

Fostering Alignment: How Supportive Conditions Bridge Language Teacher Identity, Beliefs, and Practice in Listening Instruction

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Abstract

How can language teachers consistently enact their beliefs about effective pedagogy, particularly in the often-marginalized skill of listening? This study argues that the answer lies in understanding and supporting Language Teacher Identity (LTI). This study examined LTI through the aspects of agency, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and commitment. Using a mixed-methods design with 59 Iranian EFL teachers (questionnaire) and an in-depth qualitative study of three teachers (observations, interviews), the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practices was investigated. Teachers had above 5 years of teaching experience both in the qualitative and quantitative phase and ranged in age from 24 to 45. Contrary to studies that found frequent misalignments, our findings revealed a strong congruence between what teachers believe and what they do. This alignment was fundamentally enabled by supportive institutional conditions, including teacher agency, professional trust, and a lack of restrictive policies, which empowered teacher development and affirmed their sense of self. The study concluded that the development of positive LTI and consistent belief-driven practice is deeply facilitated by the educational ecosystem. This study offers implications for school administrators and teacher educators on creating environments that nurture teacher agency, thereby directly improving instruction in line with teachers' beliefs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language teacher identity (LTI) has become a central focus in understanding teacher development, recognized as a dynamic and multifaceted construct that is constantly (re)shaped through social interaction and power relations within specific contexts (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Norton, 2013; Zembylas, 2003). This on-going process of identity formation is pivotal because it fundamentally informs how teachers think about their work (their beliefs), and how they ultimately act in the classroom (their practice) (Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025; Richards, 2023). To understand this critical link, Richards (2023) proposed a framework for LTI, comprising four interrelated aspects: agency

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(the capacity for purposeful, reflective action), self-efficacy (belief in one's capability), commitment (personal investment in the profession), and self-esteem (positive self-evaluation) (Bandura, 2006; Chesnut & Burley, 2015; Khezerlou, 2017; Richards, 2023; Rogers & Wetzel, 2013). These aspects directly shape a teacher's sense of self and professional cognition. Teacher belief, often used interchangeably with teacher cognition, is a potent force in education. It encompasses what teachers know, think, and believe, and it exerts a pervasive influence on their instructional choices and practice, knowingly or unknowingly (Borg, 2003; Graham et al., 2014). A persistent and practical question in teacher education, therefore, is the degree to which teachers' stated beliefs align with their enacted practices. While some studies find a strong relationship (see Biesta et al., 2015), others report frequent misalignments, often attributed to constraining contextual factors (Graham et al., 2014; Karimi & Nazari, 2017).

This study acknowledges the existing research on LTI, beliefs, and practices, but argues that the integration of these separate lines of inquiry, particularly concerning the specific pedagogical domain of EFL listening instruction, remains underexplored. We argue that listening instruction presents an ideal and necessary site for such an investigation as it strategically requires LTI and cognition. However, delving into the field shows that listening is consistently reported as the most challenging skill for learners to master and, paradoxically, the most neglected in teaching and research (Bozorgian, 2015, 2021). This neglect extends to our understanding of the teachers themselves. While research has established the importance of LTI (Barkhuizen, 2021; Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025; Norton, 2013), the cognitive dimensions of teaching (Borg, 2003), and the belief-practice relationship in listening (Graham et al., 2014), few studies have holistically investigated how LTI acts as a bridging factor in the (mis)alignment between teachers' beliefs and their listening comprehension teaching practices. Investigating this integrated relationship is vital because effective listening instruction, a skill consistently identified as challenging for EFL learners and often neglected in pedagogical practice (Bozorgian, 2015, 2021), depends heavily on teachers' self-esteem, professional commitment, self-efficacy, agentic behaviors, and pedagogical understanding. By exploring the role of LTI in this dynamic, this study has the potential to contribute significantly to the field by providing a more nuanced understanding of not just *why* but *how* belief-practice alignment occurs or falters. The findings could inform more effective teacher professional development programs, guiding educators to foster not only sound pedagogical knowledge but also a strong sense of self that supports the consistent application of effective listening strategies, as committed, effective agents with higher levels of self-esteem. This is particularly relevant in the Iranian context, where EFL teachers often operate within demanding educational systems that present unique challenges to effective language pedagogy (see Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025). Factors such as specific class norms, parental expectations, limited time and resources, and curriculum pressures can influence both LTI formation and the translation of beliefs into practice in listening instruction (Haqiqi, 2024; Karimi & Nazari, 2017). While the significance of these constructs is acknowledged in the literature, research exploring the specific interplay between LTI, encompassing its four integrated aspects, and the belief-practice dynamic within EFL listening instruction needs further investigation in the Iranian context. Therefore, this study addresses this critical gap by exploring EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching listening based on their LTI, and is guided by the following questions:

RQ1: What beliefs do teachers hold about teaching listening in relation to their language teacher identity in EFL classes?

RQ2: To what extent do EFL teachers' beliefs align with their listening teaching practices, considering their language teacher identity?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Previous Research on Language Teacher Identity

This study adopts a post-structural theoretical framework to conceptualize LTI. From a post-structural perspective, LTI is not fixed, nor unified; rather, it is multiple, shifting, and discursively (re)constructed across time and space (Barkhuizen, 2021; Norton, 2013). Language teacher identity is understood as a construct which is (re)shaped and enacted within and through discourse, marked by historically situated power relations, and constantly negotiated in social interaction (Barkhuizen, 2021; Olsen, 2008; Zembylas, 2003).

The current understanding of LTI approaches it as a multiple, shifting, and multifaceted construct, constantly (re)shaped according to the social contexts an individual engages in (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). This view aligns closely with post-structural notions of subjectivity as fluid, dynamic, and constructed rather than stable or merely inherent (Richards, 2023). Yazan's (2018) definition emphasizes how language teachers perceive themselves, their visions and imaginations regarding their role in language education, and their membership in communities. From a post-structural standpoint, such perceptions are not purely internal, personal, or psychological but are discursively mediated and socially produced within particular institutional and cultural narratives (Barkhuizen, 2021; Norton, 2013).

