning and assessment, rather than, a traditional grammar-based one.

In this chapter, I examined teachers' past language learning experiences, their professional coursework background, their inservice teacher training, and their beliefs about English teaching, learning, and assessment. From the interviews I found that past experiences influenced beliefs in different ways. For example, some teachers preferred the traditional approach to language teaching they experienced as students, while others did not. All of the teachers lacked systematic preparation to be language teachers and drew information from their own teachers or their senior colleagues. As professionals they had experienced spotty professional development thus far and did not feel well-supported to learn new techniques. Thus, as we will see in later chapters, Emirate teachers' beliefs and their interactions with the ECART

was socially and historically contextualized in complex ways. In the next chapter, I will explore the process of the ECART and the various ways in which Emirate teachers encountered it. In addition, I will delineate some of the factors that influenced teachers' receptiveness toward the ECART.

Chapter 6

Teachers Encountering the ECART

In the previous chapter, I explored Emirate teachers' preexisting beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment. The interpretation of the data in the current study revealed four main sources that served to shape teachers' beliefs: a) their past language learning experiences, b) their professional background knowledge, c) the veteran teachers they encountered at the beginning of their teaching career, and d) their past teaching experiences. Before embarking on a discussion regarding the extent to which Emirate teachers' beliefs influence their receptiveness and implementation of the ECART, it is important to examine the underlying guidelines and principles of the ECART framework and highlight the ways in which such curriculum change was different from the traditional prescribed curricula that Emirate teachers have been using throughout their teaching profession. This chapter offers a brief description of the ECART framework and process, an exploration of Emirate teachers' readiness to English language reform, and an examination of the different factors that might have served to exacerbate teachers' uneasiness when using and implementing the ECART in the classroom.

Brief Description of the ECART Framework

Since its inception in 2005, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) of the UAE—which is comparable to a State Board of Education in the United States—has been strategically developing and implementing various educational initiatives and programs in order to improve the learning of children whose parents are UAE citizens. One of these reform initiatives is the English Continuous Assessment Rich Tasks (ECART) that aims at enhancing the English language learning experiences of national students and incorporating the Emirati culture into education. ECART is a pedagogical framework designed by ADEC in 2009—and formally

implemented in Abu Dhabi governmental schools since 2011—to enhance the teaching, learning, and assessment of the subject-matter English for Emirate’ middle and high school students who reside within the Abu Dhabi Emirate. In their description of the ECART policy, ADEC references the “State of Queensland’s Quality Teaching Framework” which shows that the ECART is adapted from an Australian pedagogical framework of teaching and learning. ADEC describes the purpose of the ECART in terms of its requirements as follows:

ECART requires students to use higher order thinking skills, engage in critical and creative thinking, problem solving and collaboration with peers while developing language in context. ECART requires deep learning to occur by students actively inquiring rather than to find or be given information to present in some form. By working through all sections of the process students learn how to learn rather than memorize information for an examination. ECART encourages students to engage in and develop new and or different understandings. ECART encourages students to make connections to their Emirati culture and heritage and the wider world. (ADEC’s English Framework, 2012, p.5)

The above requirements show that the ECART is designed to promote a student-centered environment, provide opportunities for inquiry-based learning, encourage students to think critically, and link them to their cultural and heritage background. In addition to creating a teaching and learning environment that helps students take responsibility for their own learning, ECART offers a model for ongoing and continuous assessment that aims to assess students’ performance along a continuum of learning. Accordingly, ADEC has defined a set of standards and learning outcomes against which students’ performance was being measured. The overall guiding principles of the ECART are:

- All students are capable of learning
- The teacher is responsible for student learning
- Students will learn in a student centered environment
- Teachers will facilitate an Inquiry based process
- Curriculum content and English language development are integrated in context
- Students work towards meeting learning outcomes

According to ADEC, the ECART is not a textbook-driven curriculum, but rather an outcome-based curriculum where decisions about teaching and assessment are driven by learning outcomes that students are expected to display at the end of each semester. To that end, ADEC provides teachers with an ECART guide, the standards, and learning outcomes that delineate the skills and knowledge students in grades 6 through 12 should gain in the areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Teachers are then required to collaborate in order to make decisions regarding the choice and sequencing of materials used in classes and the assessment practices that students will engage in to demonstrate their understanding.

The school year in UAE is divided into three trimesters. Since the ECART is a theme-based framework, teachers have to abide by the themes set by ADEC for the first and third trimester. However, teachers are allowed to choose a theme freely for the second trimester. For example, in grade six, the first theme is “People and Place” and the third theme is “My Imaginary World” (see Table 2 p. 105 for a description of the themes for grade 6). ADEC explains that the ECART is based on:

A process of inquiry that should be engaging and relevant to the cohort of students.

Language and 21st century skills are woven throughout the process at the appropriate points. The process requires that rich tasks are developed that encourage and support

students to construct their own learning and understanding. (ADEC's English Framework, 2012, p.5)

Table 2. *ECART Themes and Guiding Questions for each Trimester in Grade 6*

Trimester	Theme	Guiding Questions
1	People and Places	Who am I? What do I have in common with others? Differences and similarities between people/places? What are my goals?
2	Free Theme	Free Guiding Questions
3	My Imaginary World	What do composers do to create texts and performances? Why do composers use imagination? How do I use imagination?

The ECART process starts at the beginning of every school year when teachers are required to hold meetings with the coordinator of the English department in order to choose text type (fiction/nonfiction), genres (short story, drama, poetry, biography, news report), and Integrated Strand Tasks (a set of twelve tasks, some of which are compare and contrast, writing for purpose, narrative...etc) that will be covered throughout the year. Language features (grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, etc.) are woven through the content of each trimester and not taught in isolation, but rather in the context of working through the tasks of the theme. Teachers then either take up (in the first and third trimester) or decide on (in the second trimester) the theme and use, or develop, its guiding focus questions and the core vocabulary. This process is mandated by ADEC and for each theme the teachers develop a unit plan, which they will use during the trimester. Technology is integrated as an important learning tool in teaching and learning. In addition, Abu Dhabi Standards, learning outcomes, and 21st century language skills are embedded within the overall framework of the ECART as they guide the teaching, learning, and assessment of students.

In the ECART process, teachers act as facilitators who guide student's learning process. Teachers, thus, scaffold students through the inquiry process where students gather information, process it, organize it, synthesize their findings, and present it in a form of product to the entire class. Finally, teachers and students engage in reflective and evaluative conferences to finalize their ECART product (see Table 3 p. 107 for a brief description of the ECART requirements, including the responsibilities of teachers during the process of ECART completion).

For ADEC, engaging students in inquiry-based learning through the ECART process “should lead to promoting and developing sustainable independent learning (Abu Dhabi Educational Council, 2011). In such an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning, classroom assessment has to target students' deep understanding and high-order thinking skills, rather than superficial retrieval of information. In addition, criteria of success should be explicit and available to the students in order to know what is expected from them and how to reach certain learning goals. Accordingly, the ECART presents a framework for continuous assessment “to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills against set criteria” (Abu Dhabi Educational Council, 2011). Such criteria are available through various rubrics that are included in the ECART guide. ADEC, thus, regards the ECART as an innovative English curriculum compared to the traditional textbook-driven curricula that have been long used in the UAE schools.

From the description above regarding the ECART process, it is notable that such a process is radically different from the traditional curriculum that teachers have been using for the past years. Prior to the ECART, Emirate teachers used a prescribed curriculum and textbooks that contained various lesson plans and included the language skills and grammatical language structures to be taught.

Table 3. *Brief Description of the ECART Requirements, including the Responsibilities of Teachers during the Process of ECART Completion.*

Theme	ECART Guide	Teachers' Responsibilities
My Imaginary World	<i>Guiding focus questions to consider and explore:</i> • What do composers do to create texts and performances? • Why do composers use imagination? • How do I use imagination? <i>Core vocabulary:</i> • A list of guiding vocabulary required to explore the topic deeply <i>List of text types and genres</i> • Narrative: short story, myth and legends, fables, memoir, etc. • Information: biography, news report, brochures, etc. • Critical Response: debate, argument, discussion, etc. <i>List of 12 Integrated Strand Tasks that intend to develop specific skills (one per trimester):</i> • Compare and contrast, creative writing, reading and listening for meaning, writing for purpose...etc <i>Focus language features (must be taught in context):</i> • Noun, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, phrases and clause, connectives. <i>E-learning</i> • Teaching and learning empowered by electronic technology <i>Final Product</i> • Students choose the type of product they will create to demonstrate their understanding of their ECART research. The product must be an example of the focus text type and genres within that text type. <i>Assessment</i> • <i>For Learning and Of Learning</i> • <i>Learning outcomes and Standards</i> • Rubrics	Find the appropriate grade themes, guiding focus questions and vocabulary for the year. Plan teaching, learning and assessment using these choices Choose the focus text type and genre for each trimester. Develop challenging tasks that provide opportunities for students to achieve the learning outcomes. Develop your own understanding of the focus language features by finding further information about them using grammar reference books, the internet etc. Write your own sample in the text type / genre you are expecting students to use. Select 3 language features for which you can see strong patterns throughout the sample you have written. For example, if you have written a short story (narrative text type) you may notice a clear pattern in the use of <i>tense</i>, <i>adjectives</i> and <i>connecting words</i>. Choose a process to help students identify a range of products within the text type and genre based on their interests, skills, and strengths that can best demonstrate their understanding of the identified text type and messages. Provide opportunities for students to engage in critical and creative thinking where transfer of knowledge and skills is evident. Assessment tasks must challenge higher order and problem solving skills.

When describing the history of curriculum development in UAE, Ridge and Farah (2009) explained:

Since 1985 the word “curriculum” in the UAE context is largely used to refer to official textbooks, or intended curriculum, rather than any documentation outlining what skills or standards a student should acquire in a particular grade or subject. This has meant that teachers have been very restricted in what they can teach, as they are bound precisely to the content and activities prescribed by the textbooks in order to ensure that what they teach matches what will be assessed. (p. 1)

In addition, assessment was provided in the form of tests that measured students’ retrieval of information gained from the textbooks. However, as it is clear from Table 3, Emirate teachers are currently responsible for developing a curriculum based on the guidelines of the ECART framework, in addition to teaching and assessing in ways that are compatible with an inquiry based approach to teaching and learning.

Teachers’ Readiness for English Language Reform

Researchers have long argued that teachers are key to the success of any educational reform since they are the ones who implement the reform initiatives in the classroom (Battista, 1994; Harris, 2003). Since teachers’ beliefs have a great influence on their practices, it was important to examine EFL teachers’ beliefs regarding their preparedness for enacting English reform in UAE. The four participating teachers in the current study indicated that they were not ready and/or prepared for either the nature or the suddenness of the change in the English curriculum in UAE public schools. For example, Aziza explained that in the past decade the English curriculum at her school has changed many times from a traditional one that focused on

the acquisition of discrete language skills to more progressive and student-centered curricula that focused on communication and application of language skills. However, Aziza explained that even though the curriculum was gradually changing to a communicative one “the teaching and assessment were still the same old traditional way...it was just a change of the curriculum to a better one that engaged students more into learning, but the way we taught and assessed our students remained unchanged.” As a result of the radical changes proposed by the ECART, especially in the area of assessment, where “ADEC changed how we assess students, the students are now required to conduct research and do presentations...before students were not asked to do that,” Aziza believed that her past teaching experiences have not prepared her for this sudden change in teaching, as well as in assessment.

Sherooq also voiced her disappointment regarding the continuous and rapid change of English curriculum. Prior to the ECART, she explained that they used to follow a traditional skill-based curriculum that mainly divided the four skills of language—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—along each unit. She asserted that she loved the old curriculum and was very distressed to moving to the ECART especially that it required teachers to incorporate “21st century skills” such as critical and creative thinking, which were skills that she was unfamiliar with. She reflected:

ADEC sent us the ECART guide and that’s it...we kept reading this guide and felt that it was so overwhelming...what are the 21st century skills? I don’t even know what are these skills about or how to apply them.

That’s why Sherooq expressed her attachment to the old curriculum and wondered if there was a way to go back to it while drawing on some aspects of the reform, she voiced her thinking:

I am really wondering why they don't go back to the old system so we can use it and add to it whatever reform they want such as developing students' thinking abilities and knowledge etc., we can still do all of this through the old system

Mona was taken aback by the reform, as well, mainly for “completely throwing away the old system of teaching and assessment and getting us a new one” and believed that “an integration between the old curriculum and the ECART would be better.” Amal voiced the same reaction toward the introduction of the ECART, “I feel ADEC completely threw away the old system of teaching and assessment; there should be a balance between the old system and the ECART.” For the balance to take place, Amal believed that the ECART should not be considered a curriculum in itself; rather it should be treated as an external requirement to an already established curriculum like the old one. She recommended, “the ECART is an external or add-on thing to what we are already doing...I believe the ECART should be a supporting material that supplements a solid curriculum.”

It was clear teachers perceived the ECART as a completely new system for teaching and assessment, which they were neither familiar with nor prepared for. Various factors have contributed to teachers' sense of complete unfamiliarity with the ECART framework, such as their confusion regarding the notion of continuous assessment, lack of textbooks and coherent curriculum, lack of grammar instruction and assessment, heavy reliance on performance-based approaches to teaching and assessment, lack of rigorous language testing, and the use of rubrics as a scoring tool. In addition, the teachers in the current study expressed the insufficiency of the professional development experiences they were getting from ADEC, which resulted in teachers' feeling unqualified and uncertain of their practices when enacting the ECART in the classroom. Below I discuss each of these factors and highlight how the participating teachers perceived them

in a different manner depending on their preexisting beliefs about English language teaching, learning, and assessment, which were discussed in the previous chapter.

Factors Affecting Teachers' Receptiveness of the ECART

The Notion of Continuous Assessment

The English reform in UAE has introduced new conceptual frameworks in English teaching, learning, and assessment that were unfamiliar to the Emirate teachers. One of the most important concepts introduced in the ECART was the notion of continuous assessment. ECART stands for English Continuous Assessment Rich Tasks, which describes a framework of ongoing assessment through which students engage in inquiry-based tasks that encourage students to construct their own learning and understanding of English. The four participating teachers in the current study believed they were bombarded by new terms and concepts as a result of the English reform. Aziza, for example, believed that the notion of continuous assessment did not add any new dimension to what she has already been doing as a teacher, which was to continuously assess her students. She argued:

Before the ECART I also used to do continuous assessment in the form of written and oral quizzes...now the continuous assessment is in a different form...I look at the student's file to see if she is applying the skills I am teaching her or not, if she is progressing her research, like gathering information and summarizing.

Since one of the main functions of the ECART was to develop students' learning skills in areas of problem solving, critical and creative thinking, collaboration and taking responsibility of learning, Aziza reflected that in the past she used to continuously assess students' knowledge through tests, however currently she was "continuously assessing their skills...so for me the notion of continuous assessment is the same, just targeting different outcomes." Aziza's

reflection on how she perceived continuous assessment showed that she did not have a thorough understanding of what continuous assessment entailed and how different it was from traditional forms of assessment, which tend to be summative and thus reflected in tests rather than in performances of various skilled behaviors in an ongoing way.

Sherooq was as confused as Aziza regarding the notion of “continuous assessment.” She explained that she did not fully understand the term and did not see how different it was from what she used to do in the past. She voiced her opinion regarding the notion of “continuous assessment” by saying:

I really don't understand how ADEC conceptualizes continuous assessment...because I consider what I used to do in the past as continuous assessment, which is assessing each step the I taught the students...and now ADEC just introduced a new word to what I used to do before and called it continuous assessment...on the outside, the form of the assessment looks different because it is presented through the ECART, but in reality I am doing the same thing I used to do before.

Accordingly, for the most part, Sherooq believed that testing was a better form of “continuous assessment” that she used with her students even prior to the implementation of the ECART. She constantly asserted, “I don't see a difference between how I used to assess students in the past and now, on the contrary, I feel that the old assessment was better.” Sherooq preferred the traditional form of English assessment mainly because, for her, it was a very straightforward process that had guaranteed results. She explained, “the old system of assessment focused on what students had in their minds and how they can put it on paper... if students studied well, they will get a good grade and do well in the exam.” That's why she replicated various lesson plans and assessments that were included in the old curriculum. Sherooq admitted that she knew

what she was doing might not be what ADEC had in mind—in terms of how to carry out continuous assessment in the classroom—yet she believed it was ADEC’s responsibility to clarify for her any misconceptions she had:

From ADEC’s viewpoint, probably the problem stems from me, as a teacher, and that what I am doing is not real continuous assessment...but if that is the case, then ADEC should intervene and show me what is continuous assessment and how to do it.

Sherooq was aware that she might not be carrying out continuous assessment practices in the right way. However, she believed the way she assessed her students, through tests and other forms of traditional assessment tools, was also considered a form of continuous assessment. Like Aziza, Sherooq lacked clear understanding of the principles of continuous assessment and mistakenly considered repetitive tests as forms of ongoing assessments.

Mona, on the other hand, differentiated between the ECART and what she referred to as “everyday assessment.” For her, the notion of continuous assessment applied only to the ECART—not to her “everyday assessment”—as she explained “in my mind continuous assessment is only linked to the file the students have to submit at the end of the semester because it assess the process that’s why it is called continuous because it doesn’t stop...even after the students submit their project, they have to carry out a final a final reflection of it.” On the other hand, the everyday assessment included “testing that I don’t usually grade, but it’s for me as a teacher to see what they have learned...I give them comprehension questions so I can get feedback whether the students learned or not...I give them matching questions, I give them a spelling test and vocabulary tests.” Mona, thus, treated the ECART as a checklist that she had to go through and fulfill in order for the students to submit their final project at the end of the semester. For her, traditional tests helped her unravel students’ weaknesses, whereas the ECART

did not show her how they progressed or what language areas they needed to focus on. She explained:

For me, it's a number of certain skills that should be reflected on the ECART of each student and I use these set of skills as a checklist when I grade their ECART... but I don't know for each student what is her weakness or how she improved in certain areas.

It was clear that Mona treated the continuous assessment embedded in the ECART in a superficial way, which did not allow her to reap the benefits of such assessments in gauging her students' performance across different language skills and various situations. On the contrary, her lack of understanding of how continuous assessment can provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of different aspect of the language misguided her into thinking that continuous assessment failed to uncover her students' strengths and weakness.

Lack of Textbooks and Coherent Curriculum

An important element to teachers' bewilderment regarding the introduction of the ECART was the parallel withdrawal of English textbooks from schools. Before implementing the ECART, ADEC had withdrawn all English textbooks from schools and provided teachers with an ECART guide that explained the purpose of the ECART and how it functioned as both a curriculum and method of assessment. Teachers were then required to construct materials that adhered to the guidelines and themes presented in the ECART guide. However, teachers participating in the current study were used to relying on a textbook-driven curriculum as it shaped their learning as past language learners and they depended on it throughout their past teaching experiences. Aziza justified her frustration at the lack of textbooks by saying:

This curriculum is different than anything I have encountered before...they don't give us textbooks...what really bothered us was that we were teaching a specific curriculum, we had textbooks, teachers' and students' guides, and all of the sudden everything changed...they did not prepare us for this sudden change...

Aziza explained that she had been always tied by the textbooks provided through the ministry of education "as they prescribed how to teach and assess students." She elaborated that she never used to have control over the materials used in class, including assessment, because everything was prescribed in the curriculum. She asserted:

That was how the curriculum was set and I had no control of it...the ministry used to tell us this is how you should assess your students, this is how you should teach them and I just followed...I didn't have any say in it.

However, Aziza complained that currently she was given complete autonomy to create materials and assessment tools without the use of any textbooks or teachers' guides, "ADEC depends on the teacher to construct the curriculum, which poses difficulty on us...sometimes I don't know if what I am doing is correct or not." Amal also expressed her astonishment regarding ADEC's substituting English textbooks with the ECART framework. She explained that she had been teaching and using English textbooks for eleven years and that she could not easily get rid of the idea of teaching without textbooks. She explained, "we don't have a book and I have never heard of a teacher who teaches without a book...there has to be a book." As a result, the teachers were responsible for creating all the materials and content used in the classroom without having any textbooks as reference, which Amal was against:

The system now depends on the teacher to create everything...Currently, the teacher is the one who develops the curriculum and this is nonsense...ADEC provides us with the theme and asks us to do with it whatever we want...where is the guidance?

In addition, ADEC'S withdrawal of textbooks had challenged Amal's perception regarding the teacher's role in the classroom. For her, she believed "the only thing required from me as a teacher is to be creative in the way I teach and the way I prepare for class, but I should not be required to create a curriculum for the students." As an EFL teacher in UAE, Amal was socialized into teaching exclusively from textbooks. Her role as a teacher was defined by how much she abided by the information covered in English textbooks and the extent to which she was creative when presenting such knowledge. To Amal, any other alternative to textbooks when teaching and assessing English was questionable.

For Sherooq, the change of the old curriculum to the ECART coupled with the withdrawal of textbooks was overwhelming, not only for her, but also for the other teachers at her school. She reported:

We were told that the entire curriculum is changing to what is now called the ECART and they gave us the framework but nobody decoded it to us...we were very lost...so we tried to create our own curriculum and handouts.

Sherooq explained that ADEC's provision of ECART guide and themes was insufficient for the teachers to create a curriculum out of it and they felt "lost trying to figure out what we should teach the students." Even though Sherooq created a curriculum that she and her colleagues used in class, she was still uncertain if she was fulfilling ADEC'S vision of how an ECART curriculum should look like. She explained:

I don't know if what I am doing is correct or not...nobody told me until now if what I am doing is right or wrong, even though I sent copies of this ECART to ADEC...but I didn't get feedback from them.

Sherooq believed that the lack of textbooks was equivalent to a lack of curriculum, which she believed had a detrimental effect on the students, as well as, the teachers. Ornstein (1994) explained that teachers who were used to textbook-driven curricula heavily relied on textbooks and considered them “the main medium of education” (p.74). As a result, when the main medium of education disappeared, Sherooq felt that students' learning was not progressing in an effective manner, “the students don't feel there is a curriculum or there is anything they should be studying...they proceed from this grade not having any solid knowledge and easily forget what they have learned.” She further quoted a high performing student who revealed to her “I liked the old curriculum better because we had a book that we learned from.” Sherooq considered the lack of textbooks to be “a crisis because I feel I am not teaching anything...I believe there are lots of useful things the new reform offers, but I need a textbook.” Therefore, Sherooq believed that ADEC “overrated the importance of the ECART at the expense of the knowledge the students should have in their minds.” For Sherooq such knowledge could only be derived from textbooks, which were currently substituted with the ECART framework.

Like Aziza and Sherooq, Mona voiced her annoyance that she had to create all the materials and lessons used in class due to the lack of textbooks and teachers' guides. Mona compared her experiences as a language learner to that of her current students and believed that even though she started learning English in grade four she was more advanced than her students who have been learning English since grade one. Mona reflected that one reason for her success, as an English language learner, was the availability of English textbooks. Mona illustrated that

the new English reform required the teachers to construct their own materials based on the themes provided in the ECART. The teachers, thus, ended up printing out several lesson plans and exercises from the Internet, which they later distributed to the students. Mona believed that the provision of textbooks was not only crucial for teachers, but also for students, because “they need textbooks...they don’t appreciate the value of the handouts we give them...they don’t feel they have a curriculum to follow.” The teachers indicated that textbooks represented the existence of a coherent and solid curriculum and without them, both teachers and student, were at risk. Teachers’ strong connection to a textbook-driven curriculum was discussed in an earlier study conducted by Troudi and Alwan (2010) that examined Emirate teachers’ feeling at times of curriculum change and reported, “all the participants considered the ‘book’ to be the curriculum” (p.113).

Lack of Grammar Instruction and Assessment

The ECART explicitly stated that teachers were not to teach grammar in isolation by means of handing out “photocopied worksheets from a grammar book” (ADEC’s English Framework, 2012, p.32). The ECART process moves away from explicit instruction and assessment of grammar to one that is embedded within the context of actual communication. The teachers in the current study valued the explicit instruction of grammar as was obvious from their strong beliefs about grammar teaching in Chapter 5. Thus, they stated that they believed the ECART has not treated the instruction or assessment of grammar fairly. For example, Aziza explained that grammar instruction was not included in the new ECART framework. She elaborated that the ECART framework offered them a set of language functions to choose from and required teachers to teach them in context. She believed, “the ECART has treated the instruction of grammar unfairly” because grammar cannot be taught exclusively through context,

“you have to teach the rule then you apply it in different situations but now we can’t teach grammar and there is not even time to dedicate an entire class period for teaching grammar...it’s not in the curriculum.” Amal added that the ECART has ignored grammar instruction and assessment, which is an important aspect in second language learning. She explained, “the assessment of grammar is very weak in the new system and the grammar is the foundation of any language...now we are rarely teaching grammar...so it’s like we focus on assessing certain areas and ignore other ones.” Accordingly, Amal decided that she had to pay specific attention to the teaching and assessment of grammar and she had to overtly correct students when they made any grammatical mistakes, “I also usually correct students during class, I tell them this is verb, or, noun, or singular...I have to correct them.”

Mona agreed with Aziza and Amal regarding the importance of grammar instruction and argued that the ECART has impeded students’ mastery of English grammatical structure where “one would find that even the excellent students would tell you sentences like ‘yesterday, I buy.’ She further highlighted, “when a student reads a text and answers questions, the new system argues that the most important thing is that the student understood the text, it doesn’t matter if the structure of the sentence or spelling is not accurate.” She, thus, criticized the current approach to the teaching of grammar—where it is not taught separately but rather integrated within a language context—and believed that it left students with poor language structure background. Mona believed that more focus and time should be dedicated to the teaching and assessment of grammar. As a result, she admitted that she explicitly taught students grammar rules at the beginning of every semester, which she knew was against the current language teaching reform.

Sherooq was astonished that the teaching and assessment of grammar was not explicitly addressed in the ECART and she declared that she was against the teaching of grammar through context. She explained that she still used with the student traditional teaching methods such as grammar drills and memorization mainly due to their low proficiency in English. She clarified:

The new reform tells us to only teach grammar through context, without informing the student, let her notice it on her own...how come? Our students are poor in reading to start with so you are asking them to notice the grammar rules on their own!!

Accordingly, the participating teachers saw a great learning value in the explicit teaching and assessment of grammar and believed that teaching grammar through context was a drawback in the ECART framework as they believed their students were not ready to make that leap of extracting information through the context, rather than explicitly transmitting it to them.

Heavy Reliance on Performance-Based Approach

The teachers in the participating study suggested that one of the main disadvantages of the ECART was its heavy reliance on the performance-based approach to teaching, learning, and assessment. Unlike the traditional approach to language teaching and learning—which required students to complete various drills and quizzes—teachers believed that the process oriented approach was lenient and allowed students to pass easily. For example, Mona believed that the purpose of a process oriented approach to assessment was to allow students to pass regardless of their proficiency level, rather than filter the high performing from the low performing language learners. She reflected, “lots of students can pass...even those who are not that good in English language can still pass because they have either produced something or attempted to produce something.” Aziza added that the overreliance on developing students’ English language skills through engaging in performance-based tasks has resulted in their gaining less knowledge of

English language structure. She clarified that on the outside, students seemed to be doing a good job or creating a product and/or performing a task. However, they scored badly when they were tested in reading or grammar. She argued:

The focus on the application of skills and the process oriented approach when gauging what the students had learned and what they can do is valuable, but the problem is that it came at the expense of the amount of knowledge students' should acquire.

Accordingly, Aziza believed that grades obtained through the ECART were not reflective of students' proficiency level.

The ECART allows the student to get lots of grades which, I believe, is not useful to students' learning...ADEC should distribute more grades for written exams...otherwise you find weak students getting a good grade just because they completed their ECART.

Amal, on the other hand, argued that students did not currently perceive English as a serious subject matter since they did not need to study for it, but rather engage in performance-based activities in order to enhance their communication, which allowed them to get easy grades. She elaborated:

ADEC has to find a solution for the English curriculum...The new system for teaching relies mainly on engaging students in activities, which is why they don't pay attention to studying...they know they will get grades anyways if they carry out these activities...so I believe I should force them to study like before.

In an attempt to force students to study, Amal created a "dictation booklet" where she required students to memorize vocabulary and test them regularly. In addition she illustrated, "if they got the words wrong they have to copy it more than one time." She knew that what she was doing

was against the principles of the ECART, but she believed she was helping her students. She explained:

ADEC opposes this, but I do it because I know my students...they struggle with spelling, even the good ones so that's why I made up the dictation booklet...in the old system I rarely saw a high performing student who struggled with spelling, but nowadays I am seeing this a lot because the new system is not focusing on it.

Lack of Rigorous Language Testing

Performance-based assessment focuses on the process of learning, rather than the end product. Accordingly, tests and grades were less frequently used in the performance-based approach because the focus is on enhancing students' performance through the completion of various tasks that extend over a period of time, rather than merely rating students' performance "in relation to an external standard of correctness (how many right answers are given)" (The National Capital Language Resource Center, 2003, para. 7). This situation has bothered all the participating teachers since they considered traditional assessment as a valid and accurate reflection of students' learning progress. For instance, Aziza struggled with the way the reform was currently dealing with language testing. For her, the reform was greatly relying on a process-oriented approach to assessment at the expense of rigorous language testing. She expressed her opinion regarding the distribution of grades in the ECART framework saying, "What I don't like is that this kind of assessment has overruled the importance of exams especially that the grades dedicated to the ECART are higher than those of the final exams." For Sherroq, students' results on tests were the best indicators for their learning. She lamented, "there are no exams like before that really assess students' knowledge." She explained that a process-oriented approach to assessment was valuable—where the teacher focused more on monitoring and assessing the

process of learning—but she also believed that the old approach to teaching and assessment was more accurate and should not be disregarded. She elaborated:

I see the value of the new approach to teaching and I can see that the old approach is valuable as well and more guaranteed... The old assessment was more accurate as tests reflected the knowledge the students have in their minds and their real proficiency level.

Sherooq believed that performance-based assessments did not reflect students' real knowledge of English language and structure, as compared to traditional assessment. Unlike performance based assessment, Sherooq explained that traditional assessment—usually in the form of tests—placed high importance on grades, which forced students to study “grades are important because it force the students to study...now the students won't study at all unless I tell them there is an exam.” Accordingly, Sherroq criticized the lack of traditional testing that, she believed, used to be successful in assessing the knowledge students acquired during the semester. She voiced her frustration regarding the absence of continuous testing that would assess students' ability to retrieve knowledge in English language:

I am so upset at the fact that there isn't such tests that would assess students' knowledge of the information covered during the semester...

In an attempt to make up for the lack of tests and adapt the ECART to fit Sherooq's vision of a good assessment, she altered the some sections of the ECART to include grades for traditional tests. She explained:

We as teacher decided to devote the assessment of this section to traditional tests, such as reading, grammar, vocabulary, listening depending on what each teacher sees fit...I don't even know what are these skills about or how to apply them.

In addition, Sherooq explained that she felt obliged to continuously test students because it was what their parents wanted. She narrated a situation that occurred with one of the parents:

The parent of one of the top students talked to me about how her daughter has turned to become completely careless about English language class and this has to do mainly with assessment because there is nothing that she is studying, nothing that she is memorizing, there is no knowledge that she would be asked about or tested in.

Sherooq added that parents were familiar with the old traditional grading system, unlike the ECART grading system where students get to know their grades at the end of the trimester.

Sherooq explained that for this reason, she continue to test and quiz her students in order to be able to show their parents some grades:

The parents don't know how their children are graded because they don't see any grades except at the end of the semester...so by giving students exams, quizzes, vocabulary test, I kind of give parents something they could check out when they want to see how well their children are doing and what their performance is like.

In addition, she believed that parents reflected their satisfaction when their children got tested because “for parents and students alike, the ECART is not recognized as what reflects students’ language proficiency regardless of how much we try to explain for them the importance of ECART”.

Accordingly, it was clear that teachers appreciated traditional language testing due to various reasons, some of which were their accuracy in measuring discrete language skills, the validity of the grades in reflecting whether students were able to retrieve certain language features, the pressure such tests put on students to study hard, and pressure from parents to abide by the traditional testing.

Use of Rubrics as a Scoring Tool

In performance-based assessments, rubrics are used as a scoring tool to demonstrate the desired elements needed for the student to successfully produce a piece of work. Litz (2007) explained that rubrics “are intended as communication devices that precisely convey to students what their learning target is and what they need to do to reach that target” (para. 2). Rubrics are thus helpful for EFL students as guides to knowing the criteria for successful performance. However, teachers in the current study had mixed views regarding the effectiveness of rubrics. Aziza had a positive attitude towards the use of rubrics in class as she clarified that feedback was currently more detailed than how it was in the past, since she had to carefully examine students’ work against a set of detailed criteria. She explained that the use of rubrics had changed her views about assessment because they “act as a road map for the students through which they know where they will be heading.” She was the only teacher in the current study who believed that sharing the rubrics and explaining them to the students was important as it allowed them to participate in the assessment process since “they know what is required of them, the extent to which they can reach their goal, and the right way to apply the appropriate skills.” On the other hand, Sherooq was against the use of rubrics and admitted that she had not shared them with the students:

I haven’t shown them the rubric...I explained it to them orally but have not shared it with them...I don’t think they would understand it if I give it to them...grade 6th won’t understand anything like that...one time I gave them the writing rubric but I didn’t feel it made any difference to them...

Unlike traditional assessment where students were constantly being tested and given a grade for their tests, Sherooq complained the grading system for performance-based assessments was

confusing for students, as well as teachers mainly due to the use of rubrics. Sherooq explained that teachers were required to use rubrics to assess every skill and task included in the ECART, which means, “none of the students can get a zero.” Sherooq gave an example of the rubric used in writing assessment:

The rubric entails that if the student expressed her ideas effectively give her five, expressed part of the ideas give her four, got away from the topic give her 3, her ideas were not related to the topic give her 1...so the student can get 5 grades for gibberish...if it were for me I would give her zero.

Accordingly, Sherooq believed that the use of rubric in assessment has allowed students to get better grades, but did not advance their learning. For that reason Mona was also against the use of rubrics to evaluate students’ performance, as she believed that rubrics allowed students to get grades they didn’t deserve. She explained, “when we evaluate using the rubric, the students gets a grade even if she does the minimum work required of her, which I believe is not beneficial for the student. So basically she will get a grade regardless what she did.” Mona voiced her discontent with the way she was forced to use rubrics when assessing students and expressed how the current assessment went against what she believed in. She explained, “when I started using the rubric, if a student’s answer is weak or not complete I used to give her zero, but the advisor said that we can’t do this because anything the student writes down is an attempt to answer and I have to give her a grade and the lowest grade is 1...if it were for me, I would still give her a zero.” Accordingly, Mona believed that assessing students’ language learning through rubrics did not reflect an accurate measure of their language abilities. She believed that if current students were to be solely assessed through traditional tests, they would score way lower grades than what they get through rubric assessment:

I believe that the assessment now using the rubric is not reflective or accurate of students' English proficiency level...for instance, the students now whose grades are in the 80s, if time would go back, they wouldn't get this grade in the old system...they would definitely get a lower one.