Accordingly, LTI is considered a dynamic, conflictual, and multiple phenomenon, connected to diverse cultural, social, and political contexts (Yazan, 2018). This conceptualization resonates with post-structural understandings of identity as inherently fragmented and shaped by competing discourses. Furthermore, the linkage of LTI to power relations and social positioning (Olsen, 2008; Zembylas, 2003) directly reflects Foucault's (1982) notions of power as productive and pervasive, operating through institutional practices, norms, and knowledge systems that position language teachers in particular ways.

Moreover, LTI is tied to a range of internal and external factors, including teachers' past and personal experiences (Richards, 2023) and their professional experience and trajectories (Derakhshan et al., 2023; Sani et al., 2022). Within a post-structural framework, these experiences are understood not as merely individual attributes but as socially mediated narratives through which teachers construct and reconstruct their identities. Similarly, constructs such as self-esteem (Motallebzadeh & Kazemi, 2018), self-efficacy and commitment (Chesnut, 2017), and agency (Karimpour et al., 2022) are viewed not as stable psychological traits but as contextually negotiated positions made possible or even constrained by available discourses and power structures (Zembylas, 2003). Thus, adopting a post-structural lens allows LTI to be conceptualized as a site of on-going negotiation, shaped by discourse, power, history, and social interaction, rather than as a fixed set of personal characteristics.

Previous Research on Language Teacher Identity Aspects

Resting upon Richards's (2023) framework of LTI and in line with the theoretical underpinnings of this study, four aspects (agency, commitment, self-esteem, and self-efficacy) have been introduced to the literature in defining LTIs in the profession (see Figure 1). Similar to LTI, rising attention has been given to the concept of agency in recent years and its link to LTI (Karimpour et al., 2022; Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Karimpour et al. (2022) investigated language teacher agency within the context of LTI, and demonstrated that institutional mandates and top-down policies can strictly impede agency, negatively influencing various dimensions of LTI such as commitment, self-

efficacy, autonomy, emotions, and motivation. They further emphasized that identity tensions arising from power relations and social positioning can constrain teachers' agentic behaviors, thereby affecting both their professional and interpersonal identities.

A common definition of agency adopted by many scholars is "the capacity of people to act purposefully and reflectively on their world" (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013, p. 63). Therefore, teacher agency is defined as when teachers take agentic and active roles with the ability to apply the necessary changes in the whole teaching process (e.g., decision-making or curriculum development) (Richards, 2023). In this regard, teachers' capacity to enact their beliefs and sense of self could be empowered or restrained by personal, contextual, and sociocultural factors, and their interactions with power relations and societal mandates (Haqiqi, 2024; Karimpour et al., 2022; Veliz et al., 2025)

Teacher agency is intrinsically linked to a teacher's self-perception, a construct significantly shaped by external factors such as how colleagues, administrators, and the institution perceive and position them (Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025; De Costa et al., 2018). This interplay between internal self-perceptions and external positioning highlights the social dimension and the driving force of agency. When teachers find that their personal goals, deeply held values, and core beliefs are in harmony with the policies, values, and objectives of their workplace, a state of 'value consonance' is achieved (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). This alignment actively amplifies job satisfaction and cultivates a profound sense of belonging within the professional community.

Consequently, an environment that not only acknowledges but actively promotes 'favoring factors' (Richards, 2020), providing teachers with the freedom and agency to act, innovate, and shape their practice within a welcoming and supportive environment that minimizes unnecessary restrictions (Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025; Haqiqi et al., 2024), acts as a fertile ground for positive outcomes. Such conditions are conducive to fostering positive emotions and self-esteem (Granjo et al., 2021), and nurturing a strong sense of professional commitment (Collie et al., 2018). In addition to this, teacher agency emerges as a cornerstone for sustained engagement, being critical to teachers' investment in their jobs (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016), and their overall emotional well-being (De Costa et al., 2018). It forms a scaffolding upon which motivation, self-efficacy, and commitment are built and maintained (Karimpour et al., 2022).

Given its significance, commitment like agency has been the subject of many studies (Chesnut & Burley, 2015; Granjo et al., 2021), and linked to LTI. It is defined as the level of personal investment and involvement teachers have in their profession, which includes "the extent to which he or she has a sense of vocation, identifies with and supports the school's goals and practices and is willing to invest personal resources of time and energy in order to achieve excellence in teaching" (Richards, 2023, p. 3). However, given the integrity of all LTI aspects, each aspect acts as a catalyst that brings about changes in the others. For instance, power relations can affect teachers' sense of agency (Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025; Haqiqi, 2024), and impede or empower teachers' sustained engagement in the profession and professional commitment (Collie et al., 2018; Hamid & Nguyen, 2016; Karimpour et al., 2022)

Research has also delved into self-efficacy as the other LTI aspect, framing our study. A well-established definition adopted by scholars belongs to Bandura (1997), who holds it as individuals' belief in their ability to effectively plan and carry out the necessary actions to handle or overcome the potential situations that may arise. Moreover, Bandura proposed the concepts of mastery experience (e.g., teacher's successful experience of their teaching) and emotional arousal (e.g., anxiety or vulnerability due to a challenging situation) as possible sources of self-efficacy through the lens of the social cognitive theory. In addition to this, scholars hold a positive relationship between self-efficacy and teachers' self-esteem (Fu et al., 2019). In this regard, as Fu

et al. discussed, those who perceive themselves as capable and effective are likely to view themselves positively and deal with lower levels of burnout while dealing with tensions that arise within the profession. Self-esteem refers to individuals' evaluation of themselves as capable and successful (Khezerlou, 2017).

Aligning with this perspective, Richards (2023) put forward the concept of positive self-esteem as a pivotal factor influencing several key dimensions of a teacher's professional experience. Richards argued that teachers' high level of self-esteem positively affects their interpersonal communication, efficacy in conflict management, overall job satisfaction, and their broader perspective on the teaching profession. He further elaborated that this positive self-esteem can enhance interactions with others, such as learners and colleagues, scaffold the capacity to confront and manage real-time teaching challenges, and thereby contribute to increased commitment and the maintenance of effective coping strategies. Therefore, LTIs different aspects are shown to affect each other while being affected by contextual factors, discourse, history, ideology, social positioning, and power relations (e.g., Haqiqi, 2024; Haqiqi et al., 2024; Collie et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2019; Granjo et al., 2021; Richards, 2023; Veliz et al., 2025).