Accordingly, Mona explained that she has doubts regarding the ECART as a valid assessment tool and, thus, she relied on testing instead mainly due to her lack of trust in the use of rubrics. She explained:

Nowadays we have a rubric for every task...the problem with the rubric is that regardless of what the student writes she would get a grade...so if she writes gibberish she would get 1...but, as a teacher, I disagree with this form of assessment, if the student didn't fulfill the criteria she should get a zero.

Teachers' negative attitudes toward the use of rubrics—as a reliable assessment tool in the classroom—stemmed from their beliefs in the sole validity of traditional tests in reflecting students' accurate proficiency level in English language.

All of the above factors served to intensify teachers' reaction toward the ECART as they regarded it as a foreign framework that took into account neither Emirate students' proficiency levels nor teachers' background knowledge. In addition, teachers believed that the professional development provided by ADEC was insufficient in helping them bridge the gap between their long-established teaching and assessment practices and the ones ADEC was calling for.

Insufficient Professional Development

Currently, professional development in UAE is mainly brought about through educational advisors who are appointed by ADEC to help English teachers through the process of curricular change. ADEC explained that the goal of appointing an advisor in each school was to “support

English teachers to develop and use international best-practice when teaching English in ADEC schools” (“English Medium”, n.d.). The four participating teachers in the current study had different experiences with their advisors, where teachers from AlMajid School indicated receiving more support and professional development than those in OmHabiba School.

Aziza and Mona acknowledge the help of their advisor and how she constantly supported their professional development as teachers. For example, Mona explained that their advisor shared with them the standards and learning outcomes outlined by ADEC, which was crucial for the teachers as it assisted them in creating “a plan as to what areas we need to focus on...the standards and learning outcomes are very important because they reflect what I want students to know and learn during the semester.” For her, “the advisor reflects the vision of ADEC.” Aziza also voiced her appreciation of the way the advisor introduced the standards to her as she regarded them to be very important “because it shows me what I need to cover with the students, the objective of learning, the skills the students should acquire in reading and writing, so I usually go back to the standards and learning outcomes.”

On the other hand, Sherooq and Amal from Om Habiba School were dissatisfied with their advisor and felt that she did not enhance their understanding of the ECART. Sherooq criticized the way her advisor handled their professional development meetings. From Sherooq’s point of view, her advisor being a foreigner did not help her in gaining an understanding of the new reform because of “foreigners’ style of communication” She gave an example to reflect the gap in communication between herself and the advisor:

One time she told us that we have to foster the 21st century skills mentioned in the ECART one of which is critical thinking, so I told her how can we do that, she replied back “you think about it, what do you think you should do to foster this skill?” so she

wouldn't explain for us, she want us to generate ideas and this is by the way the style of foreigners, they won't give you an answer, rather they want you to generate the answer...

So Sherooq admitted, "the problem of us, as teachers, is that we don't know the right way of implementing the reform, we want someone to teach us these different skills promoted by the ECART." Unlike the teachers in Almajd School, Sherooq explained that the teachers at her school did not use the standards or the learning outcomes because their advisor did not introduce these materials to them.

In addition, the teachers in the current study explained that ADEC sent them educators from time to time who held professional development sessions. However the teachers indicated that the topics were irrelevant to them and did not address their needs. For example, Sherooq complained that the educators talked about issues that mostly focused on the classroom environment and management, whereas what Sherooq and other English teachers at her school needed were topics related to enhancing students' proficiency levels in English, especially their reading skills. She complained, "I don't feel that we as teachers have any support in developing the reading abilities of the student." Amal added that more support was needed from ADEC in order for the ECART to be implemented in the right way. She explained that she needed more guidance in how to apply different aspects of continuous assessment, one of which was differentiation:

The teacher can't do this on her own...ADEC needs to provide us with such materials...we need more support from ADEC in terms of assessment materials, how to consider the individual differences among students, they should provide us with textbooks...

In this chapter I explored the ECART framework and illustrated how the process and underlying principles of the ECART were inherently different from the old curriculum the Emirate teachers have been using for the past years. In addition, I delineated the various factors that contributed to teachers' sense of perplexity when dealing with the ECART. The teachers in the current study expressed their lack of knowledge regarding how to successfully put into action many of the activities and skills included in the ECART. They explained that the ECART framework and the changes that had taken place in their teaching and assessment practices were completely novel to the teachers, as they have not encountered any curriculum like that before. They asserted that in order for them to be able to enact the ECART in accordance with ADEC's vision, they would have to receive massive support from ADEC. In the next chapter, I will examine the extent to which the participating teachers' beliefs influenced their instructional and assessment practices as reflected in the five classroom observations conducted for each teacher.

Chapter 7

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in the Context of the ECART Reform

The current study represents an attempt to understand Emirate teachers' beliefs regarding English language teaching, learning, and assessment in the context of the ECART reform, in addition to highlighting the different ways their beliefs influence their practices in the classroom. The research questions that guided the current study aimed to explore not only Emirate teachers' beliefs and behavior, but also the contextual factors—classroom environment, curriculum, and professional development—that mediated their understanding and enactment of reform in the classroom. The previous chapters (4-6) served to cover the following areas respectively:

- lay out the context of the current study, describe the schools from which I gathered my data, and introduce the four participating teachers along with a description of their personal and educational backgrounds;
- explore teachers' preexisting beliefs about English teaching and learning that have been formed early on in their lives as a result of their prior language learning experiences, professional background knowledge, and teaching experiences; and
- overview the ECART framework and process, delineate how its underlying learning theories and principles were inherently different than those underpinning the old prescribed curricula that have been used in UAE since 1985, and examine Emirate teachers' perceived readiness for such curricular change and the factors they attributed to their confusion and insecurity when using the ECART.

The current chapter adds to the previous ones in that it goes into detail regarding the participating teachers' understanding of their roles in the current reform, their beliefs about the effectiveness of the changes proposed by the ECART in the teaching and assessment of English language, and

the extent to which teachers' beliefs—whether the preexisting or the current ones—influence their enactment of the ECART in the classroom.

Teachers' Understanding of their Current Role in the Classroom

One of the main guiding principles of the ECART is that “Teachers will facilitate an Inquiry based process” (ADEC’s English Framework, 2012, p.4). This principle reflects a constructivist approach to language teaching and learning in which the teacher’s role changes from a lecturer to a facilitator of learning who guides students to use their background knowledge and personal interpretation of the world in the learning process (Honebein, 1996). In a constructivist-learning environment, Emirate teachers’ role would be to guide students through their learning process and assist them in acquiring the skills needed to become independent learners. Such role was radically different from the one Emirate teachers assumed in the classroom before the introduction of the ECART. The four participating teachers in the current study indicated that they *had* to act as facilitators in the classrooms because it was ADEC’s vision of how teachers should go about teaching in the 21st century. As with every other aspect of the English reform, participating teachers always referred to their role in the current educational change by verbs that denoted an obligatory state such as *had*, *should*, and *required*, which reflected the authoritative nature of top-down reform in UAE.

Even though Emirate teachers indicated that the introduction of the ECART has indeed changed their role in the classroom, each one of them practiced her role as a facilitator of learning differently depending on her preexisting beliefs regarding teachers’ role in the classroom and the extent to which she believed such role would enhance students’ learning. Accordingly, in some case teachers’ beliefs regarding their role as facilitators of learning were

consistent with their classroom behaviors and in other instances their reported beliefs contradicted how they acted in their classrooms.

When reflecting on her past experiences as language learner, Aziza criticized the traditional approach to language teaching her previous teachers used to adopt in the classroom, as it alienated the students from the learning process. However, she explained that as a teacher who used to follow a prescribed curriculum, she was still the one responsible for providing students' with knowledge, as their role was limited to studying the lessons offered in the textbooks. Aziza acknowledged that the ECART helped her create a student-centered environment that was absent before the introduction of the ECART framework. She believed that a student-centered environment enhanced students' learning as it gave them a chance to exercise a sense of ownership regarding their language learning. She noted:

Before the ECART, the responsibility of students' learning depended mainly on myself, the environment was teacher-centered but now I am more as a facilitator and this is better because it allows more of student participation and the students get a good grasp of the knowledge because they work on it themselves...they become more responsible of their learning and more independent...

Accordingly, she believed that her role has changed from being the source of knowledge in the classroom to facilitating and sharing knowledge with her students.

Mona added that teachers were currently required to offer a learner-centered environment because it was "ADEC's vision." She clarified that before the ECART, she used to hold a teacher-centered approach to learning however, she stated that her role was changing as a result of the reform. She explained:

In the past, the class interaction mainly relied on question and answer form and the teachers would mostly tell the students what to do and what not to do...but now I have to act as a facilitator because this is one of the twenty first century skills.

Even though Mona recognized the importance of actively engaging students in the learning process, she expressed her struggle of maintaining an exclusively student-centered environment due to students' low proficiency level of English. She explained that the majority of her students were not ready yet to work on their own due to their poor mastery of English and were very dependent on their teachers to the extent "that the students won't be able to do good in class without their teachers." For that reason, Mona stated that since the introduction of the ECART, she has been trying to find a balance between creating a teacher-centered and a student-centered learning environment. She noted that ADEC made attempts to get the teachers at her school to recognize the new role they should play in the classroom. For instance, Mona explained that ADEC held a professional development workshop at her school that illustrated the current role of teachers in the classroom and how they should move away from "being transmitters of knowledge to helping students self-learn." She explained that teachers did not respond very well to this workshop because it did not address the reality of students' English proficiency level. She argued, "We are required to create a student-centered environment regardless of the proficiency of the students...not all students can work on their own and even if I model for them or give them instructions they still need lots of help." For Mona, being a facilitator of learning in her classroom was not a role that she could maintain regularly. Mona believed that since her students' English proficiency level was low and she couldn't rely on them to act as independent learners, she was obliged—most of the time—to be in control of the teaching environment.

Amal shared the same attitude as Mona where she recognized the inevitable change of her role in the classroom as a result of the student-centered approach that ADEC promoted. She explained that her role has changed since she became more of a facilitator, which gave students more chance to practice English language in class. She asserted:

I am more of a facilitator nowadays...before the curriculum was different, since all the lessons relied on students' answering comprehension questions or doing drills...nowadays, I depend more on the students to do the work since they have to research, analyze, practice the language...so their role is different than before...this way they learn better.

For Amal, 'learning better' meant that students were currently practicing the language and not only receiving information from the teacher.

Even though Amal appreciated how the ECART provided students with more opportunities to practice the language in authentic ways, she still strongly sided with the traditional approach to language teaching and learning. Amal stated her firm belief that English learning takes place mainly through memorization of vocabulary and grammar structures. She was, thus, against the reform's stance regarding memorization as an ineffective tool of language learning. On the contrary, she considered the constant engagement of students in activities—at the expense of memorizing—to be playful. She believed that this would not result in learning. She argued, "students have to memorize in order to learn...but now the reform requires us to play with the students, well I don't believe this is proper teaching...playing will not result in learning." Accordingly, for Amal, maintaining an exclusively student-centered environment in the classroom was not feasible. She emphasized:

The idea of students depending on themselves 100 percent is still not acceptable, they are scared because they are used to relying on their teacher all the time...we need time for this transition because it is not an easy one.

She proposed that an integration of the traditional and the student-centered approach to language teaching was important to maximize students' learning of English. She explained that despite allowing students to work on their own in class, she still required them to memorize and copy vocabulary, in addition to, testing them regularly, "I have a dictation booklet so I make them memorize words and I test them...if they got the words wrong they have to copy it more than one time." Accordingly, Amal held contradicting beliefs about her role as a facilitator of learning. On one hand, she acknowledged her role as a facilitator of learning through promoting the communicative aspect of the ECART, which she believed enhanced students' use of the language. On the other hand she criticized such role as it allowed students to be "playful" in the classroom, which she reacted to by controlling the learning environment through regularly involving students' in drills, tests, and quizzes.

Sherooq expressed the same struggle of juggling between a teacher and a student approach to language learning. Sherooq believed that the current reform's call for a change in teachers, as well as, students' roles—where teachers act as facilitators and students have more ownership of their learning—was not in the best interest of students' learning. She believed that students learn best when they received the knowledge from the teacher and recited it back through repetition. Hence, Sherooq resisted solely maintaining a student-centered environment and giving up her traditional role of controlling the content and methods used in class. She contended:

The new reform says, don't force your style on the student, don't make a parrot out of the student that just recites back what you say as a teacher...I don't agree with this...I believe that we learn language through repetition...that's why I teach writing now using the old way where I write on the board and they copy what I write.

She further highlighted the difficulty of enacting new roles in the classroom:

ADEC wants the students to do all the work themselves and, for us, to just act as facilitators and I don't think this works...I work with them hand in hand in every step of the way through their learning because what they are asking from the students is just difficult from them to do on their own...I sometimes feel that I am in a dilemma between the old way and the new way of teaching.

Accordingly, Sherroq's adoption of a teacher-centered approach was mainly due to her belief that it was for the best interest of her students. Sherroq sensed that the ECART was challenging for her students and, thus, she resorted back to the traditional teaching methods, which she believed enhanced students' acquisition of the English language.

Looking at the different roles that the teachers believed they had to play in the classroom, it is fair to say that Emirate teachers were being caught in the midst of a paradigm shift between the traditional role of the EFL teacher in the classroom—as the all-knowing provider of knowledge—and the one who facilitates the learning process and co-construct knowledge with the students. Even though the participating teachers understood that the current reform required them to change their roles in the classrooms, each had her own perception of which role worked best in her classroom depending on her preexisting beliefs (discussed in chapter 5) and her knowledge of her students' needs. For example, Aziza expressed her strong belief in teachers' role as facilitators of learning because it gave her students a sense of ownership of their learning

process, which she found useful for her students' progress in the classroom. On the other hand, Mona was not always able to act as a facilitator of learning due to her students' poor English language skills and their dependency on her to deliver knowledge in the classroom. In other instances it was clear that teachers held conflicting beliefs regarding their role in the classroom. For example, Amal perceived her role as a facilitator of learning who created a student-centered environment as useful to the students because it enhanced their participation and use of English language in the classroom. Yet, she held a conflicting belief that the change in teachers' role from authoritative transmitters of knowledge to facilitators of learning transformed the classroom into a "playful" environment, which impeded students' learning. Richardson (1996) illustrated that people can simultaneously hold two conflicting or incompatible beliefs and as long as such beliefs "are never set side by side and examined for consistency, the incompatibility may remain" (Richardson, 1996, p. 103). Accordingly, giving voice to teachers to talk and think about their beliefs in response to English reform may shed light on teachers' conflicting beliefs. In addition, teachers' voicing their beliefs regarding their role in the context of reform showed that they were not against creating a student-centered environment that would foster their students' language learning and engage them in the classroom however, they were in search of a balance between the traditional and constructivist approaches to English teaching and learning.

Teachers' Beliefs about the Effectiveness of the ECART in the classroom

In the previous chapter I discussed Emirate teachers' reactions toward English reform in UAE and their beliefs regarding the challenges the ECART imposed on them. The participating teachers talked about many factors that increase their sense of uneasiness while implementing the ECART in the classroom, such as their confusion regarding the notion of continuous assessment, lack of textbooks and coherent curriculum, lack of grammar instruction and

assessment, heavy reliance on performance-based approaches to teaching and assessment, lack of rigorous language testing, and the use of rubrics as a scoring tool. Nevertheless, Emirate teachers were able to identify some aspects of the ECART, which they believed held promise for enhancing their students' learning and engagement in the classroom. Below is a discussion of teachers' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the ECART in the classroom.

ECART Encourages Active Participation of Students

According to ADEC, "ECART requires deep learning to occur by students actively inquiring rather than to find or be given information to present in some form" (ADEC's English Framework, 2012, p.5). Since the ECART is an inquiry-based framework for language learning, students' active participation in class is crucial. The four participating teachers in the current study agreed that the ECART has changed the roles of the students in the classroom from passive recipients to active co-constructors of knowledge. Aziza explained that students were not solely depending on her for language acquisition but were also seeking knowledge on their own, which she admitted as "learning skills that are important for the students." In addition, Aziza believed that allowing students to be active agents in their learning through creating artifacts and products—rather than depending mainly on the materials presented in textbooks—was useful for the students as it allowed them to enjoy the learning of English language. She explained:

Students love the ECART. They enjoy creating a notebook and putting their work in it and printing stuff out and sticking it there so it's not just that they are studying from a book and not doing anything else...

Mona explained that there were many benefits to the ECART that one cannot disregard. She highlighted that the role of the students has significantly changed as a result of the introduction of the ECART. In the past students were alienated from the teaching process and

their knowledge was limited to whatever the teacher offered them. However, currently the new reform required the teachers to share the objectives of every lesson with the students to engage them in the learning process. She illustrated, “now we are encouraged to write our lesson objectives on the board and share them with the students by clarifying what they will learn on any specific day.” In addition, students had to carry out research projects that required them to seek knowledge outside the classroom from various resources, such as the school library and the Internet.

One of the ECART benefits that Amal was that students were no longer limited to demonstrating their knowledge through the passive recitation of vocabulary and/or grammatical rules but also were encouraged to perform and use the language in various ways. For example, Amal described one of the assignments the student carried out where they had to imagine a character, draw it, and present it to class. Amal explained that not only did students practice the language by describing their character but also “enjoy creating things and it make them proud because we hang whatever they created on the wall with their names on it.” Students were able to feel a sense of ownership of their learning when they were allowed to display and share their works in the classroom.

ECART Highlights a Different Way of Assessment

The ECART emphasizes the importance of using continuous and ongoing assessment methods in which teachers gather information regarding students’ learning and performance recurrently during the course of students’ study. Such assessment help students’ demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding of various aspects of English language in a non-threatening environment as the focus is on students’ learning instead of the attainment of high grades. In addition, continuous assessment recognizes the holistic nature of language learning

and, thus, attention is giving to students' demonstration and integration of different language skills. Aziza explained that the ECART has moved her away from assessing discrete language skills to more integrated approaches to assessment that measured the extent to which students' could apply such skills:

Before I used to assess discrete skills, but the ECART showed me that there are other important skills that I have to assess...tangible skills that the students can use to produce something by the end of each semester...so assessment is not about tests, quizzes and memorization anymore...it's more about application...

Even though Amal believed that traditional assessment was manageable as it was specific to the knowledge covered in the classroom and students just needed to retrieve what they had already memorized, she explained that the new approach to assessment embodied in the ECART went beyond what students covered in the classroom and, rather, assessed skills from outside sources, which had its own merits. For Amal, such a new look on assessment that was not limited to assessing discrete skills, but rather, extended to how students integrated and used the four skills of language—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—had broadened her perception regarding the notion of assessment in general. She elaborated:

The new assessment influenced my thinking a lot...it gave importance to assessing the process of learning...so I started assessing new skills that I didn't use to assess before in a more accurate way...it showed me where the students might be struggling in areas of listening, reading, and speaking...so it broadened the assessment process for me as it drew a deeper picture of the proficiency level of the students.

Like Amal, Sherroq was able to see that the ECART allowed her to assess students holistically and from different angles. She explained that such assessment revealed not only what students had in their minds, but also what they can perform:

Currently, assessment is not limited anymore to the students reading a passage and answering questions...or memorizing a composition passage and rewriting it in the exam...it relies more on assessing students' understanding in a general way...so the ECART showed me a different way of assessment... it showed me what the student can do...before I used to follow a certain routine that I abided by...but now I have various ways of assessing students, there isn't one way only like before...

Using various assessment tools to gauge students' language learning process has also allowed for differentiation, a concept Sherroq was first introduced to through the ECART. Sherroq explained:

Before the ECART, students were all given the same assessment task...for example, a reading passage with questions...it did not differentiate between high and low performing students...but now during the semester I can give different assessment tasks to the high, intermediate, and low performing students.

The ECART has helped Sherroq to move away from seeing students equally, in terms of their linguistic abilities, to recognizing the individual differences in each one of them and, thus, assess them accordingly. However, Sherroq struggled with understanding the concept of differentiation as she regarded it as merely simplifying the material presented to the low performing students. She clarified her understanding of the differentiation process by saying:

Differentiation is that I give the high performing students sentences to create, while I give the weak ones some words to sort out or things to color...I don't feel I am helping them,

on the contrary I am being unfair to them...the reform explains to us that in differentiation, we should group all the weak students together, the medium level ones together, and the strong ones together...I don't believe this is right...I should mix them so they can help each other...

Sherooq's understanding of differentiation as merely the watering down of the materials and assessments used with low performing students reflected the challenges that teachers faced as a result of the reform's introduction of new and innovative educational concepts. Adding to that the lack of quality professional development and teacher preparation background knowledge, Sherooq grappled with how to use differentiation in her classroom. Such struggle has reinforced her belief that the old traditional curriculum allowed her to exercise her role as a teacher who pushed her students to do better:

I believe that we should go back to the old curriculum and not apply the differentiation concept because we have to push the students to raise their English proficiency level...I keep simplifying everything for the weak students and then they get to the final exam not knowing how to handle it...

Engages Students in the Assessment Process

One advantage of the ECART that teachers identified was that students had a more active role in their learning than before, as they knew what was expected from them, how they were progressing in learning, and what they needed to do in order to reach their goals and complete the ECART. Aziza explained that students were now required to choose a topic on their own, conduct research, gather information, and present their final product in the classroom. Such active engagement of students in the learning process was absent in the past. Amal, thus, added that the ECART was different than the old system of teaching and assessment in that "students

are always performing something in class which allows me to see what they can do and what they cannot do.”

Teachers also gave examples of various classroom activities that could also serve as assessment tools, such as brainstorming, weekly journals, and self and peer reflection. Sherroq explained that students engaged in brainstorming activities at the beginning of every new lesson which she found “a really useful activity because it helps students organize their ideas and assist them in understanding what they will be learning further on in the semester.” For Amal, the brainstorming activity helped the students by “broadening their thinking horizon” as they came up on their own with vocabulary and ideas related to each theme in the ECART. Such an activity that was new to Amal made her “notice new skills in the students...I was amazed at the ideas the students came up with, which showed me that students can be creative if they were given the chance to think on their own.” Amal’s comment touched on one of the main purposes of the ECART, which is to allow students exercise their creative thinking skills in class.

An important section of the ECART included a weekly journal, which Aziza believed was useful for the students, as well as, the teachers. She illustrated:

The journal give me suggestions on aspects that I need to work on...for example, the students could say that they liked or disliked a specific genre of stories...so I take their reflection into consideration and build on it...these journals help me take important decisions regarding what to teach and what not to teach...

Amal and Sherroq considered the weekly journal to be mainly useful to the teachers as it helped them assess the extent to which their students followed them in class. Other useful activities that teachers believed engaged students in the learning and assessment process were the self and peer assessment exercises. Teachers explained that the ECART required students to fill out a self-

reflection sheet at the end of every lesson and write down what they believed they had learned. In addition, at the end of each semester, students exchanged their files and completed a peer reflection form that assessed the extent to which their files were complete. Aziza explained that such activities helped students evaluate their work and that of their classmates. Amal highlighted that students not only benefited from the self and peer reflection activities, but also enjoyed carrying them out. Mona added that students' engagement in the assessment process through self and peer assessment "make them feel they have a responsibility toward themselves and their classmates to assess their work and offer them suggestions regarding how they can do better." This way, "students take responsibility of their language learning as well."

Emirate teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of the ECART highlighted their positive stance regarding its role in: a) enhancing their students' participation in the classroom, b) introducing their students to a variety of activities that engaged them in the assessment process, and c) enriching their learning experience as they became more involved in their language learning process. Thus, it is noteworthy to argue that Emirate teachers would welcome English language reform should they see in it the potential to enhance their students' language learning. What Emirate teachers were missing was quality professional development that would help them understand the different aspects and epistemologies underlying the reform and model for them the right way of enacting the ECART in the classroom. Accordingly, it is important to take a closer look at Emirate teachers' enactment of English language reform in light of their beliefs about EFL teaching in general and the ECART as an innovative framework for English teaching and assessment in particular.

Teachers' Enactment of the ECART in the Classroom

The organization of data into four thematic chapters (see chapter 4-7) helped me explore Emirate teachers' beliefs in the context of the ECART reform initiative. My analysis focused on themes that developed from a combination of my knowledge about the conceptual framework of teachers' beliefs and the advances in the field of second language acquisition, especially in instruction and assessment. These themes arose inductively as I used the constant comparative method to frame, test, and refine my interpretation of teachers' beliefs and practices. My analysis revealed that important factors in the case study of Emirate teachers' understanding and beliefs about the ECART curriculum, in whole or in part, were related to a) their past language learning and teaching experiences, b) their professional background knowledge, c) the content and nature of the ECART (in regards to assessment and instruction), and d) the wider contextual factors that facilitate and/or impede the reform, including students' English proficiency level and background knowledge, educational context of language teaching and learning in UAE, the role of professional development in helping teachers make necessary changes in their practices, and the pressure from parents to adhere to certain aspect of the traditional approaches to assessment.

One of the main purposes of the current study was to examine the extent to which Emirate teachers' reported beliefs influenced their teaching and assessment practices. Bearing in mind the above factors that shaped teachers' understanding and receptiveness of the ECART framework, it was important for me to get in the participants' classrooms and observe how Emirate teachers made sense of the new English curriculum in their teaching and assessment. I was able to observe five classroom sessions for each participating teacher. Before each observation, I was able to talk briefly with the teachers in regards to their lesson plans, objectives of each lesson, and the assessment methods used. In addition, I engaged in short discussions with

the teachers after the classroom observations so as to allow them to describe the objectives behind carrying out certain activities and/or explain any teaching instances or assessment practices that were not clear to me as an observer. My analysis of the classroom interactions, field notes, and teachers' teaching and assessment practices showed that their beliefs were, to a great extent, consistent with their behavior. However, in few instances, teachers' practices did not reflect their reported beliefs. My analysis of the data revealed that the inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and practices was mainly due to two reasons: a) teachers' lack of deep understanding of the underlying principles of the ECART and the inquiry-based approach to language learning, and b) teachers' dispositions toward their students' linguistic abilities to carry out certain tasks. Below is a description of teachers' instructional and assessment practices and the extent to which their classroom behaviors were reflective of their reported beliefs about EFL teaching, learning, and assessment in the context of reform. In the following section, I explore the teaching and assessment behavior of each teacher separately in order to show how their reported beliefs interacted with their behaviors.

Teaching Practices

Aziza. The data obtained from the classroom observations reflected a consistency between Aziza's reported beliefs and her teaching practices. First, Aziza's classroom was different from the other participating teachers' classrooms. Every day she gave students a couple of minutes before she started her class to rearrange the lay out of the classroom from a traditional straight rows and columns one to several circles with four students in each. Research showed that if teachers were to increase interaction among students in the classroom, they should rearrange the classroom setting to a U-shape or circle seating arrangement (Hastings & Schweiso, 1995). Aziza was keen on involving students in classroom activities and ensuring student-student

interaction rather than limiting classroom discourse to student-teacher interaction. Aziza expressed her belief that she was against the traditional approach to teaching and learning in which the teacher stood in the front of the class and lectured. She explained that one of the main disadvantages of the traditional approach to teaching and learning was the passive role that students played in the classroom. Accordingly, Aziza aimed at enhancing students' group work and interaction by making sure they sat together in small circles. The general atmosphere of Aziza's classroom was that of a student rather than teacher-centered classroom where students were always seen working together, raising their hand, competing to answer, and eager to exchange their work and see that of their peers. Aziza was always seen walking around the classroom, rather than standing in the front, and facilitating students' learning.

The first thing that Aziza used to do before starting any lesson was reading the objectives of the lesson and making sure students understood what they will be learning on a given day. By the end of the lesson, Aziza reminded the students of the lesson objectives and connected them to the larger plan of the ECART. Aziza followed this pattern during the five classroom observations that I conducted. When asked about the reason behind reiterating the lesson objectives in every class session, she explained:

It is very important for me that the students know what they will be working on and what they should learn by the end of the lesson...the objectives are like a guiding plan for the class and it makes such a big difference for the students to know what they should expect to learn. At the same time it gives me a chance to connect these objectives with what we covered in the past so it becomes like a net or a web especially because the ECART seems scattered and unconnected so I need to make these connections myself.

So for Aziza engaging the students in the learning process by sharing the objectives with them

was not only beneficial for the students, but also for her as it helped her plan and reflect on the ECART.

In writing instruction, Aziza considered writing as a process that went through different stages, such as brainstorming, planning, and editing. She believed that students' engagement in these different stages of writing was vital to their learning. For example, after covering with them different genres of literature, Aziza required students to write their own short story. She, then, grouped them according to the genre they were going to write about and gave them instruction regarding how to plan writing their short story. Students within each group were sharing ideas, interacting, and discussing the different features they needed to include in order to write up a short story. As Aziza walked around to check students' work, the classroom environment seemed lively and groups of learners were competing to show Aziza their progress. Accordingly, Aziza's beliefs regarding her role as a facilitator who guided students through the process of writing matched her teaching practices.

Even though Aziza believed that one of the flaws of the current English reform in UAE was the lack of rigorous language testing, she complied with the ECART and saw many benefits of it in assessing language learners from a holistic approach. One of the values of the ECART that Aziza perceived was its provision of activities that acted as both instructional and assessment tools. For example, Aziza conducted a brainstorming activity whenever she was introducing any new information in class. She explained that such activity enriched her instruction as it helped students use their background knowledge and come up with ideas on their own and, at the same, time it assisted her to assess students' knowledge regarding any given topic. Aziza strongly believed that students' engagement in the learning and assessment process was vital for their language learning, which was reflected during her instruction and assessment

practices. For example, when she drew a concept map on the board, she asked students to come up to the board and write their own answers and discuss them class. One of the purposes of continuous assessment is to engage students in real-life like tasks in order to assess their ability to transfer their knowledge to different contexts. Aziza believed that offering students authentic assessment tasks enhanced their learning and interest in English language. For example, when talking about the genre of science fiction in class, Aziza played a short clip of the movie “Avatar” and asked students to extract the features of science fiction from that clip. In addition, Aziza involved students in the assessment process by giving out biweekly reflection sheets that were divided into three columns; “what I learned, what I liked, what I don’t like.” She explained that she used these reflections to check if students were on track with what was covered in the classroom. Accordingly, Aziza’s beliefs about language teaching and learning were in alignment with her instructional and assessment practices in the classroom.

One aspect of the ECART that Aziza complained about was the nature of skills that teachers should cover with the students, especially that her students had low level of English proficiency and she believed that some of the requirements of the ECART were above their English language ability. She explained:

The level of students in grade 6th is low and it is the first time for them to carry out such skills as conducting research, collecting data, summarizing, and finding references...so I can’t cover all the skills proposed by the ECART...

Accordingly, Aziza believed that the ECART did not take into account students’ background knowledge. When implementing the ECART, Aziza felt puzzled, as she believed there was a missing link that she could not figure out. She explained

There is a missing link...it's really good for the students to acquire such skills, but at the same time the students are not prepared at all for it...they have to do a brain map and come up with a question that will help them base their product on

She finally declared that the main challenge she faced when implementing the ECART resided in students' lack of skills and foundation needed for carrying out research:

ECART focuses a lot on requiring students to conduct research, whereas students don't have the foundation needed for carrying out research...as a teacher with limited time, I am required to teach them the foundation of conducting a research, let them do it on their own, and cover the rest of the curriculum...it's very difficult to cover all of this in such a short time.

Accordingly, Aziza believed that the reform should not be implemented in such a hurry and that ADEC should give teachers, as well as students enough time to acquire the new skills presented in the ECART.

Mona. Mona's recollection of her past language learning experiences showed that she resented the authoritarian role her teachers used to play in the classroom as it intimidated her. Accordingly, she tried to create a student-centered friendly environment in her classroom where students worked together, rather than her being the center of attention in the class. Despite her beliefs, Mona lacked the preparation for teaching that might have enabled her to actualize her beliefs and create the kind of classroom environment she thought was useful for students' engagement. Even though Mona reported beliefs of the importance of engaging students in learning through group work, her classroom practices showed that she limited students' group work and rather allowed them to work individually or in pairs. Mona explained that whenever she tried to create an environment where students could interact, she ended up losing control of

the classroom, which revealed Mona's struggle in meeting one of the requirements of the ECART where language learners work and collaborate with each other.

The seating in the classroom was a traditional one and students interacted mainly with the teacher. Even though Mona expressed her resentment regarding the authoritative and strict nature of her past teachers and explained that such attitude in the classroom was harmful to the students, she was often exercising the same role she condemned. For example, she constantly called on students and required them to repeat her explanation of given lessons. One time she noticed that a student was not paying attention and, in a scolding manner, Mona asked her to repeat everything she said. In another instance, she asked a student some questions and when she didn't know the answer Mona told her "You should stay at home." Mona had a negative attitude towards students, which was reflected in the way she described them in many instances as being "unmotivated students...it is not that they don't understand...they are just being lazy." Even though Mona reported beliefs regarding her being against the authoritative nature of her past teachers who "used to give students the attitude that they were judging them as being good or bad" and her desire to be able to create a safe and welcoming environment to all her students, she unconsciously exercised the same role of her previous teachers. Kennedy (2005) explained, "teachers may possess dispositions or attitudes that interfere with their ability to create ideal practices" (p.14). The difference between Mona's espoused beliefs about teaching and her enactment of an authoritative role might be attributed to her dispositions about students. Also, Mona unconsciously taught in ways that were similar to her own previous teachers, which reflected the impact of the apprenticeship of observation on Mona's practices in the classroom. In addition, Mona's reaction to her students' lack of engagement in the classroom reflected the nature of beliefs as being resistant to change. Mona lacked the kind of professional development

that would help her unravel her beliefs' about students' learning and assist her in creating an environment that is, both, engaging and respectful to students.

Mona tried to balance between being a facilitator of learning and a transmitter of knowledge. For example, Mona critiqued the teacher-centered approach to learning that she experienced in her past language learning experiences due to the lack of students' engagement in the learning process. She explained that she currently acted as a facilitator in order to give students a chance to express themselves and use their background knowledge. In class, Mona tried to encourage the students to make connections between any given lesson and their background knowledge by asking them to reflect on their past experiences. However, Mona lectured on many occasions and offered students power points where she asked them to copy the slides in their notebooks, as she believed they had poor language skills. Mona explained that the current cohort of students was exceptionally behind in their English reading proficiency level:

At the beginning of the year we gave them a reading test to determine their reading level and most of the students scored at level 2, so their reading proficiency is equivalent to a student in grade 2.

Accordingly, Mona believed that the ECART requirements were not developmentally appropriate for her students. She explained:

ADEC is asking for a lot of research and planning, which is a lot for a sixth grader... 6th graders are still babies, it's the first time for them to use ECART.

For Mona, in order to bridge the gap between the requirements of the ECART and her students' low proficiency level, she resorted to giving her students simplified materials and refrained from providing them with opportunities that could challenge or push their thinking. She explained that it was hard for her to have high expectations of her students because—as she put it—“whenever I

raised my expectations of the students I got frustrated and disappointed.” She believed that it was sometimes better “to lower my standards and expectations to meet my students’ needs and language level”.