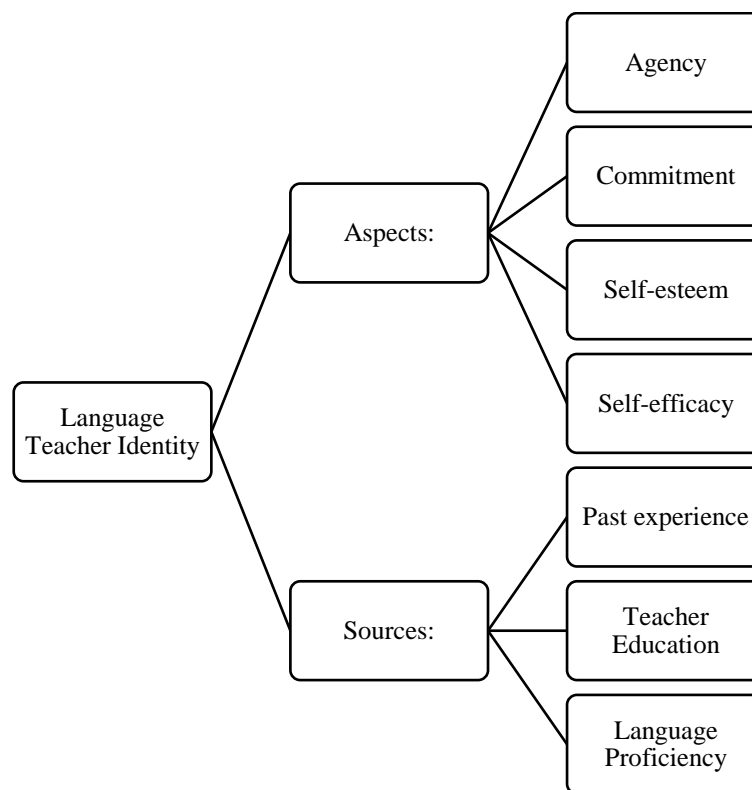


Figure 1: Framework for language teacher identity (Richards, 2023)

Previous Research on Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Teaching Listening

Teacher belief has been the topic of many scholars due to the pervasive influence of beliefs in different areas of the field (see Fives & Gill, 2014). This concept, which affects teachers' practice and in-class choices (Borg, 2003), has been interchangeably used with 'cognition' (e.g., Graham et al., 2014; Karimi & Nazari, 2017). Cognition is "the study of what teachers know, think, and

believe and how these relate to what teachers do” (Borg & Burns, 2008, p. 457). Seen this way, teachers’ pedagogies are affected by their potential beliefs toward their practice and its different aspects (Bandura, 2006). Similarly, Borg’s (2003) definition of teacher belief highlights it as a proposition an individual possesses that directs how they think and behave, whether knowingly or unknowingly.

Research has adopted different views on the relationship between these two elements (for a complete discussion see Buehl & Beck, 2014). While one group supported that there is no relationship between these two factors (e.g., Graham et al., 2014; Karimi & Nazari, 2017), others claimed that there is a strong relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices (e.g., Biesta et al., 2015; Farrell & Ives, 2014).

However, despite this vast body of literature on this matter in different areas of the field, it was not until the study of Graham et al. (2014) that scholars noticed the paucity of research on teachers’ beliefs and practice in teaching listening. This gap is not surprising because listening has been neglected in the field. Listening is the least highlighted language skill since people mostly emphasized the output rather than the input (Bozorgian, 2015).

Therefore, few studies have been conducted to fill this gap. In this regard, Graham et al. (2014) cultivated the seeds of investigating belief-practice alignments in teaching listening through a mixed-method approach to probe teachers’ practices and reported beliefs. The findings highlighted belief-practice misalignments as teachers prioritized task completion over providing learners with instructions on ‘how’ they can listen more effectively despite acknowledging its importance. Additionally, the authors highlight the mediating role of contextual factors leading to these mismatches. Similarly, Karimi and Nazari (2017) revealed how contextual factors can impede teachers from practicing their beliefs into practice as well as similar findings regarding teachers’ view of the listening skill with a focus on the product rather than the process. According to the results, belief-practice misalignments were found. These discrepancies pointed that despite teachers’ possible understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of listening pedagogies, they were incapable of practicing those beliefs, which stemmed from contextual factors such as insufficient time, or limiting teachers from planning and implementing listening tasks other than the tasks in the book. In connection with this, prior research has identified both internal and external factors as key barriers that hinder teachers from fully enacting, rather than merely holding their beliefs. Internally, such constraints may arise from teachers’ level of awareness and the coherence of their belief system, as well as from their past experience, and practical knowledge (see Buehl & Beck, 2014). In particular, limitations in self-reflection or difficulties in critically evaluating one’s own practice can prevent beliefs from being translated into day-to-day instructional decisions (Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025). Externally, barriers often stem from classroom and institutional contexts. Contextual factors may include students’ preferences, attitudes, or misbehaviors, as well as the demands of effective class management. At a broader level, school-related conditions can also shape teachers’ capacity to act on their beliefs. These factors may include lack of or inadequate resources, and insufficient support from parents, colleagues, or supervisors. Taken together, these internal and external pressures can restrict teachers’ agency and create a gap between what teachers believe should happen in teaching and what they are realistically able to implement in their specific contexts (for a full discussion see Buehl & Beck, 2014).

3. METHOD

Design

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate the complex relationship between LTI, beliefs, and practice in teaching listening. The qualitative phase came first, consisting of class observations and field notes to document teachers' actual listening practices. The quantitative phase followed, using a questionnaire to measure teachers' beliefs and establish general patterns across a larger sample. Finally, semi-structured recall interviews were conducted to further explore and compare teachers' beliefs and practices. This design was chosen because the qualitative exploration allowed an in-depth, contextualized understanding of teachers' practices, while the quantitative phase provided general patterns of beliefs across a larger sample. This approach aligned with understanding LTI as a negotiated, dynamic, and context-dependent phenomenon, marked by social context and power relations (Edwards & Burns, 2016; Olsen, 2008; Yazan, 2018; Zembylas, 2003). Data included a teaching listening beliefs questionnaire, class observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews.

Participants

Participants were recruited in two phases corresponding to the mixed-methods design. In the quantitative phase, 59 Iranian EFL teachers were recruited through institutional and professional networks (e.g., institutional mailing lists, teacher associations, and social media groups for English instructors). The participants represented a diverse demographic range: ages 24 to 45 years, with teaching experience of above 5 years. They taught English at various contexts, including private institutes, universities, and online platforms, covering different proficiency levels from elementary to advanced. In the qualitative phase, three private language institutes consented to participate after institutional approval was obtained. From these institutes, three EFL teachers (aged 26–29 years), with 6–7 years of teaching experience volunteered to participate. All three taught intermediate-level learners through online courses throughout the study, following the institutes' regular curricular procedures. They also had experience working in different educational contexts, such as language institutes, online international platforms, and universities. All participants in both phases of the study held M.A. or Ph.D. degrees, and possessed advanced language proficiency and listening literacy. Each had more than five years of teaching experience, qualifying them as experienced teachers (Chan, 2008). All participants were provided with detailed information sheets, outlining the study's purpose, their rights, and data usage policies, and each signed an informed consent form prior to participation. They were assured of confidentiality, and voluntary participation. To uphold research ethics and protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used throughout, and all data were anonymized before analysis. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic and professional profile of the qualitative-phase participants.

Table 1: Participants' demographic information.

No.	Pseudonyms	Age	Teaching experience	Educational background
1	Ashkan	27	7	M.A in TEFL
2	Hanieh	26	6	M.A in TEFL
3	Parham	29	7	M.A in TEFL

Instruments

Class Observation

To probe the identities that teachers portrayed in their actual practice (Kanno & Stuart, 2011), we closely observed and recorded their classes. An observation guide was developed based on Richards' (2023) four LTI aspects (agency, commitment, self-esteem, and self-efficacy) in order to carry class observation. Then, we transcribed and read the listening instruction sections, as the focus of this study, several times for further analysis. Notably, the classes were held online on Skyroom per institutes' norms.

Field Notes

Field notes are extensively used to document the necessary contextual information, especially in research that is mostly qualitative (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). We utilized field notes alongside class observations and recall interview sessions in our study to assist us with each session's main points and highlights during the listening instruction (e.g., teachers' agentive actions, attitudes in critical moments such as technical difficulties, and positions in resolving conflicts). For each session, field notes were taken using a structured template with four sections (one for each LTI aspect), where specific teacher behaviors were recorded as they occurred.

Teaching Listening Beliefs Questionnaire

To measure the participants' beliefs about their teaching listening, we adapted the English Language Teacher Professional Identity Inventory by Hashemi et al. (2021) for the study's requirements. Following the validity and reliability phase, we administered the questionnaire after the class observations to reduce the potential effects of participants' awareness on their performance or behavior (McIntyre, 1980). Additionally, prior to administering the questionnaire, we carefully adapted, revised, and validated 41 items with the help of five experts and active researchers in the field to ensure the validity of each item in terms of both language and content. The participants were asked to select one response from five responses, which were selected from a 5-point Likert scale that showed their level of agreement with each statement (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Then, we pilot-tested the statements before revising them based on the interpretation of each item. Finally, the score of Cronbach's alpha of the revised version was calculated to be 0.88, indicating high internal consistency reliability (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2004) with a total score of 4.0. It took each respondent almost 32 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Recall Session Interviews

We conducted online semi-structured interviews with teachers after the class observations and the belief questionnaire (Mackey et al., 2000). All questions underwent expertise assessment and was revised accordingly for content validity. We held the recall sessions on a one-to-one basis via Google Meet. The interviews were conducted in English, following the teachers' preferences. Similar to class observation, we utilized field notes alongside the interview sessions for further analysis. Before the interviews, we briefed the teachers on LTI's four aspects to ensure they had an initial familiarity with it and to avoid any lack of comprehension throughout the session. Additionally, the questions circled around participants' in-depth experiences and beliefs about their LTI in teaching listening, and more importantly, explored any mismatches between their beliefs of the four LTI aspects in teaching listening and their actual practice.

Procedure

The procedure included three steps. First, we conducted class observations along with field notes to explore how teachers teach listening based on the four aspects of LTI. Aligned with the purpose of our study, we did not place importance on the count of sessions as we aimed to observe teachers' practice merely in the listening instruction regarding their LTI. Hence, we observed each of the three teachers as long as they covered two units of the books employed at the institutes: *Four Corners 3* (Richards & Bohlke, 2011) and *Touchstone 4* (McCarthy et al., 2014). This procedure could ensure that the listening instruction was included in our observations. Overall, we observed and recorded a total of 51 hours and 41 minutes of class observation, encompassing two units for each teacher (almost one hour and a half to two hours for each session). We scheduled observations at the midpoint of the semesters to avoid any potential impact on the teachers' regular teaching practices.

Following the observations, we then proceeded with the questionnaire to gain familiarity with teachers' beliefs about their identity in teaching listening. The questionnaire was sent electronically to EFL teachers in language institutes as well as other academic communities such as ELT-focused WhatsApp and Telegram groups.