Even though one might expect that the ECART reform would help Mona re-think ideas such as control and authority in the classroom or lead her to design activities where students would indeed engage in the material and interact with each other, without her losing control of the classroom, that was not the case. In fact, the reform added a further challenge to her practice because it called for even more movement toward a style of student-oriented classroom discourse that she already felt unable to master even given her wish not to teach in a traditional transmission way. In addition, for Mona, her students’ low proficiency level in English language was an obstacle toward meeting the goal of the ECART in terms of providing students with rich tasks that would enhance their critical thinking.

Mona clearly stated that she tried to balance her assessment practices between those that were required by the ECART and other forms of assessment that reflected students’ proficiency in a more accurate way. Mona believed that the ECART assessed students’ process of learning. In order to complete the ECART, students engaged in ongoing inquiry-based learning so as to finalize their product at the end of the semester. Throughout this process, Mona believed that she was not only able to monitor students’ learning progress, but also engaged them in the assessment process. In one classroom observation, Mona handed students a sheet that assessed their understanding of the steps needed to complete the ECART product (see Appendix B). In addition, after completing the sheet, Mona gave individual feedback to each student regarding the steps and the time frame needed to complete her product. In other instances, Mona used traditional assessment methods that assessed students’ recall of information. For example, in one

classroom session she handed out a reading log that contained three columns: title, main character, what was the story about” and tested students’ ability to retrieve information regarding stories they have read the past week. She explained that the purpose of this exercise was to assess whether or not students remembered the reading passages they covered so far. Accordingly, Mona’s beliefs regarding her struggle to exclusively maintain a continuous approach to assessment was reflected in her classroom and the way she engaged students in, both, authentic and traditional assessment methods.

Amal. Even though Amal sided with the role of the teacher as the transmitter of knowledge, she tried to balance between a teacher controlled and student-centered classroom environment. The activities she carried out in the classroom ranged between pair and group work so the seating arrangement usually changed according to the purpose of the tasks, which gave students the chance to interact with each other and with the teacher. At times, Amal maintained an authoritarian personality in the classroom where she would call on the students, ask them to stand up, and if they could not answer her questions she would not let them sit back down until they figured out the answer. For example, when one student stumbled in a question, Amal kept pushing her with a high intonation, “What is written on the board? Read...it’s in the last paragraph...what is the name of it?” The student at that point seemed very scared. Amal reflected her belief that being strict in the classroom sent an important message to her student, that “they are coming to class in order to learn not play...that’s why the teacher has to be strict when teaching a language.” Despite Amal’s attempts to create a student-centered environment, she still leaned more towards a teacher-controlled classroom, as she believed that a teacher’s role should not be limited to “just being a teacher”, but should extend to also “being a discipliner.”

Even though Amal considered herself a facilitator of learning and tried to engage students in group-work, in which she required them to come up with ideas and share them with the rest of the class, she mostly used traditional teaching methods in her instruction. For example, she wrote new vocabulary on the board and asked students to copy each one of them five times in their notebook. She encouraged students to memorize new information by telling them, “You are going to get this in the exam, I want you to memorize this answer.” For their final project, she handed them several handouts explaining “I already did the research for you...you will read it and answer questions.” When asked why she did not let students seek information themselves, she answered, “Grade 6 are still kids, they don’t know how to research.” Amal voiced her concern regarding students’ weak language skills. She explained that she had students in her class “who are still confused about the English alphabets so how can I ask them to conduct a research and I assess them based on that?” Accordingly, for Amal, the reform’s stance of changing teachers’ role to exclusively being a facilitator in the classroom was not feasible due to her students’ struggling with the English language.

Amal believed that an integration of the traditional assessment methods and the ECART was important because, for her, the ECART only assessed students’ performance but not their actual knowledge of language structure. Amal believed that the ECART helped her assess students’ ability to be creative and “get out of the bubble of the theme that we are covering...how they can draw from outside sources and knowledge and imagine things other than what they have already studied.” In class, after covering a unit about imagination, Amal requested the students to think of any tool that was used in their daily life and imagine how it would look like in the future. The students were divided into groups and each group came up with an invention and a name for it. Afterward, the students presented their inventions in front of

the class and their work was hung on the wall (see Appendix C and D). For Amal, such an assessment activity was useful because it helped broaden the horizon of students' thinking and in that way assessment was linked to learning. However, Amal believed that even though such assessment was valuable, it did not accurately reflect students' linguistic abilities. For her, students' ability to memorize and retrieve correct linguistic structures was what best-reflected their internalization of the English language. Accordingly, she was keen in class to encourage her students to memorize as she explicitly informed them that they would not get good grades unless they memorize certain answers. For example, she repeated in more than one classroom session, "You are going to get this in the exam, I want you to memorize this answer," "memorize the answer so you can copy it in the exam," "the exam will take 10 minutes to those who memorized well." In addition, in terms of the final research project, Amal chose a topic and printed out the online resources for the students and distributed them in class. Amal believed that the main drawback of the ECART is that it "treats the students as if they are fluent in English but they are not...the students need a great linguistic support in order to reach the proficiency level ADEC hopes for...the idea of the ECART is excellent but doesn't fit the language proficiency of the students and that's the main weakness of it." Hence, she believed it would be unfair to ask students to carry out a research on their own. She explained that ADEC should develop a curriculum specifically for 6th graders that would help them build their research skills gradually.

Sherooq. During the four classroom observations I conducted, Sherooq's classroom setting did not change. It was always the traditional neatly arranged rows and columns seating. Sherooq always took the front position as a lecturer and was usually seen walking between the rows to check students' performance as they individually completed their work. Peadar (2011) highlighted the disadvantages of the traditional classroom setting:

This standard classroom is not the best environment for teaching students a language for a variety of reasons. The most important has to be that language is by its nature communicative it requires interaction with another individual to exist. The traditional classroom environment also has a tendency to change students into “listening objects” engagement levels are very low and the students (especially at the back of the classroom) can tune out.

Peadar’s (2011) description of the impact of classroom setting on students’ engagement in class showed that the traditional classroom seating arrangement hindered students from becoming active participants in the learning process. Sherooq explicitly expressed her belief that the purpose of teaching “is to keep putting input and information into the students’ minds, once the student gets into college that would be the time where she can produce an output.” For Sherooq, students’ participation in class was not seen as vital to their language learning which explained why she maintained a traditional classroom setting. As a result, Sherooq dominated the classroom talk and students’ voices were not heard unless they were being called on or questioned.

Sherooq was very explicit about her beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the traditional approach to language teaching and learning. Sherooq believed that students in grade six should follow their teacher and their engagement was not crucial to their learning. For Sherooq, the best role a teacher can play is that of a “transmitter of knowledge” and, hence, she believed that lecturing and repetition were the best teaching strategies in second language classrooms. In a teaching episode she asked students to repeat the word “drink container” and “fork” 4 times, then repeat the word “material” and “cloth” 5 times. She used to repeat all the power points used in class more than one time and ask students to repeat the information given after her. In reading

instruction, Sherroq also used a traditional method of teaching, in which the focus was on vocabulary and factual meaning, rather than making inferences and digging deeply into the text. In one classroom session, Sherroq provided students with a reading passage and comprehension questions, in addition to a vocabulary sheet that had all the difficult words in the text translated into Arabic (See Appendix E). When I asked her why she did not allow the students to guess the meaning of the words from the context, she explained that she believed students in grade six were incapable of being independent learners and they did not have the skills needed to make predictions. When I asked Sherroq how she described her role in the classroom, she explained that she acted as a facilitator of learning as it was ADEC's vision. However, Sherroq's reported beliefs about the usefulness of the traditional methods of language teaching and learning and the way she viewed students as recipients of knowledge were congruent with her classroom practices, which showed her struggle of understanding the learning and teaching principles that guide the role played by the "facilitator of learning."

Sherroq believed that fulfilling all the requirements of the ECART seemed unrealistic because students' reading and writing skills were very poor. She explained, "My students have a problem with reading and writing...I have students who don't even know how to write the letters." She wondered how ADEC expected the students to be able to master certain reading strategies, such as "predicting, skimming, reviewing, etc.," while they still struggled with their reading. She questioned, "ADEC expect that students in grade six would be able to reach a specific level of proficiency, which is unrealistic." In addition, Sherroq believed that students in grade six were not only unready to become independent learners, but also they were being asked to learn high order thinking skills, which were not appropriate for their age. She highlighted:

In the ECART, they want students to summarize and evaluate which are good skills but a student in grade 6th should not be asked to do that...we should teach them how to summarize in a simple way, not to ask her to get a text, summarize, paraphrase, and use it in research...they don't have the mental ability to do that yet...we need to go step by step...for example this year summarizing, next year discussion, and so on.

Sherroq, thus, believed that strictly complying with the ECART requirements would only fail the students, which was why she believed that fewer grades should be dedicated to the ECART:

The product of the ECART is highly regarded and a big grade is dedicated to it which should not be the case because sometimes the topic of the product is silly because I would never ask the student to carry out a real research, it's impossible for them to do that...I don't expect them to create a well informed product.

For that reason, Sherroq simplified all the ECART requirements for the students so they could carry them out. In other instances, she had to discard whole sections of the ECART and substitute them with traditional tests because she believed that assessing the students mainly through ECART was unfair to them. She explained:

If I will adhere to everything the ECART requires me to do, probably one student only would pass in the class...for example, none of the students can generate the focus questions and key statement in a correct way...ADEC is not considering the young age of the students and their inability to understand what a focus question and key statements mean.

Sherroq believed that the grades allocated to the ECART were overrated, as students were not actually fulfilling the ECART requirements the way ADEC intended. Accordingly, Sherroq

voiced that the requirements of the ECART, the way the grades were distributed across the school year, and the lack of textbooks showed her that:

ADEC did not taking the reality of the students into consideration...the students don't know anything and the new reform tells us let the students figure the answer on their own...this shows that the way Emirate students were educated and introduced to English language is marginalized.

Sherooq recognized the importance of the ECART in assessing what students can do, in addition to, offering her various ways of assessing students' performance. However, she explained that she had more faith in traditional assessment methods, especially tests, in drawing an accurate picture regarding students' English proficiency level. In the classroom, Sherooq tested students' spelling and grammar regularly as she considered students' knowledge of grammatical structures and the memorization of vocabulary more important than enhancing their communication skills, which was apparent in the drills she gave them and the lack of group work and interaction among students. In addition, Sherooq's strong emphasis on structure took away from the purposes of continuous assessment. For example, in one of the classroom sessions I observed for Sherooq, she required students to write in their journal regarding what they learned. After the students completed their journals, they stood in queues to have their journals graded. Instead of focusing on the content of the journal and what it reflected regarding students' learning, Sherooq was sidetracked by checking the spelling and correcting the grammatical errors of the students. In addition, Sherooq did not guide the students in how they should approach their learning journal and what information they should include. Below is a sample of students' reflection on their learning:

- We learnt visual literacy

- We had a test
- We did brainstorm
- We read about J.K. Rowling
- We learned new vocabulary

Sherooq, thus, admitted that she did not know how to enhance the learning value of students' journals so it could help them progress in their language learning.

The relationship between teachers' reported beliefs and their classroom practices is a complex one. Even though research shows that teachers' beliefs governed their behaviors and the choices they took in the classrooms (Borg, 1999), many researchers reported consistencies between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices, while others showed some inconsistencies (Agee, 2004; Smith, 1996). In the current study, my classroom observations focused on the extent to which the teaching and assessment practices of Emirate teachers reflected an understanding of the underlying principles of the ECART and the different ways in which such practices were aligned and/or misaligned with their reported beliefs. From the above analysis of teachers' practices in the context of English reform, it was clear that most of Emirate teachers' reported beliefs regarding English teaching, learning and assessment were in close alignment with their classroom behaviors. For example, teachers' beliefs regarding how they viewed their role and that of their students were consistent with the way they arranged their classrooms. Aziza strongly believed in an interactive classroom environment that involved students in the learning process and, thus, she arranged her classroom in circles. On the contrary, Sherooq believed that the teacher should be the main figure in the classroom and, thus, she arranged her classroom in rows and was always seen in the front of the class. As a result of the introduction of the ECART,

Amal and Mona believed that an integration of a student and a teacher-centered environment would maximize students' learning, so they fluctuated in how they arranged their classrooms. The consistency between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices—in regards to those beliefs and practices that reflected a traditional teacher-centered language instruction and assessment—situated the teachers' in a system that each had developed, mostly on their own and over the years. The change in teachers' beliefs and practices upon the introduction of the ECART—in search for a balance between what they were familiar with, in addition to the new requirements of reform—showed that teachers' tried to reconcile the traditional model of teaching and assessment with the ECART.

Understandably, for some teachers the change solved some perennial problems of practice with which they had wrestled for a long time, but for others, it elevated these problems. The discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and their instructional and assessment practices tended to occur in situations where ECART exacerbated teachers' problems of practice. It appeared that such discrepancy between some of teachers' beliefs and classroom practices were mainly a result of teachers' lack of understanding of the new concepts introduced by the ECART. Even though some of the teachers indicated that they were fulfilling the requirements of the ECART, they were not doing so in accordance with ADEC's vision as they lacked a clear understanding of what continuous assessment entailed. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Emirate teachers participating in the current study did not only lack a professional background in pedagogy and second language teaching and assessment, their inservice professional development was minimal and of uneven quality. In addition, the ECART organization and structure provided little of what the teachers perceived as guidance for their instruction and assessment, yet it held them to rubrics, standards, and learning outcomes.

In the next chapter, I discuss the findings of the current study in relation to research on EFL teachers' beliefs and practices. The implications of the study for teacher education programs, inservice teacher professional development, and policymakers in UAE will be also explored.

Chapter 8

Discussion

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study research design in order to examine experienced Emirate EFL teachers' beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment, including the use of ECART as an alternative approach to instruction and assessment in the classroom. The study explored the ways in which Emirate teachers' beliefs influenced their classroom practices and receptiveness to the ECART reform. In order to understand the various factors that impacted Emirate teachers' beliefs and behaviors, the educational context within which teachers work (e.g. classroom, school, ADEC reform policies) was also examined. Accordingly, in-depth interviews, classroom observations, field notes, and document analysis were used in order to answer the study's research questions (see chapters 4-7).

The purpose of this concluding chapter is threefold: a) to discuss the findings of the current study in relation to a small, but growing body of research on EFL teachers' beliefs and knowledge base regarding teaching, learning, and assessment, b) to explore the role of teachers' beliefs in their implementation of a reform initiative (ECART) in instruction and assessment in their classrooms, and c) put forth the limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Knowledge Base of Emirate Teachers in UAE

Four Emirate EFL teachers from two different schools participated in the current study. The teachers engaged in four in-depth interviews in which they shared their experiences as past foreign language learners and as participants in the English teaching community in UAE for more than eight years each. In addition, the teachers were able to express their views regarding the effectiveness and the drawbacks of the ECART, which represents one of the various reform

initiatives undertaken by ADEC to revamp the English curriculum and assessment methods in UAE schools. Teachers also reflected on their beliefs regarding their role in the current English reform and the challenges they faced as a result of the implementation of a new method of teaching and assessment that was completely foreign to them. The findings of the current study revealed that teachers held many strong beliefs about what constituted effective teaching, learning, and assessment of English language, which were incompatible with the underlying principles that guided ADEC's reform efforts. Such beliefs played an important role in the way teachers received and understood the purposes of the new reform movement, which influenced how they implemented the ECART in the classrooms.

In addition, the results of the current study showed that teachers' beliefs were not the only factor that impeded their full endorsement and acceptance of the ECART as an innovative curriculum that aimed at improving the teaching, learning, and assessment of English. Other contextual factors, such as students' low proficiency level in English, perceived lack of ADEC support, and pressure from parents to teach and assess in a traditional way have negatively affected teachers' perception and judgment regarding the innovative practices of English teaching and assessment that were being called for by ADEC. In light of the massive and rapid educational reform the UAE is currently undergoing, I will discuss in the following section the importance of examining Emirate teachers' beliefs amid reform as they are considered a central aspect of their knowledge base of teaching. In that sense, Emirate teachers' beliefs about English teaching, learning, and assessment and how they perceived the context in which they taught guided their teaching practices in the classroom.

The findings of the current study reflected the interconnectedness between teachers' beliefs and their knowledge base of teaching. Research shows that what teachers *know* and

believe is complexly intertwined (Borko & Putnam, 1996). In this study, examining Emirate teachers' beliefs revealed a great deal about their knowledge base of English teaching and the decisions they made in the classroom. In the past, the term 'knowledge base' use to refer to teachers' competency with respect to the subject matter knowledge and the pedagogical skills required for teaching. However, recently, other variables have been included in the list of things that make up the knowledge base of teachers, such as, school context, the psychological characteristics of learners, and the personal and practical experiences of teachers (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Research, thus, showed that the knowledge base of teachers went beyond the knowledge of the subject matter and the basic skills of teaching to include knowledge about the curriculum, the learners, the means needed to communicate the subject matter to the students in a comprehensible way (pedagogical content knowledge), and the different educational goals and their philosophical bases (Shulman, 1987). Accordingly, teachers' understanding and beliefs—of what it was to be learned, how it could be taught, and in which ways it was best assessed—were put in the forefront of the discourse about teachers' knowledge base.

The expanding of the framework of teachers' knowledge base has echoed in the field of second language teaching and learning. Second language teachers, thus, are now regarded as active agents in the classroom who develop their own theories of teaching according to their interpretation of the learning context and their assumptions and beliefs regarding what constitutes good teaching. Duarte (1998) illustrates that “the interpretive and situated nature of teaching implies that teachers do not learn and implement unadulterated versions of any given methodology but develop their own understandings of the teaching-learning process” (p.618). To that end, second language teachers' prior experiences, values and beliefs are recognized as determinant factors in the way they received and implemented reform. Accordingly, when

examining the results of the current study in light of the research on teachers' knowledge base, it became clear that the participating teachers did not passively receive and/or implement the ECART curriculum from ADEC, but rather actively filtered the practices promoted by the ECART and enacted what they believed was best suitable for their classroom context.