As the final phase of the study, we held semi-structured interviews in the recall session, which lasted approximately 50 minutes, with each teacher to explore further their beliefs analyzed through the findings. Specifically, we addressed any mismatches between the teachers' stated beliefs and actual practices through open-ended questions to evaluate their LTI toward teaching listening and explored LTI sources regarding past experience, teacher education, and language proficiency (Richard, 2023). It is worth mentioning that before the interviews, we explained the four LTI aspects to the teachers to ensure they understood the variables' meanings and to avoid any possible lack of comprehension. Moreover, we conducted the sessions in English due to our teachers' preference and recorded them for further analysis. Similar to the belief questionnaire, the interview questions underwent assessment and were revised based on each question's interpretation. To ensure data saturation, an on-going thematic analysis was conducted during data collection. The codebook was then updated until consecutive interviews produced no new codes or themes.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) effectively facilitated the identification of patterns and codes within our data set, which we then thematized according to the four categories of LTI: agency, commitment, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Richards, 2023). By adopting this method, we could discern teachers' beliefs and in-depth experience through the lens of the LTI aspects. Therefore, we first transcribed the listening instructions as the focus of our study and thoroughly read them several times to ensure accuracy. Secondly, we pored over the data multiple times to understand the data set better. Finally, we coded the data, using Richards's (2023) framework to place it into the four categories mentioned above, as well as considering the sources of LTI in terms of past experience, teacher education, and language proficiency. This procedure was applied to the whole data set, including class recordings, field notes, and at the last stage, recall session interviews. For instance, we coded instances where teachers provided personal resources, such as being available to students outside of class throughout the semester, as 'commitment.' Similarly, we coded instances as 'agency' where teachers introduced novel techniques or implemented necessary changes to their teaching practices, even if they were not part of the syllabus. In the same vein, in the recall sessions, we coded instances where teachers expressed positive or negative self-evaluations regarding their ability to overcome conflicts while

teaching listening or their language proficiency as ‘self-esteem.’ We also coded instances where teachers pointed out their abilities in carrying out language goals and learners’ needs as ‘self-efficacy.’ We constantly compared data from different resources during data analysis to maintain consistency. We conducted individual and group discussions and performed participant-checking to increase the credibility of our data interpretations and to avoid the potential influence of researchers’ views and beliefs.

Additionally, we analyzed the questionnaire responses using a descriptive analysis in the SPSS version 26 (IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0), and results were presented in the form of mean and standard deviation. Moreover, by comparing class observations and the belief questionnaire, we probed to analyze to what extent the teachers’ beliefs mentioned in their questionnaire responses aligned with their actual practice regarding teaching listening. We asked about any mismatches through the semi-structured interviews in the recall session for further clarity.

Table 2: Report of LTI aspects regarding class observations and field notes

No.	Pseudonyms	agency	commitment	Self-esteem	Self- efficacy
1	Hanieh	+	+	+	+
2	Ashkan	+	+	+	+
3	Parham	+	+	+	+

+ shows that the variable was included in teachers’ practice, and - shows its absence or deficiency

4. RESULTS

Research Question 1: What beliefs do teachers hold about teaching listening in relation to their language teacher identity in EFL classes?

Class Observations and Field Notes

Agency:

All three teachers demonstrated agentive behavior by taking ownership of their classes and introducing innovative teaching methods or techniques to enhance creativity (See Table 2). For instance, they brought forth innovative materials (e.g., presentation slides or videos for pre and post-task listening), and creative techniques to the classes while remaining within the framework of guidelines. Hanieh adapted tasks creatively, sometimes skipping parts if she had already covered them more effectively, “I don’t think we need to do that because I already provided you with a better and more creative task we did right now.” Similarly, Parham chose to do the listening exercises by merely listening to the audio once, contrary to the prescribed guidelines in the book but deemed it necessary to play the audio track twice in another session, considering that learners may need to remember the audio content and upon request from some students, “I think it was hard, teacher. It is hard to remember.” Ashkan’s agency also stands out by dedicating time to editing and playing a short extract from the well-known Friends series related to the day’s topic. Following this, learners were to answer two questions during each session and engage in a group discussion. This listening pre-task activity not only proved to be an effective listening exercise itself but was also an interesting pre-listening task as learners seemed so hyped and active during

the listening instruction. This underlines his commitment as well. Therefore, findings highlight the pronounced impact of policies, teaching context, and learners on teacher agency, and how a flexible context for teachers helps in effectively performing their beliefs.

Commitment:

The analysis of the data revealed that the teachers' good sense of commitment regarding teaching listening (See Table 2). For instance, Ashkan devoted his personal time to extracting and editing a part of a series related to the topic and the new vocabulary of the book's audio track, which requires a significant amount of time and effort on the part of the teacher, indicating a high level of commitment to their students' learning outcomes. Hanieh also provided learners with support outside of regular class time. Specifically, she has established group classes on Telegram and WhatsApp to offer further assistance and respond to questions from students, "if you had further questions about the audio, please do ask in our groups. I would be available all the time." In addition, Hanie, and Ashkan were observed to insist on staying longer in the class to ensure the listening task was fully understood and completed:

I would like to stay a few minutes more so we can finish this part since we wasted a few minutes on tech difficulty, even though I would have to jump to my next class, and I would be deadly exhausted tonight (Ashkan).

Self-esteem:

All three teachers exhibited a great sense of self-esteem (See Table 2) and matched Richards's (2023) definition of positive self-esteem as the extent a teacher is socially competent, can efficiently communicate with learners and colleagues, and is capable of working out conflicts. For instance, Hanieh demonstrated a readiness to step out of the book if necessary. Once, she decided that a part of the listening task was not necessary as she provided her learners with a better task and was confident in its efficiency, "I already provided you with a better and more creative task."

One notable point was that teachers' excellent command of English played an essential factor in teachers' self-esteem as they demonstrated a readiness to step out of the book whenever necessary to provide examples. For instance, Parham always held group discussions with the audio track's new vocabulary and played a game called 'Q & A' to let learners ask questions so he could answer them. This way, he helped them activate the audio's new vocabulary for further practice, "let's play Q & A but let's not forget to ask really hard questions!"

Additionally, teachers' positive self-evaluations were another critical factor, as their colleagues and institutes perceived them as capable teachers. The institutes have never observed them during our observations. Accordingly, teachers showed remarkable self-esteem in modifying the listening tasks, such as skipping a part (Hanieh) or replacing the post-task (Parham). In this vein, results showed that when teachers were given the freedom to exercise their agency and were entrusted with great agency in their workplace, they were prone to high self-esteem levels. For instance, Parham replaced a section of the listening post-task about learners' experience with repairing things with an activity that excited the learners since he believed the original task was dull and repetitive: "I think part C is just boring as we have already talked about repairing stuff. I want you to write about this: How would you repair your spaceship if you were a time traveler stuck in 1920!" This piece again proves that Parham's positive evaluations of his ability to replace tasks could come from his agency.