Personal Practical Knowledge

The personal and contextualized dimensions of teachers' knowledge have become a focus of interest for many researchers and educators, especially that they reflected a larger system of teachers' beliefs. Ben-Peretz (2011) analyzed nine papers chronologically—dated back to the 1980s—that focused on teachers' knowledge base in order to shed light on the development of the theme over time. The author explained that when one looks at the evolving definitions and categories of the concept of the knowledge base of teaching, “one finds a growing focus on the personal aspects of knowledge...the role of context in shaping teacher knowledge” (p. 3). Such emphasis on the personal and contextual dimensions of knowledge has led to the introduction of the term “personal practical knowledge” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988). The authors illustrated that personal practical knowledge was:

a term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teachers' present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher's practice. It is, for any teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation. (p. 25)

This definition shows that teachers have their own personal narratives of past experiences, which shape their views and beliefs regarding their teaching and students' learning. Such beliefs are

embedded and intervene in the day-to-day practices of in-service teachers. Tsang (2004) highlighted the impact of personal practical knowledge on teachers' practices:

While some personal practical knowledge has a positive influence over a teacher's professional growth and development in inspiring or testing beliefs, theories, maxims of teaching, some knowledge can nurture biases, which make the teacher resistant to alternative thoughts or actions. (p. 166)

A view of Emirate teachers' knowledge as being embedded within a broader system of beliefs that teachers drew upon when making decisions in the classroom was valuable in the current study. Emirate teachers' knowledge and beliefs regarding ESL teaching and learning was derived mainly from observing other teachers both when they were language learners themselves and later when they started teaching. Thus, their knowledge base of teaching can be thought of as a combination of their personal beliefs and practical experiences. Such a perspective revealed the extent to which Emirate teachers' beliefs about English teaching, learning, and assessment guided how they viewed, understood, and enacted the principles of the ECART in the classroom.

As discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, the relationship between teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices is a dynamic, rather than static one. Teachers continuously develop new understandings of their subject matter in response to a) their changing personal beliefs about what constitutes quality teaching and learning, b) the professional knowledge they gain through coursework and development, and c) the context within which teaching and learning takes place. Looking at Emirate teachers' beliefs as shaping their personal practical knowledge was important because it reflected the subjective body of convictions that teachers held, the contextual nature of their knowledge base of teaching, and how such knowledge was expressed in the classroom.

Such interpretation of Emirate teachers' knowledge as not only that which is theoretical, objective, and exists outside the teachers, but also as one that has arisen as a result of a) the collective experiences that teachers gained along their teaching careers, b) the continuous reconstruction of their past language learning and teaching experiences to meet the demands of their classroom context, and c) their understanding of the current English curricular reform highlighted the intertwined, dynamic, and contextualized nature of the relationship among teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Accordingly, the findings of the current study revealed that Emirate teachers' beliefs regarding English language teaching, learning, and assessment in the context of reform were shaped by their personal, as well as their learning of practical knowledge during their professional lives. Below is a discussion of the most important factors, which not only shaped Emirate teachers' beliefs, but also guided their classroom instructional and assessment practices.

Apprenticeship of Observation

Research has shown that teachers' personal practical knowledge is shaped by various background sources, such as apprenticeship of observation, disciplinary knowledge and professional coursework, and teaching experiences. Johnson (1999) explained that teachers' beliefs were formed early in life as a result of the accumulated experiences they gained as language learners in schools. Accordingly, ESL teachers' beliefs about what constituted effective language teaching and learning were well established by the time they completed their schooling as language learners, which reflected the pervasive influence of the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975). The findings of the current study support previous research that called for the importance of examining ESL teachers' past language learning experiences as they revealed that Emirate teachers held strong beliefs regarding English teaching and learning that

went back to how they were taught as foreign language learners. The four participating teachers in the current study shared a common English educational background in which they were all taught English from a traditional grammar-oriented approach. Their past traditional English learning experiences not only shape their beliefs about teaching and learning, but also influenced their current instructional and assessment practices. Additionally, Emirate teachers' beliefs acted as a blocking force against the full integration of ECART reform in the classroom.

Disciplinary Knowledge and Professional Coursework

Teachers have a variety of sources from which they construct their personal practical knowledge. Two of these important sources are the disciplinary background that encompasses teachers' subject matter knowledge and the professional coursework undertaken in teacher preparation programs. Grossman (1990) explained that these sources were crucial in informing the development of pedagogical content knowledge, which referred to teachers' ability to communicate the subject matter to the students in a comprehensible way and resolve students' lack of understanding of the subject matter. However, the participating teachers in the current study highlighted that they graduated from English literature programs and did not receive any teacher preparation or specialized content-based courses in second language acquisition. Several studies have recognized the influential role that second language teacher education programs play in developing teachers' knowledge base and preparing them for effective teaching (Borg, 1998; Gutierrez Almaza, 1996; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000). Richardson (1996, 1998) delineated the importance of the two categories of knowledge that second language teacher education programs offer prospective language teachers, such as disciplinary knowledge (second language acquisition theories, language teaching methods, sociolinguistics, phonology and syntax) and pedagogical content knowledge (awareness and appropriate treatment of language learners'

errors, designing and adapting instructional materials to meet language learners' needs, knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of context of language teaching including language policies). In addition, second language teacher education programs offer professional courses that help ESL teachers develop reflective practices in order to be able to "re-construct the implicit theories and beliefs which underpin current ELT practice" (Freeman, 1991).

Accordingly, various researchers considered second language teachers preparation programs as an essential source of ESL teachers' personal practical knowledge.

The finding of the current study showed that Emirate teachers lacked disciplinary knowledge and professional coursework in ESL pedagogy, which resulted in their massive reliance on veteran teachers—who used to teach and assess in a traditional way—in order to socialize and introduce them to the English teaching profession. The participating teachers also indicated that they followed in the footsteps of veteran teachers without questioning their practices, which showed that in order for reform to be successful in UAE, Emirate teachers needed to learn how to become reflective ones. Accordingly, the findings of this study revealed the negative impact of the absence of a teacher education background in general and an informed pedagogical content knowledge in the ESL subject matter in particular. Emirate teachers' struggle was evident in their reported beliefs regarding the difficulty of enacting different roles in the classrooms, addressing learners' needs in certain areas such as reading, and understanding the overall philosophy behind English reform in UAE.

Teaching Experiences

Previous studies have stated that teaching experience is a vital source of teachers' personal practical knowledge (Borg, 1998; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000). Research showed that teachers' have strong beliefs regarding the knowledge and practices they gained through

experience, especially that such knowledge “is learned from thousands of hours of instruction, and tens of thousands of hours of interaction with students” (Berliner, 1987, p. 64). Accordingly, ESL teachers’ beliefs regarding teaching and learning that are formed as a result of their teaching experiences tend to shape their knowledge base of teaching (Ulichny, 1996). In a study that focused on the development and change of teachers’ beliefs, Beijaard and De Vries (1997) argued that teaching experiences appeared to be the most important source of teachers’ beliefs regarding teaching and learning. Each of the Emirate teachers in the current study had an average of nine years of English teaching experience. The participating teachers explained that they have been using a traditional English prescribed curriculum since they started their teaching careers. They saw the benefits of such an approach to teaching and learning, as students were able to demonstrate their ability to retrieve previously memorized knowledge through traditional tests. Two of the teachers, Amal and Sherooq, voiced their strong beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the traditional English teaching and assessment methods they used over the course of their teaching profession. While other teachers, Aziza and Mona, believed that an integration of a traditional and more progressive view of language teaching and learning was more realistic. The finding of the current study revealed that Emirate teachers past language teaching experiences not only shape their beliefs and personal practical knowledge about what worked in their classrooms, but also influenced the extent to which they adapted their teaching and assessment practices to fit the context of English reform.

Accordingly, it is noteworthy to argue that the revamping of English curriculum in UAE through the introduction of the ECART challenged the personal practical knowledge of Emirate teachers. Teachers’ past language learning and teaching experiences, in addition to their professional background knowledge have all served to shape teachers’ beliefs to regard the

provision of a traditional prescribed curriculum and the adoption of traditional methods of instruction and assessment as the most effective means of second language teaching and learning, which informed their classroom practices. Such sudden change in the teaching and assessment of English in UAE schools from a traditional teacher-centered to an inquiry-based approach to language learning and teaching required teachers to deconstruct their beliefs regarding what constituted effective language teaching and reconstruct new beliefs that were contradictory to what they perceived to be quality teaching in the past. Accordingly, upon the introduction of the ECART, teachers' were expected to radically change their classroom practices to fit the next context of reform, which has created a number of tensions between teachers' beliefs about their role in the classroom, the teaching and assessment methods they used, and what the reform required them to do.

Tensions between Teachers' Beliefs and Reform Practices

The findings of the current study revealed that Emirate teachers held beliefs that were incompatible with the guiding principles of the ECART. Throughout their teaching careers, the Emirate participating teachers have held a traditional role in the classrooms where they lectured most of the time and gave students limited chances to participate in classroom discourse. Teachers were regarded as the all-knowing figure in the classroom and it was in the best interest of the students to listen and quietly follow their teacher. In addition, Emirate teachers followed a traditional curriculum where language teaching focused on form (grammar), rather than meaning (communication) and students displayed their understanding of various language structures through recitation and completion of drills. Wilkins (1976) referred to this approach to language teaching and learning as "synthetic" in which "different parts of the language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until

the whole structure of language has been built up” (p. 2). Teachers’ role in such a synthetic approach to language learning was to control the classroom environment by transmitting knowledge to the students through lecturing and, in exchange, students displayed their learning through the completion of drills and exercises.

Teacher-student interaction in the traditional language classrooms usually followed what is known in second language teaching as the P-P-P cycle: presentation, practice, and production. In this cycle the teacher would present a new content, follow it by drills for practice, and then introduce a new context for the students to try out what they learned (production phase). Skehan (1996) commented on this teaching method:

The underlying theory for a P-P-P approach has now been discredited. The belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization (that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught) no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology. (p. 18)

Two of the participating teachers, Amal and Sherooq from Om habiba School followed the P-P-P approach to language teaching, which they believed enhanced students’ learning mainly due to the aspect of repetition that it entailed. They also believed that teachers’ role, as the sole transmitter of knowledge, was “the best role a teacher should have” as it ensured that knowledge was ‘handed’ to the students repetitively, which they believed enhanced student language learning over the years. Amal and Sherooq’s beliefs about language teaching and learning reflected what Freire (1970) referred to as the *banking concept* of education, where teachers’ role is to deposit knowledge and information in students’ minds. In terms of assessment, Amal and Sherooq expressed their conviction that the use of tests as the sole means of assessment not only help them in assessing students’ mastery of certain discrete language

structures and their ability to retrieve information, but also offered “guaranteed” results as they were able to filter the high from the low performing students. Such beliefs and classroom practices were at odds with the reform-oriented approaches of English language teaching and assessment that ADEC was calling for.

Yet Amal and Sherooq explained they started applying new instructional and assessment practices as a result of the ECART, which had introduced them to new ways of English teaching and assessments. The teachers explained that they used activities such as brainstorming, peer reflection, and weekly journals, which had enhanced students’ engagement in the classroom. However, they voiced their concern regarding their lack of understanding of the right way of carrying out some of the activities and/or covering some of the skills introduced in the ECART, such as developing learners’ critical and creative thinking and carrying out formative assessment practices in the classroom. It was clear that Amal and Sherooq’s confusion with the structure and purposes of the ECART led them to fall back on the traditional instructional and assessment practices they were most familiar with. Brown (1999) explained that when teachers implement educational reform without truly understanding its rationale and/or the underlying teaching and learning principles that it promotes, they tend to apply some of the reform strategies and methods in the classroom, in addition to replicating past behaviors. Accordingly, when Emirate teachers’ beliefs were left unexamined, they approached the enactment of reform through adding a new range of teaching activities and assessment practices, rather than replacing the old ones.

Even though Mona and Aziza did not dismiss the benefits of the traditional approach to language learning, they highlighted the drawbacks that such an approach had on students’ engagement in the learning and assessment process. Mona and Aziza were more opened to and acceptive of the English language reform. They believed the ECART has placed more emphasis

on the application of language, students' engagement in their language learning progress, and demystifying the assessment process through the use of rubrics. They believed that the changing role of the teacher in the classroom from the traditional transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of learning brought about positive change in the students' role as well. However, they struggled with the idea of completely letting go of the old teaching and assessment methods especially the explicit instruction of grammar and the provision of language tests. The findings of the current study revealed that Emirate teachers were torn between the teaching and assessment methods they believed to have brought about learners' success in language learning in the past and what the reform was currently asking them to do.

In order to fully understand the dilemma that Emirate teachers were going through as a result of the English language reform ADEC enacted in Abu Dhabi schools, it is important to delineate the form, content, and purposes of the ECART in order to show how it is inherently different from the traditional approach to language teaching, learning, and assessment the Emirate teachers were used to. The ECART is an innovative framework that moves away from the traditional behaviorist approach to language teaching and learning to an inquiry-based constructivist approach that places that learner in the center of the educational process. In addition the ECART requires teachers to continuously assess the process of learning, rather than just focusing on the product. Strydom and Velu (2011) explained that what made the ECART unique in the context of English teaching and learning in UAE was "the idea that the process is as important as the product" (p. 55). The ECART's focus on the process was derived from its form as an alternative performance-based method of assessment that assessed students' ability to create and produce rather than recall and memorize. In performance-based assessment, language learners produce a product in order to reflect a concrete evidence of their application of the skills

and knowledge to be assessed. These products can be written (writing samples and projects), visual (displays, photo exhibits), and aural (an audiotape or an oral presentation). One common application of product assessment is portfolio, which is the systematic collection of students' work over a period of time in order to show the teacher their effort and continuous growth. The ECART acts as a portfolio through which students display their work and language progress. Accordingly, the form of the ECART requires students to be active participants in the classroom as they are expected to create and produce, rather than just receive knowledge.

In term of the content, alternative assessments aim at linking assessment practices with the real world through providing students with authentic tasks. The themes of the ECART reflect such authenticity, as it requires teachers to provide students with contexts and tasks with “links to Emirati culture and heritage, and a contribution to humanity” (ADEC’s English Framework, 2012, p.5). Wiggins (1998) identified six characteristics that make up authentic tasks: a) they should be realistic and embedded with a context, b) they should allow for multiple ways of solving a problem, c) they should require students’ active participation and use of wide range of skills, d) they should be ongoing and conducted over time, e) and finally they should allow for feedback and chances to revise the work being assessed. Accordingly, Emirate teachers can no longer rely on drills and tests to assess students, rather they should create authentic tasks that allow them to use a wide range of evidence to make informed decisions about students’ performances, in addition to allowing students to use various skills and participate actively in their learning progress. Finally, the purpose of alternative assessments is to provide ongoing, interactive, and formative feedback to the students. When using alternative assessments in the classrooms, teachers are able to provide feedback and gather evidence about students’ learning, adapt teaching and instruction as a result of the feedback, and engage students in the assessment

process (Black et. al, 2002). ADEC clearly states that the ECART should help teachers: a) use a range of strategies to gather information about students' progress against a set criteria, b) map student progress throughout the trimester against the rubrics, c) Provide relevant and timely feedback referring to the set criteria in the set rubrics, and d) use gathered information about students learning to inform planning decisions (ADEC's English Framework, 2012, p. 37).

Accordingly, unlike assessments methods that merely measure students' performance in relation to one another in the classroom, Emirate teachers' need to re-conceptualize their understanding of the purpose of assessment in order to be able to provide students with ongoing, interactive, and formative assessment tasks when enacting the ECART.

However, the results of the current study showed that the participating Emirate teachers had misconceptions and surface-level of understanding regarding many aspects and requirements of the ECART. For example, the four teachers believed that the concept of continuous assessment was just a new term the reform was using, however for them it described what they have always been doing as teachers, which was to continuously assess their students. As one teacher put it, "Before the ECART I also used to do continuous assessment in the form of written and oral quizzes...now the continuous assessment is in a different form". Such misconception about the notion, principles, and practices involved in continuous assessment led teachers to believe they could combine between traditional methods of teaching and assessment and the ECART. In addition, the four teachers made a distinction between knowledge and skills giving the former a higher priority than the latter. For them, the old system of teaching and assessment enhanced students' acquisition of knowledge in terms of language structure and features, vocabulary, and spelling. However, the ECART focused on developing students' skills such as researching, editing, paraphrasing, creative thinking, and producing artifacts which the Emirate

teachers believed were important aspect of language learning, but not as valuable as the acquisition of knowledge that was brought about as a result of hours of practicing and drill-work. Accordingly, Emirate teachers' understanding of knowledge was still limited to the one-way transfer mode, from the teacher to the students, instead of knowledge being co-constructed and shared in the classroom.

Research has shown that teachers' beliefs about teaching, learning, and assessment could act as a barrier to the implementation of educational reform (Tobin & McRobbie, 1997). Teachers in the current study had mixed beliefs about the ECART as an effective alternative assessment tool for students in UAE. They acknowledged many positive aspects of the ECART in terms of providing a holistic view of students' learning and assessment, engaging students in the assessment process, providing students with venues for displaying their language learning progress, and enhancing students' linguistic skills. However, they believed there were many drawbacks to the implementation of the ECART, such as lack of explicit grammar instruction, unreflective of students' proficiency level, decontextualized curriculum, absence of textbooks, and lack of rigorous language testing. In addition, teachers' admitted their lack of understanding regarding some of the ECART requirements, concepts, and principles, as they believed they were not fully prepared for such sudden revamping of the English curriculum and assessment.