Self-efficacy:

The analysis of the data indicated that all three teachers (See [Table 2](#)) showed similar traits regarding a) promoting a safe, inviting, and active environment to engage learners, and b) class management regarding contextual influences.

In this regard, all three teachers created a nurturing and welcoming environment for their learners to practice listening. For instance, Parham and Hanieh cultivated an inviting environment during listening tasks by utilizing humor or friendly words to invite their learners during the listening exercises, such as ‘dear,’ ‘friends,’ ‘guys,’ or ‘folks.’ Similarly, Ashkan and Hanieh blended in with their learners’ age group by discussing movies, anime and animation or using humor and singing humorously to help engage all learners: “This scenario in the audio really reminded me of the anime Spirit Away. Do you remember I have recommended that?” (Ashkan); “Wasn’t her voice similar to Ozaki? I think it terrifyingly sounds like her!” (Hanieh). Through these techniques, the teachers could actively engage everyone, including the less active learners.

Interestingly, we observed all three teachers to do well with class management, social skills in the class community, and dealing with contextual influences such as technology difficulties like audio interruption, lost connection, and presentation slides. They made prompt decisions and acted autonomously with great mastery. For instance, they all displayed agility in file switching, material uploading, and audio track troubleshooting. This was most evident in Ashkan’s observation, where he exhibited an excellent command of technology with the edited videos of the series, fixing all technical glitches and resolving teaching conflicts such as learners’ difficulty with audio comprehension. For instance, in response to the learners’ demands, Ashkan decided that they should listen to the audio a second time to better grasp the track before answering the questions, “since you guys asked for it, let’s give it a second try.” This proved to be an efficient strategy, as the learners were quick to answer the questions after the second attempt. This not only underscores Ashkan’s self-efficacy but also his agency to make the necessary changes based on learners’ current needs. It can be inferred that the teachers, due to their prior knowledge and experience of real-time teaching, were well-equipped to make efficient and quick decisions based on on-going class events. As they were familiar with similar incidents, they could easily draw on their expertise to resolve issues. As shown earlier, since they possessed a great mastery of language, they focused less on minor incidents, were not anxious, and concentrated on resolving conflicts, external influences and class management.

Teaching Listening Beliefs Questionnaire:

To answer the first research question concerning investigating teachers’ beliefs toward their LTI in teaching listening, we analyzed the questionnaire data by calculating the mean and standard deviation responses for the 41 items in each of the four categories ([Table 3](#)). The total mean score of the 59 respondents included ($M = 4.12$). According to the descriptive analysis, teachers’ general mean responses circled “strongly agree” ($M > 4$) regarding the four categories of LTI. Hence, teachers demonstrated strongly positive beliefs toward their LTI in teaching listening in all four aspects.

Table 3: Mean and Std. Deviation of teachers regarding the four LTI aspects

	Teachers (59)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Agency	4.15	.43
Commitment	4.06	.34
Self-esteem	4.08	.45
Self-efficacy	4.19	.33

Research Question 2: To what extent do EFL teachers' beliefs align with their listening teaching practices, considering their language teacher identity?

Recall Session Interviews

Agency:

Results of the previous data analysis showed no belief-practice discrepancies regarding the three teachers. All three teachers believed in the importance of teacher agency and the effects of external and internal factors in enhancing or diminishing this LTI aspect. In this regard, they all attributed their belief-practice alignments to various external factors such as contextual factors (e.g., freedom to act, favorable conditions), and school-related factors (e.g., a supportive system, a healthy social network) as well as internal and personal factors (e.g., positive emotions, teaching experience, and knowledge). Ashkan noted that “a safe, welcoming, supportive, flexible, and healthy working environment will encourage more autonomous behaviors and successful outcomes.” Hanieh emphasized that “teachers may gain knowledge with a few courses, but it is through time that we can add to our teaching experience by practicing and updating ourselves and being confident, active participants in making agentic decisions.” Parahm also held that “the feelings teachers hold toward their profession can encourage their sense of agency. So, a happy teacher is a more committed, effective teacher, willing to take risks and take control of their practice.”

On the other hand, Ashkan also noted important points regarding how impeded agency and an unsupportive working environment can affect teachers. He shared his experience of the time he started his career, highlighting the negative consequences of strict institutional demands as “believing in something but being told you must believe another reality will make you doubt yourself, knowledge and all the efforts and time you put into your career.” Therefore, these mismatches between teachers' beliefs and institutional policies may lead to identity tensions and negative emotions due to the lack of trust in beginners, as mentioned by Ashkan: “The first year of my career, I did not know if I should have believed my supervisors, my university instructors, academic course books or my knowledge and I was fully lost, [and] insecure, and [I] lost motivation.” Ashkan's responses highlighted the adverse effects of unsupportive school-related factors on teachers' identities, causing identity tensions and value dissonance.

However, it is noteworthy to highlight that all three teachers believed “an efficient teacher can overcome all the obstacles” (Hanieh) and that “it still is up to the teachers to decide if these [tensions and barriers] are going to stop them” (Ashkan).

Commitment:

All three teachers demonstrated a strong sense of commitment both in their actual practice and stated beliefs with no discrepancies. The teachers believed in the positive encounter with contextual and school-related factors, which can affect internal factors such as emotions and teachers' sense of identity. For instance, teachers believed there was no rationale for them not to remain committed, given that they were "provided with all the necessary things" (Hanieh). Similarly, Parham added that his positive experience with his workplace, classes, learners, and class outcomes left no choice for him but to be a motivated and committed teacher: "At this stage of my career, it would have been unfair if I lacked commitment as I have no struggles with my learners, their performance, and outside my classes with the institute in general." Moreover, Ashkan and Parham also believed in internal factors that come hand in hand with extrinsic motivators to shape LTI and success. Ashkan mentioned that "when we are not struggling in our outside world with the institute-related conflicts, our inner world will align with this positive experience, and so will our performance and sense of who we are with all its aspects." This extract shows the importance of internal factors (teachers' emotions) as well as the effects of external and contextual factors that can affect all LTI aspects since they are "interrelated because they all can affect each other" (Hanieh).