Emirate teachers' beliefs regarding what constituted effective English language teaching and assessment, in addition to their beliefs about the ECART—in terms of not providing their students with the necessary linguistic knowledge needed for their internalization of English language—resulted in their expression of various degrees of resistance toward the implementation of the ECART. Emirate teachers' resistance to educational reform has been recently given attention to in the UAE educational research arena (Ibrahim, Al-Kaabi, & El-

Zaatari, 2013). In the current study, teachers displayed their resistance through falling back and applying traditional methods to teaching and assessment, using old English curricula, altering the ECART grading criteria, and in extreme cases leaving the profession. For example, Sherooq and Amal resented the lack of textbooks in the classroom, as they believed that textbooks were the main source of knowledge for students. Accordingly, they went back to the old curricula and compiled lessons and exercises from various English textbooks that were used before the introduction of the ECART. They created a booklet and distributed it to the students in order to provide them a form of “textbook”. However, the lessons and drills included in the booklet represented a traditional approach to language learning in which students were required to complete sentences, answer comprehension and true and false questions. Teachers also provided students with various spelling, vocabulary, and grammar tests, which was against the reform’s vision of how English should be currently taught in the classrooms. In addition, all of the participating teachers in the current study altered many of the grading criteria in the ECART to include grades of tests.

Another form of resistance was visible in teachers following a traditional approach to language teaching and assessment by transmitting knowledge in the classroom, doing research on behalf of the students and requiring them to just paraphrase the ideas, and using assessments methods that were unauthentic and did not provide students with opportunities to learn, create, and/or perform. Lastly, one teacher expressed her desire to leave the teaching profession as a way of resisting the constant and rapid change in English curriculum. Accordingly, the findings of the current study revealed that in order for Emirate teachers to meet the goals of the ECART, they need to have a clear and deep understanding of the underlying principles, learning theories, and rationale of the new educational reform and the extent to which they were different from the

traditional approaches to language teaching and learning. In addition, Emirate teachers need to receive extensive professional development support from ADEC that help them bridge the gap between what they used to do in the past and what ADEC was currently requiring them to do.

Implications

The above explorations have implications for research on teachers' beliefs and teacher change; especially the need for qualitative studies of teachers' lived experiences of responding to educational change. They also have implications for policy and teacher education as the study raises the important role of professional development not only in the methods of a reformed curriculum, but also as experienced teachers have an opportunity to examine, deliberate, and make decisions about how to implement reforms in ways that acknowledge their prior knowledge and experiences as part of asking teachers to think and act in new, different ways. Below is a discussion of some of the implications of the current study.

Teacher Preparation Programs in UAE

In the past, teacher preparation programs in the UAE were underdeveloped. The initial teacher training system in UAE followed a fairly traditional model with undergraduates completing a 4-year program, which emphasized the study of academic subjects, educational theory, and methodology. AlBanna (1997) explained that the coursework was unrelated to practice as there was no school or field experience. At the end of their fourth year, students visited schools and gave a 45-minute lesson, which fulfilled their training requirements. This is why AlBanna (1997) argued that, in reality, there was no initial teacher training provided in the UAE. In addition, teacher certification and/or graduation from a teacher education program was not a prerequisite for becoming a teacher, as emphasis was put on prospective teachers' knowledge of subject matter, rather than pedagogy, which was the case with the four

participating teachers in the current study. None of the Emirate teachers in the current study received any teacher preparation or professional coursework in the area of second language education, as they graduated with an English literature background. They expressed their struggle in the beginning years of their teaching profession due to their lack of pedagogical and second language acquisition knowledge.

This situation has changed now since Emirate prospective teachers are required to obtain teacher certification in order to qualify for teaching positions in any of the seven emirates in UAE. Additionally, calls for revamping teacher education programs in UAE have echoed in the past decade. The widespread recognition of the need for developed teacher preparation programs that could graduate high quality Emirate teachers has resulted in the opening up of various national teacher education programs in UAE, such as Higher Colleges of Technology, Zayed University, United Arab Emirates University. In addition, the conceptual framework of teacher education programs in UAE has gradually changed to reflect a new vision of teaching and learning that is student-centered and transform teachers' thinking by introducing concepts of constructivism, professionalism, engagement, and critical thinking (UAE Education Policy Forum, 2010).

However, little attention has been given to the importance of examining Emirate preservice teachers' beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment and the extent to which such beliefs and personal theories, about what constitutes quality English teaching and learning, might impact the process of learning to teach. Examining Emirate preservice teachers' beliefs and their past language learning experiences is crucial as prospective EFL teachers' beliefs are thought to "establish cognitions about learning and language learning which form the basis of their initial conceptualizations of L2 teaching during teacher education, and which may

continue to be influential throughout their professional lives” (Borg, 2003, p. 88). The findings of the current study revealed that Emirate teachers held strong beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the traditional approach to English language teaching and learning, which went back to their past experiences as language learning and the positive and/or negative images they carried of their past teachers. In addition, their beliefs influenced their classroom practices and acted as impediments to fully enacting educational reform. Accordingly, the current study has implications for teacher education programs in UAE as the findings of this study highlight the importance of helping Emirate preservice teachers reflect on and identify their beliefs regarding English teaching and learning. Such reflective practices will help Emirate preservice teacher examine the extent to which their beliefs align or contradict with the current theories of learning and the goals of educational reform

Inservice Teacher Professional Development in UAE

In-service teacher professional development in UAE had received criticism in the past because it was usually conducted in the form of workshops that lasted for two to three days and were poorly designed as it did not provide Emirate teachers with “the opportunity to analyze their practice in relation to educational theory or to pedagogical experiments made in other parts of the world” (AlBanna, 1997, p. 105). A recent study that examined English language teachers’ perception of professional development programs in schools of AlAin, found that many of the inservice professional development programs were not successful as they lacked focus and did not address ESL teachers’ needs (AlHassani, 2012). The findings of current study showed similar results in terms of the support Emirate teachers’ were receiving as a result of professional development. Professional development was mainly brought about through the advisors who were appointed by ADEC in each school. Aziza and Mona from AlMajid School believed that

their advisor, who was of Arab origins, greatly supported them through the transition from the old curriculum to the ECART. She acted as a liaison between them and ADEC and was constantly holding sessions to break down the ECART requirements for them, clarify the standards and learning outcomes, and allow them to reflect on and present their work and understanding of various teaching and learning aspects included in the ECART.

On the other hand, Sherooq and Amal believed that the support they received from their foreign advisor was of minimal use to them as it neglected their needs and did not demystify the new teaching and learning concepts that were included in the ECART. They explained that their understanding of how to go about enacting the ECART in the classroom was an individual effort and that they did not gain much from the meeting their advisor conducted. The teachers believed that one reason they did not learn much from their advisor was the fact she was a foreigner and, thus, her communication style was different than theirs. As one teacher put it:

So I told her how can we develop critical thinking, she replied back “you think about it, what do you think you should do to foster this skill?” so she wouldn’t explain for us, she want us to generate ideas and this is by the way the style of foreigners, they won’t give you an answer, rather they want you to generate the answer.

It seemed that for the teachers in Om Habiba School, the advisor mirrored the larger reform policies that were adopted from foreign countries and did not take into account teachers’ background knowledge.

Nevertheless, teachers in both schools voiced their need for professional development that would help them better understand the learning and assessment concepts introduced in the ECART in order to be able to successfully integrate the reform in their classrooms. In addition, they explained that what was most important for them was to be able to meet the needs of their

struggling students, in terms of their reading low proficiency level. They believe that the reform and the professional development sessions have neglected students' needs and rather focused on introducing the new framework of English reform without addressing how it would help Emirate students enhance their poor English language learning skills. Accordingly, the teachers in the current study reacted to the perceived de-contextualization of English language reform in UAE classrooms by applying certain teaching and assessment tools, which they believed would help their students become better English language learners. As Kennedy (2005) described teachers' role in the context of educational change: "Teachers, like other learners interpret new content through their existing understanding and modify and reinterpret new ideas on the bases of what they already know or believe" (p.2). Accordingly, for inservice teacher professional development in UAE to be successful in helping teachers formulate and develop new beliefs and practices that are compatible with the goals of English reform, ADEC appointed advisors should provide Emirate teachers with opportunities to engage in: a) reflection through dialogue, and b) scaffolding.

Garmston and Wellman (1998) defined dialogue as "a reflective learning process in which group members seek to understand one another's viewpoints and deeply held assumptions" (p.31). Through dialogue, ADEC appointed advisors can engage in conversations with Emirate teachers to clarify for them complex English reform-related issues and help them questions, rethink, and evaluate their long-held beliefs regarding English teaching and learning. In such a meaning making process, advisors can engage Emirate teachers in an "emotional and cognitive safety zone where ideas flow for examination without judgment" (p. 30). In addition, advisors can help Emirate teachers form "communities of practice" where they share common discourse about their experiences, struggles, ideas, and their interpretation of reform (Lave &

Wenger, 1991). In such an environment, advisors can assist Emirate teachers to take on the role of becoming reflective practitioners by equipping them with tools that would help them to continuously examine their assumptions and beliefs, and, accordingly help teachers make meaningful changes in their classroom.

The current English reform was not only requiring teacher to revamp their practices in the classroom, but also to take on a new identity from that of a transmitter of knowledge to being a facilitator and curriculum developer. The ECART provided teachers with themes and required them to design lesson units, teaching, and assessment materials to cover a theme per trimester. Arab and/or foreign advisors need to bear in mind that Emirate teachers have been using a prescribed curriculum that included textbooks, teacher, and students' guides for several years. When describing the history of curriculum development in UAE, Ridge and Farah (2009) explained:

Since 1985 the word “curriculum” in the UAE context is largely used to refer to official textbooks, or intended curriculum, rather than any documentation outlining what skills or standards a student should acquire in a particular grade or subject. This has meant that teachers have been very restricted in what they can teach, as they are bound precisely to the content and activities prescribed by the textbooks in order to ensure that what they teach matches what will be assessed. (p. 1)

The Emirate teachers participating in the current study believed that following a prescribed curriculum was a safe way of ensuring the gradual coverage of ESL language structural knowledge and skills and explained that they were not prepared to design and develop units that were as coherent as those provided in textbooks. Emirate teachers, thus, need scaffolding from their advisors to learn how to effectively assume new roles in the classrooms and be able to

gradually move away from the traditional approaches to language teaching and learning—they believed brought about success to students—to more constructivist methods of learning that would result in students’ becoming more proficient in the English language. Since the Emirate teachers participating in the current study lacked teacher preparation and second language-specific coursework, scaffolding could provide teachers with theoretical foundation in the different approaches of language teaching and model for them the teaching and assessment practices included in the ECART, in addition to illustrating how such reform-oriented practices would bring about more success and enhancement in student’s language learning than the old traditional ones.

Education Policymakers in UAE

In order to ensure the effective and successful implementation of the new English reform in UAE classrooms, educational policy makers need to take account of Emirate teachers’ beliefs regarding English teaching, learning, and assessment including their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the ECART as an alternative assessment method. While well intentioned, the revamping of English curriculum in UAE has posed many challenges to teachers’ current instructional and assessment classroom practices. The introduction of the ECART has exposed teachers’ tacit beliefs regarding second language teaching and learning. Policymakers in UAE need to address teachers’ beliefs because if left unchanged, it would be quite hard for Emirate teachers to enact teaching and assessment innovations in the classrooms in a manner that is consistent with the goals and intentions of ADEC. The findings of the current study showed that teachers agreed with and acknowledge many of the educational concepts proposed by the reform and believed that they enhanced students’ engagement in the learning process. However, teachers expressed their lack of knowledge regarding how to use the ECART to monitor students’

learning and address students' needs in areas, such as reading and grammar. They believed the ECART was helpful in developing students' skills, but should not stand as the sole means of assessment because of its inadequacy in diagnosing and treating students' linguistic errors.

In addition, some of the participating teachers referred to the irrelevance of many aspects of the ECART in the context of UAE, such as its emphasis on developing creative and critical skills due to students' noticeable poor language skills. Emirate teachers in the current study believed that prior to focusing on developing students' high order thinking skills, the reform should take account of students' background knowledge and linguistic abilities by offering a curriculum that is tailored towards meeting Emirate students' needs. As a result of teachers' perceived beliefs regarding the irrelevance of certain sections of the ECART to Emirate students' learning, many of the classroom practices of the participating teachers have reflected their long-standing transmission and teacher-oriented approaches to language teaching and learning.

Hargreaves (1994) explained:

Teachers don't merely deliver the curriculum. They develop, define it and reinterpret it too. It is what teachers think, what teachers believe, and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get. (p. ix)

Accordingly, the implementation of any reform in English curricula in UAE will not reach its desired outcomes unless ADEC identifies and appropriately responds to Emirate teachers' beliefs about such educational innovations.

Given the massive funding that ADEC has invested in reforming the educational system in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, the role of teachers as the implementers of reform in the classroom should not be underestimated. Dr. Mugheer Khamis Al Khaili, Director General of ADEC explained:

At the core of our education reform is the goal to develop students with strong problem-solving and analytical abilities and to equip them with the skills that they need to succeed in their higher education and future careers. Our graduates should be independent thinkers with the ability to create, innovate, and support the economic and social progression of Abu Dhabi. (ADEC's English Framework, 2012, p. 4)

The successful implementation of such reform requires a radical shift in the mindset and teaching and assessment approaches held by Emirate teachers. Even though the Emirate teachers participating in the current study recognized many of the educational benefits introduced by the new English language reform, they felt overwhelmed by the pressure to discard the knowledge and practices they have gained through the years regarding English language teaching and learning, as they were considered irrelevant and inefficient in light of the current reform. A recent study conducted by Ibrahim et al. (2013) examined the different factors that led Emirate teachers to resist the educational change promoted by ADEC. The authors explained that a major factor in teachers' resistance to change was due to teachers' exclusion from the decision making process and the false expectation that they will easily implement and comply with the reform agenda:

This resistance stems largely from how change is initiated and administered. Typically, change starts with ADEC planning for a certain change and then school principals are responsible for subsequent implementation. The expectation is that teachers will comply with the policies and plans. However, teachers sometimes struggle with the implementation of such pre-determined plans created by ADEC's officials.

Accordingly, an increased focus on assisting Emirate teachers through the process of change by offering them quality professional development experiences, involving them in the reform, and

allowing their voices to be heard in regards to what they think and believe about such radical changes to the English curriculum is needed and should not be overlooked.

Limitations

This section draws attention to the limitations of the current study and how future research could build on the findings of this study in order to target research areas that deserve more scrutinized attention. The main limitations of this study involve issues regarding a) the selection of participants, b) the question of the generalizability of the results, and c) the complexity of examining teachers' beliefs and practices. The first two limitations derive from design decisions made by the researcher, while the third is a function of the complexity of the topic and the questions that remained unanswered in the field of research on teaching generally.

One of the limitations of the current study was related to the difficulty of recruiting teachers in interviews and classroom observations. Emirate teachers were not used to reflecting on their beliefs and practices or having their classrooms observed, which made it difficult to recruit teachers as they were hesitant to participate in the current study once they knew it involved interviews and classroom observations. Out of ten teachers I met, four teachers agreed to participate in this study. The participating teachers had 9 to 14 years of teaching experience. Research shows that teaching experience has a great impact on teachers' beliefs and practices (Rex & Nelson, 2004). For example, novice and experienced teachers differ in how they plan and conduct their lessons, the decisions they take in the classrooms, and the content they cover (Borko & Livingston, 1989; Tsui, 2003). Accordingly, future research should examine how factors such as teaching experience might impact Emirate teachers' beliefs and practices.

A second limitation of the present study relates to the question of the generalizability of the results. The goal of this study was not to seek generalization regarding the beliefs and

practices of the whole population of EFL Emirate teachers using the ECART in UAE classrooms, rather the current exploratory multiple case study aimed at offering rich and thick description of how four Emirate teachers experienced English language reform. Through the recurring themes and patterns found across the four teachers from two different schools, it became apparent the common struggles that Emirate teachers faced as they tried to adapt to the new English curricula. The results of the current study could be used to inform future research in designing large-scale studies that examine Emirate teachers' beliefs across the emirate of Abu Dhabi regarding the adoption of ECART in UAE classrooms. In addition, future research could take the form of longitudinal studies that examine Emirate teachers' change of beliefs as they use the ECART for extended periods of time and with different grade levels of students.

The final limitation of the current study lies in the complexity of examining teachers' beliefs and practices. As mentioned in chapter two of this dissertation, the construct *belief* has been defined in various ways depending on researchers' position and background. In the current study, the construct *belief* was defined as propositions that teachers hold and regard as true. However, besides their beliefs, Emirate teachers have also reflected many *attitudes* toward the English curricular reform during the interviews that was not accounted for in the design of the current study. *Attitudes* are different from *beliefs* in that people do not only regard them as true, but also associate certain feelings (positive or negative) to them (Bord, O'Connor, & Fisher, 2000). In that sense, future research could use the findings of this study to examine Emirate teachers' attitudes toward the ECART, which would give a more holistic and complete understanding of teachers' perspectives.