Additionally, Ashkan and Hanieh discussed the concept of social positioning and how it can affect LTI differently. Hanieh mentioned that due to the respect she receives at the institute, and on a larger scale the society, she has a positive self-evaluation of herself and her abilities to bring about changes, make agentive behaviors, and feel obligated to stay committed:

No one should deny the importance of how the world assigns us some roles. I enjoy living a life where I am respected for my passion and the changes I make to the world, whether in my workplace or the society I live in. It motivates me, forms positive images of my capabilities, and pushes me to be a committed teacher. I can say it affects the whole identity of a language teacher (Hanieh); Remembering the first days of my career, I was not this confident and capable. I did not risk stepping beyond the book, and I would get nervous about conflicts. But that for sure was because I was not trusted like I am today and was not viewed as a capable, efficient and honorable teacher. I gained my colleagues' respect through hard work, experience and effort. We should talk about this dark side of teaching more often (Ashkan).

This excerpt highlights the concept of social positioning and how it can affect one's role as a language teacher, their LTI, its different aspects, and how teachers view themselves. In other words, teachers' sense of self can be affected through the lens of society and how others view teachers.

Self-esteem:

The three teachers, showing positive self-esteem, could actualize their beliefs into practice, which positively encouraged them to "build a stronger relationship with learners and colleagues" (Hanieh), better "manage the challenges" (Ashkan), and better "come up with strategies to deal with the conflicts" (Parham). This positive self-esteem came hand in hand with their belief-practice alignments regarding their commitment and agency to successfully engage in activities that matched teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Ashkan and Parham stated interesting views, respectively:

Although I do not believe it is entirely luck, I do feel fortunate that my path has been relatively easy, with just a few obstacles along the way. I have had the opportunity to explore things and learn from my mistakes - something that has become increasingly rare in Iran. This made me a teacher who soon developed the image of a confident, committed and capable teacher who was trusted enough to make mistakes and learn from them (Ashkan); while I have not studied LTI in-depth, I believe an efficient teacher is confident and is willing to take responsibility for their students' learning through taking the necessary actions whether it is by making changes, providing further materials or going beyond the audio or textbook's material to scaffold learners. Therefore, LTI aspects are interrelated, and a positive outcome in one or two can positively affect the others (Parham).

This excerpt not only highlighted the significance of providing enough space for teachers to learn from their mistakes and explore their teaching (agency), but also emphasized how each aspect can overshadow or develop the other LTI aspects, as Parham stated.

Self-efficacy:

All three teachers claimed that the belief-practice alignments resulted from their prior solid knowledge of the field and years of experience in "real-time teaching", which led to making prompter decisions and "acting more autonomously with greater mastery" (Hanieh). Parham stated this is the benefit of having "many years of teaching experience" as it will help him "make faster quality decisions", having been in similar situations before (mastery experience). This familiarity has made it easier for our teachers to deal with less emotional arousals, such as "anxiety and insecurity about contextual factors and managing conflicts" (Ashkan).

Moreover, Hanieh and Ashkan asserted that to be efficient teachers, they learned to focus on the whole process of teaching listening rather than the product through the years. This resulted in a positive view toward learners' small mistakes with less focus on a few unsuccessful lessons. For instance, Ashkan claimed, "Through the years, I have learned that this way, I will have more positive perspectives, and learners would be more willing to take risks, eventually leading to greater success in developing their listening skills." Hence, our teachers highlighted the importance of focusing on the entire teaching process of listening skills throughout their careers, which leads to a positive outlook on learners' mistakes, encouraging them to take risks for greater success.

5. DISCUSSION

This study offers a more deconstructed understanding of the complex interplay between beliefs and practices in LTI formation, particularly within listening instruction. Moving beyond simplistic binary oppositions often found in prior research that document belief-practice (mis)alignments attributed to potential contextual constraints (e.g., [Biesta et al., 2015](#); [Fives & Gill, 2014](#); [Graham et al., 2014](#); [Karimi & Nazari, 2017](#)), our findings underscored the constitutive role of specific institutional conditions. These are not merely external factors but rather discursive and power-laden environments that actively enable or constrain language teachers ([Barkhuizen, 2021](#); [Olsen, 2008](#); [Zembylas, 2003](#)). We revealed that it is within these specific supportive institutional conditions, distinguished by the cultivation of professional agency, the fostering of trust, and the reduction of restrictive policies, that LTI is empowered to function not as a mere bridge, but as a dynamic site of meaning-making. This allows for a pronounced alignment between teachers' beliefs and their enacted practices. This alignment, however, is not a stable or inherent state; rather,

it is discursively (re)constructed and continuously negotiated through a strong and fluid sense of LTI. Operationalized here, LTI is understood as a nexus of agency, commitment, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Richards, 2023), each element subject to constant redefinition within the prevailing institutional discourse and power dynamics (Barkhuizen, 2021; Haqiqi, 2024; Haqiqi et al., 2024; Karimpour et al., 2022; Norton, 2013; Richards, 2023; Veliz et al., 2025). The presence of these enabling conditions, therefore, allows the teachers to resist dominant narratives that might otherwise preserve a misalignment, and instead, to construct a more coherent and agentic professional sense of self that bridges belief and practice.

Our findings revealed strong alignments that directly challenge the often-assumed narrative of an inherent tension between teacher cognition and practice. This study, through a post-structural lens, argued that such tension is not inevitable but is, in fact, often fed by unsupportive environments (Karimpour et al., 2022). Conversely, we demonstrated how a supportive institutional ecosystem, particularly when it cultivates *value consonance* (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), acts as a powerful catalyst. This consonance is achieved when teachers' deeply held professional aspirations, their unique understanding of effective teaching, and their personal goals for professional growth, can find resonance within the institution through tangible amount of trust and recognition. In such conditions, the various dimensions of LTI are not just preserved but are actively strengthened. This strengthening of LTI, in turn, becomes a solid platform for a more coherent and deeply belief-driven pedagogy (Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025; Haqiqi et al., 2024), highlighting how the external reinforcement of teachers' values can solidify their self-efficacy, self-esteem, and commitment to their practice. This finding necessitates a closer look on current understandings of teacher cognition. Rather than viewing it as a purely internal, stable construct or a fixed 'filter' through which external realities are passively processed, we position LTI as a dynamic, discursively constituted phenomenon (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Olsen, 2008; Yazan, 2018; Zembylas, 2003). In this regard, its efficacy is not solely an intrinsic quality but is fundamentally rested upon, and co-constructed by enabling external affordances within the institutional environment (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2023; Uştuk & Yazan, 2024). These affordances mentioned here question the binary of internal cognition versus external practice, revealing instead a fluid, dynamic space where LTI, belief, and practice are continuously negotiated and reshaped under specific socio-institutional pressures and possibilities (see Norton, 2013), especially regarding listening as a challenging skill in language teaching and learning (Bozorgian, 2015, 2021).

Crucially, our data highlighted the dynamic, context-dependent and socially negotiated nature of LTI development. Teachers' current stances contrasted their early-career identity tensions, marked by constrained agency and low self-esteem under restrictive policies or disturbing external intrusion, with their current empowered practice (Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025). Through sustained experience within a supportive environment, teachers actively (re)shaped their identities through on-going social interaction and positioning within their institutional contexts (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Olsen, 2008; Yazan, 2018). This reflective process of identity work, where teachers negotiate and transform their professional selves through engagement with their environment (Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025; Norton, 2013; Pennington & Richards, 2016), was evident in our participants' trajectories. The supportive context, referred by Richards (2020) as 'favoring factors' was combined by teachers' role evolution (through familiarity with teaching challenges and accumulated experience), built through 'mastery experience' (Bandura, 1997). Thus, this process acted as the essential scaffold for transforming potential agency into consistently enacted practice, gradually achieving value consonance with the institutions (Bozorgian & Haqiqi, 2025; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), and evolving teachers' professional selves (Norton, 2013).

Therefore, this study proposed a support-mediated LTI alignment outcome, where it moved beyond cataloging factors that influence belief-practice links in listening instruction (Bandura, 2006; Farrell & Ives, 2014) to specify the conditional mechanism. A positive sense of LTI is necessary (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016; Karimpour et al., 2022), but insufficient. It requires an institutional environment that actively nurtures teacher agency to become the bridge to consistent practice. This explains why studies in restrictive contexts regarding contextual and school-related factors, and personal factors such as negative emotions (e.g., Buehl & Beck, 2014) find misalignments, while our study, in a supportive context, finds harmony. This point gains particular significance when we consider the intricate nature of listening instruction. Given that listening instruction requires a good command of complex pedagogical variables such as pedagogical content knowledge, technological integration, and delivery of ‘listening literacy’ that encapsulates both linguistic and socio-cultural aspects, the cognitive load on the teacher is immense (Bozorgian, 2015, 2021; Richards, 2015). In this context, the link between LTI, teachers’ beliefs and practices can seem fragile. Our findings suggest that in listening instruction, agency is not merely a personal attribute, but a prerequisite for navigating these specific demands, LTI tensions, and institutional mandates. In essence, without institutional support for teachers’ agency, even a strong sense of LTI can fracture under the demands of the complex listening tasks, which can affect the other three LTI aspects (Haqiqi et al., 2024). Therefore, results of this study shift the focus from asking *if* beliefs align with practice to investigating *under what systemic conditions* such alignment becomes sustainable.

Therefore, the findings illuminated the complex relationship between institutional context, identity development, and belief-practice alignments. For listening instruction, a historically marginalized skill, this is particularly salient. Effective pedagogy emerges not from teacher belief alone, nor from curriculum mandate, but from institutional cultures that legitimize and resource teacher professionalism. This has direct implications for leadership and policy to highlight that fostering belief-practice alignment is less about training teachers in methods, and more about creating environments where their identities as agentic professionals can thrive.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored the intricate relationship between LTI, teachers’ beliefs, and their practices in EFL listening instruction. Our findings revealed that the alignment between beliefs and practices is fundamentally rested upon supportive institutional conditions. Specifically, environments characterized by the cultivation of teacher agency, the presence of trust, and the absence of restrictive policies were found to empower teacher development and affirm their LTI across its core components: agency, commitment, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Contrary to the prevailing narrative of an inherent tension between cognition and practice, this research demonstrated that alignment is not only achievable, but is fostered in contexts that promote value consonance. The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the articulation of a support-mediated LTI outcome within the site of power dynamics, societal pressures and institutional mandates. Seen this way, this study showed that while a strong sense of LTI serves as a crucial bridge between teachers’ belief and their practice, its efficacy is conditional upon the presence of an enabling institutional ecosystem. Applied to the often-marginalized domain of listening instruction, this highlights a critical systemic leverage point which proves that enhancing pedagogical effectiveness is intrinsically linked to fostering teacher professionalism through institutional support. This supportive ecosystem emerged as equally, if not more, significant than individual methodological training. Therefore, this research highlighted how the integrated aspects of language teachers’ identity, including their sense of agency, commitment, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, work

together within supportive school environments. These aspects are key to helping teachers' beliefs about teaching listening become real classroom actions. Thus, a strong sense of LTI, backed by the institution, acts as the main link that bridges the theory of teaching listening with its actual practice in the classroom

This study is limited by its focus on a specific, supportive EFL context. Future studies should research within more restrictive educational settings and across different career stages. Investigations into how variables like educational background or gender interact with institutional support to shape LTI development would further refine our understanding. Ultimately, findings advocate for a paradigm shift from seeking to regulate teacher practice or implementing top-down instructional mandates to cultivating supportive institutional ecosystems that empower teacher agency and their sense of professional self.

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