Additionally, the discrepancy between some of Emirate teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices in the current study reflected the methodological limitations of inferring

teachers' beliefs through classroom observations. In some cases, Emirate teachers' practices showed a different epistemological stance and/or a teaching and learning approach that was opposite to their reported beliefs, which revealed the complexity of capturing teachers' beliefs through observing their practices. Tobin, Tippins, and Gallard (1994) explained that the inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices indicated that teachers' beliefs do not usually have a direct causal bearing on their actions. This could be due to the various contextual factors and classroom complexities that mediate the relationship between beliefs and behaviors. In the current study, some contextual factors, such as students' perceived poor English language skills, their concerns regarding classroom management issues, and the pressure they get from parents to abide by the traditional ways of teaching and assessment have accounted for the incongruity between some of Emirate teachers' beliefs and practices. Kennedy (2005) highlighted that sometimes certain circumstances exist that would "place so many constraints on teachers that they cannot rise above these circumstances to create the kind of practices that reformers want to see" (p.15). Accordingly, the inconsistency between Emirate teachers' beliefs and practices calls for attention to the context and culture within which teaching takes place.

Other researchers have indicated that inconsistencies between interviews and observational data could be a result of teachers responding to questions about beliefs in terms of what, in Wood's (1996) words:

They would like to believe, or would like to show they believe in the interview context. When a belief or assumption is articulated in the abstract, as a response to an abstract question, there is a much greater chance that it will tend more towards what is expected in the interview situation than what is actually held in the teaching situation and actually influences teaching practices" (p.27).

Accordingly, the results of the current study showed that the few instances where Emirate teachers' practices did not match their reported beliefs could be due to various factors, some of which were the limitations inherited in inferring teachers' beliefs through their practices and the constraints that the classroom environment and lack of professional development have placed on teachers to follow their beliefs and provide instructional and assessment practices that are more aligned with the English reform policies.

Conclusion

Several researchers have considered beliefs as an important factor that shapes teachers' behavior (Bryan, 2003; Rex & Nelson, 2004). Teachers' beliefs not only impact their teaching practices, but also filter new input, which has significant implications for how teachers react toward and implement new educational reform and innovations. However, little research—usually conducted in Western and Asia Pacific regions—has examined second language teachers' beliefs and practices in the context of reform. Borg (2003) asserted that there is an imperative need for research that examines second language teachers' beliefs in non-Western contexts. Accordingly, more international studies—especially in the Arab Gulf region where massive education reform is taking place—are needed in this area in order to shed light on the nature of EFL teachers' beliefs, the way the cultural and educational contexts influence their practices and understanding of the reform movement in general. It is also noteworthy to mention that most of the studies I came across have employed quantitative methodological approaches, which reflects the scarcity of qualitative studies that examine teachers' beliefs and practices. Such studies are needed in the field in order to offer us a deeper understanding of how EFL teachers' beliefs operate in the classrooms. The current study attempted to fill this gap by adding

to the body of international literature on teachers' beliefs and practices during times of educational reform.

The findings of the current study revealed the intertwined nature of beliefs and behavior. On one hand, Emirate teachers' beliefs clearly influenced their classroom practices and, on the other hand, changes in their practices have led to some change in their beliefs. In addition, the interpretation of data revealed that Emirate teachers were not against English curricular reform per se, yet their resistance to change was a result of their belief that their past knowledge and practices about English language teaching and learning were being looked down upon by the reform as not only ineffective, but also as hindering students' progress. In addition, teachers believed they were not receiving adequate support that would help them to successfully enact the ECART in the classroom. Accordingly, Emirate teachers lacking of sufficient subject-specific and pedagogical professional knowledge and guidance, holding beliefs and values that differ from reformers, having dispositions that interfered with their ability to implement reforms, and facing circumstances of teaching that prohibited them from changing their practices were all factors that shaped teachers' beliefs, understanding, receptiveness, and enactment of the ECART reform in the classroom.

The current study has implications not only for inservice teachers, but also for teacher preparation programs and educational policymakers in the United Arab Emirates. By understanding the impact of EFL teachers' beliefs on their instructional and assessment practices, professional development and teacher education programs in UAE will better assist inservice and preservice teachers reflect on their beliefs and recognize the impact they have on their behaviors and decision making process in the classroom. In addition, to ensure the successful implementation of the new English curriculum in UAE, policy makers have to

recognize teachers' beliefs as an integral part of their knowledge base. Thus, ignoring teachers' long-held beliefs about English teaching, learning, and assessment will hinder the assimilation of innovative ideas and practices that Emirate teachers are encouraged to adopt in the classrooms.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guiding Questions

Background Questions:

- How many years have you been teaching English as a foreign language in UAE? What grades are you teaching?
- Have you taught English as a foreign/second language in other countries?
 - If yes, what are the similarities and/or differences between the two contexts?
 - How did your past teaching experiences affect your teaching practices in UAE?

Past experiences as an EFL learner:

- Tell me more about your early experiences of learning English in school.
 - What teaching approach did your past English teachers use in the classroom?
 - How were you expected to behave as an English learner in the classroom?
 - What role did your English teacher play in the classroom?
 - What kind of assessments did your past English teachers carry out in the classroom? Do you think they were successful? Why?
 - Can you give me an example of a good language teacher that you had? What did you like about her/his teaching/assessment methods?
 - How would you describe your overall experience as an English language learner? Why?
 - Thinking back to your experience as a foreign language learner, what influence did it have on how you teach and assess your students today?

Past experiences in postsecondary education:

- Why did you decide to become an English teacher?
- What undergraduate/graduate degree do you have? Do you have a certificate for teaching English as a foreign/second language?
- Describe for me your formal teaching training experiences.
 - What kind of teacher education courses have you taken as an undergraduate student? What impact did they have on your views of English teaching and learning?
 - What kind of assessment methods courses have you taken as an undergraduate student? What impact did they have on your views of assessment?
 - Did your program promote a particular way of teaching and assessing students? Give me examples.
 - Are there any points of conflict/similarities between what you were taught in your education courses regarding teaching and assessment and what you are currently doing in your classroom?

Past teaching experiences

- What memories do you have about your earliest teaching experiences?
 - What kind of teaching and assessment methods did you use?
 - What sources did you use more often when designing assessment activities?
 - Do you think they were successful? Have you changed your teaching and assessment approach since then? Why?

- What have been the greatest influences on your development as an EFL teacher so far? For example, your experiences as a language learner, your professional course work, your past teaching experiences...etc Why?

Current beliefs about EFL teaching and learning

- How do you describe the current teaching approach/mode you use in the classroom? For example, teacher-centered, student-centered, communicative...etc
- In your view, what do you think is the best way to learn English as a foreign language?
- How do you describe your role in the classroom as an EFL teacher?
- What role do you think your students play in their language learning process?
- What guides how and what you teach in the classroom? For example, a specific textbook, curriculum...etc
- What do you feel are the most important aspects of teaching English in your classroom? For example, reading, writing, listening, communication...etc
- Describe for me a successful classroom occasion that you recently had? What factors do you think contributed to the success of this particular lesson?
- Describe for me a frustrating classroom occasion that you recently had? What factors do you think contributed to the frustration you or your students experienced in this particular lesson?

Current beliefs about EFL assessment

- When I say “assessment”, what do you think about?
- What types of assessment methods do you usually use in your classroom? For example, traditional/alternative methods. Could you give me examples
- In your view, how can you best assess your students’ English language learning?
- When do you grade your students’ work? When is it not important for you to grade your students’ work?
- In your view, what are the purposes of assessing your students?
- In what ways does your assessment impact your instruction?
- Describe for me the different ways in which you use the results/outcome of your assessment.
- What is the role of feedback in your assessment practices?
- To what extent is it important for you to engage your students in the assessment process? Why?
- How much thinking do you typically do in advance of a lesson regarding the assessment you will use? What factors determine your use of specific assessment tasks?
- How different is the ECART from the old curriculum?
 - How different are your assessment practices before and after the implementation of the ECART?
 - In what ways did the ECART influence your thinking about assessment practices?
 - What have you learned about language assessment from the ECART?
 - In what ways, do you believe, your role as a teacher changed after the implementation of ECART?
 - Can you tell me about any kind of change that you have made in your instruction as a result of implementing the ECART?
 - Do you feel your beliefs about language teaching and assessment have changed as a result of incorporating the ECART framework in your classroom?

- What benefits do you believe the ECART has provided you and your students in terms of English language assessment?
 - How valuable, do you believe, the ECART framework is in assessing your students' language learning progress?
 - In what instances and/or language areas, do you believe, the ECART is successful when assessing your students?
- What kind of difficulties or obstacles do you encounter when assessing students using the ECART framework?
- What kind of information does the ECART give you about your students' language learning progress? What information does it leave out?
- How much do you think your assessment practices reflect the principles of the ECART framework?

The context of teaching and assessment

- How do you describe the student population in your classroom? For example, their language abilities, background knowledge, and motivation.
- To what extent are your students receptive to the ECART system?
 - What do they find useful?
 - What do they complain about?
 - How do you assist them in the transition from a traditional mode of assessment to an alternative one?
- How do you like teaching in this particular school?
- How would you describe your relationship with your colleagues, staff, and administration?
 - Do you have discussions with school personnel regarding ESL assessment methods?
 - How do such discussions affect your assessment design? Could you give me examples where school requirements and or discussions with colleagues impacted your assessment practices in the classroom
- Would you describe for me the teaching and assessment philosophies endorsed by your school? How does such philosophies impact your teaching and assessment.
- How does your school support your use of alternative assessment?
- What do you think about the current reform of English language teaching and assessment adopted by ADEC?
 - What do you agree with? What do you not agree with?
 - How does such reform impact the methods you use when you teach and assess your students?
 - What kind of support do you receive from ADEC in order to implement the ECART framework in your classroom?

Appendix B

Figure 2. ECART Organization

3. Context: Student choice of topic within the theme

My theme is...

Think of as many things related to the theme as possible

BRAINSTORM

I am doing this to learn...

Purpose

Skills

Students make choices to direct their own learning

Choices and decision making

Choose one item from your brainstorm for your ECART Project

For my ECART I will focus on..

I think this will make a good project because...

My daily reflection log!

Today I learnt	
Guided teacher response and higher order question	
Student response	

Appendix C

Figure 3. Example 1 of Students Work

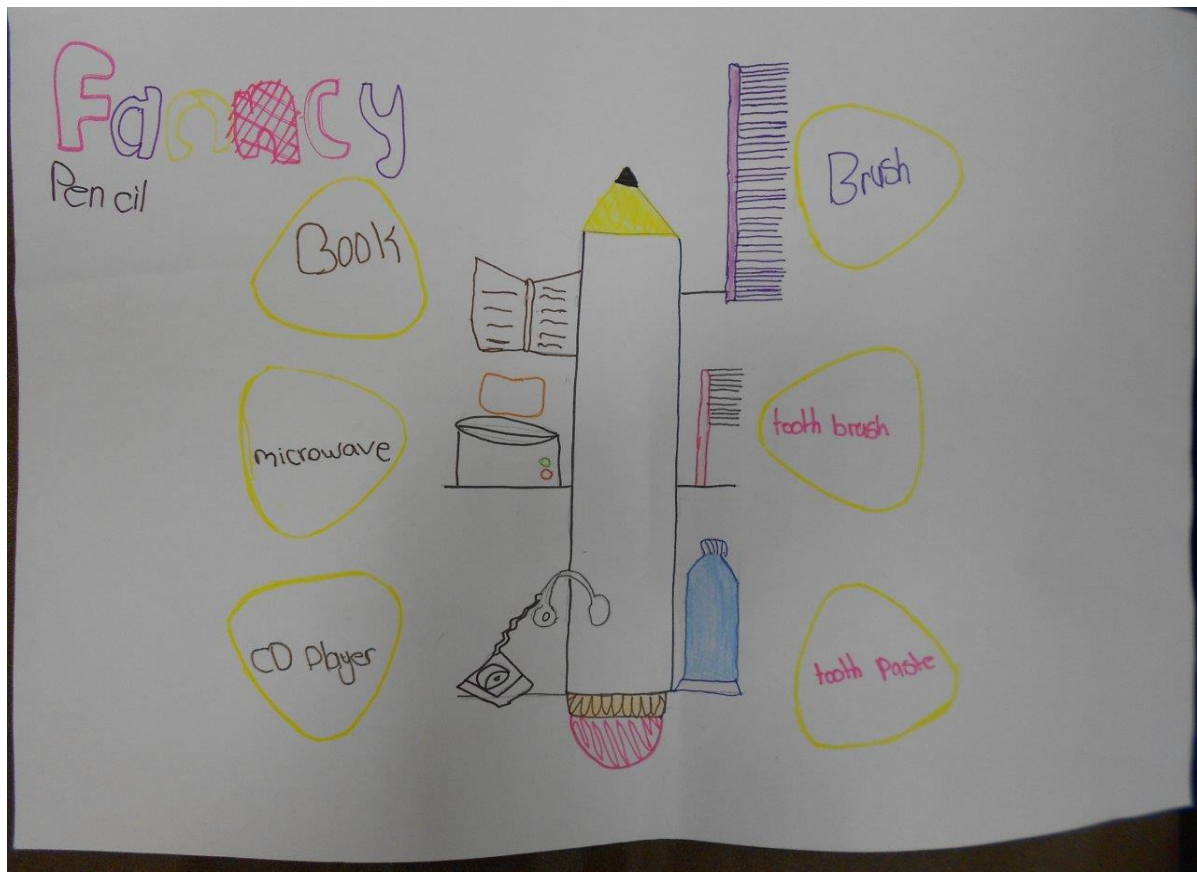
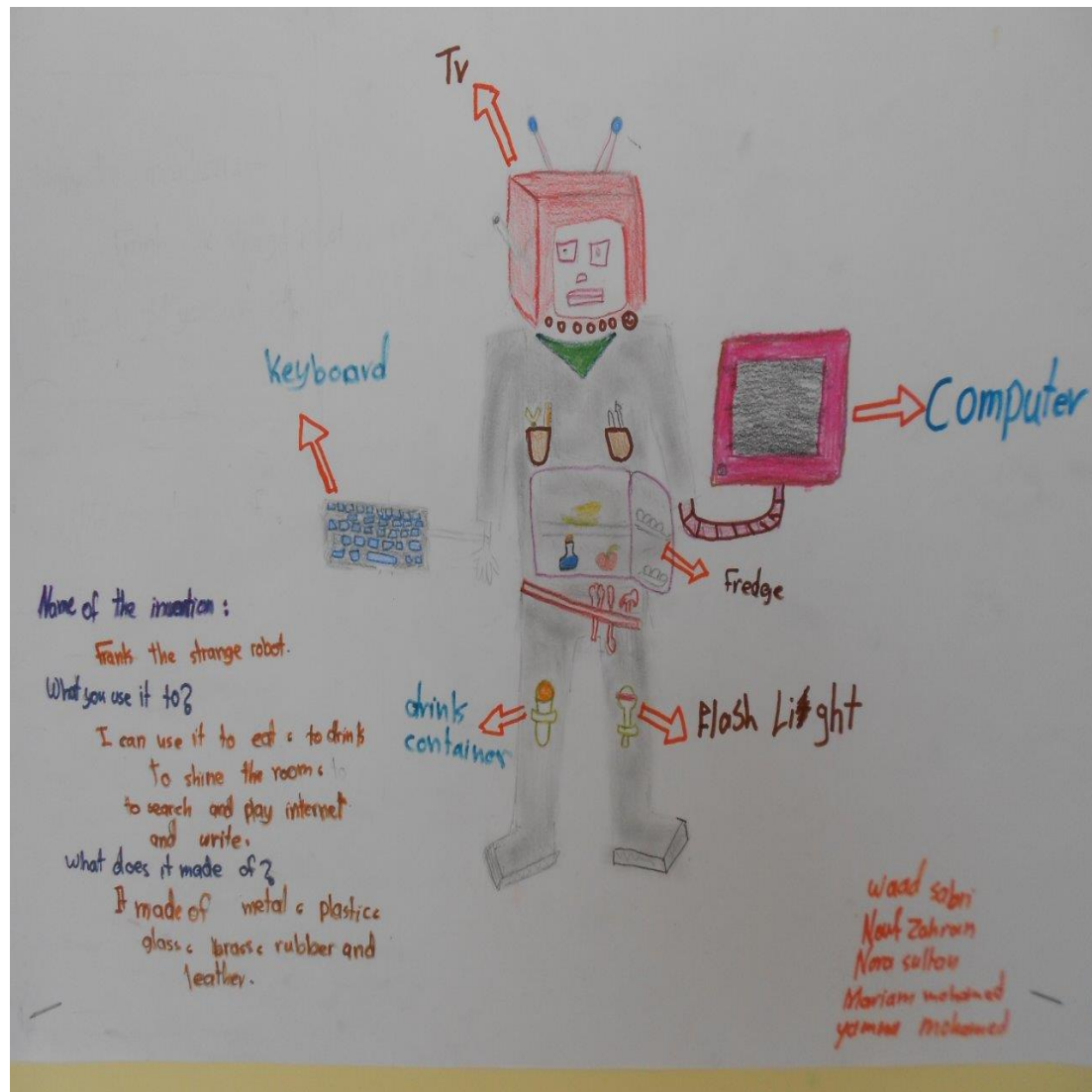


Figure 3.1. Example 2 of Students Work



Appendix E

Figure 4. Vocabulary Supporting Sheet

No	Word	Meaning
1	Valley	وادي
2	Bored	يشعر بالملل
3	Upset	مكتئب
4	Sailing	ابحار
5	Lit up	يتلألأ يتلامع
6	Excitement	اثاره
7	River	نهر
8	Surprise	مفاجأة
9	Disturbed	يشوش منزعج
10	Hide	يختبئ
11	Island	جزيرة
12	Get off	ينزل
13	Explore	يستكشف
14	Tied	يربط
15	Swayed	يتمايل
16	Breeze	نسيم
17	Whistle	يصفر
18	Louder	أعلى
19	Shell	صدفة
20	Rubbed	يفرك
21	Tickling	يدغدغ
22	Giggle	يضحك
23	Dropped	يسقط
24	Creature	مخلوق
25	Crawled	يزحف
26	Amazed	مذهول

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