

THE EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND THEIR TEACHING PRACTICES

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Abstract:

This paper tries to discuss the relationship between the EFL teachers' beliefs and their teaching practice. It is interesting to note that practically being exposed to the same materials, curriculum, students and environment, teachers conduct their teaching in varied ways. It can be seen from how students receive and build their image about their teachers. It also reflects the effectiveness of the practice they do. Therefore, it will be very useful to understand whether their teaching practice, including class and curriculum management, is influenced by their beliefs or not. This article embraces the theoretical review and previous studies conducted in this field. This will lead to how teachers should understand about themselves and their profession, consecutively they will be able to develop their competence through activities that can enhance their positive beliefs which will enlighten their teaching practice and maintain effective teaching practice in their classroom.

Key Words:

Beliefs, teachers' belief about language learning, teaching practice

Introduction

Despite the similarities in terms of educational background, syllabus, textbook, access to information sources and technology, and opportunities to attend pedagogical and professional trainings, teachers do have different teaching styles because they employ different strategies. That makes his/her teaching practice different from one to another. Their classroom instructions are varied. One basic reason that makes the teachers' classroom practice is different one to another is teachers' belief. In English Language Teaching, the beliefs about how language should be learned

and taught are the significant factor that makes them involve different strategies, materials, media and evaluation.

A. Teachers' Beliefs

Shavelson and Stern noted that what teachers do in the classroom is said to be governed by what they believe and these beliefs often serve as a filter through which instructional judgments and decision are made¹. In line with it, Riley stated that how language teachers make instructional decisions, choose

¹ Shavelson, R.J., & Stern, P. "Research on teachers' pedagogical thoughts, Judgment, Decision, and Behavior." *Review of Educational Research* 51(4) (1981): 445-498.

instructional materials and select certain instructional practices is influenced by the beliefs they hold, and students' attitudes, motivation and language proficiency in target language learning are directly influenced or determined by their beliefs about language learning.²

Furthermore, it has become widely recognized that the teachers' pedagogical beliefs play a central role in their teaching practices where these beliefs are manifested in the teaching methods, in choosing the subjects and activities, decision-making, and evaluation in the.³ Thus, the definition of teachers' belief about language learning has to be clearly defined in accordance to the classroom practice. Haney, Lumpe & Czerniak define beliefs in the teaching environment as the teacher's contentions, and his/her viewpoints on teaching and learning.⁴

Another about teachers' beliefs is what Pajares argued that teachers'

beliefs about teaching are formed early in life through their experience as learners.⁵ These early beliefs exert an influence on teachers throughout their professional lives⁶.

Ghaith⁷ sees that the teachers' belief is whole conception of several aspects related to the beliefs on education and teaching, curricula and the teaching profession in general, and create the education culture which influences pedagogical objectives and values. Furthermore, Vibulphol in his thesis construed belief as personal knowledge about second or foreign language learning including aspects such as who, why, how, what, where and when.⁸ Who is related to who learns and teaches the language, why is about the objective of learning and teaching certain foreign language, how is about the strategy, approaches, method or technique teachers or learners use to learn certain foreign language, what is a matter of what foreign language is, where is concerning where the teaching

² Riley, P. "BATS and BALLS: Beliefs about talk and beliefs about language learning." Proceedings of the International Conference AUTONOMY 2000: The development of learning independence in language learning, 151-168. Bangkok, November, 1996

³ Borg, M. "Key concepts in ELT: Teachers' beliefs." *ELT Journal*, 55:2 (2001): 186-188.

Handal B and Herrington, A. "Mathematics teachers' beliefs and curriculum Reform." *Mathematic Education Research journal*, 15:1 (2003): 59-69

⁴Haney, J., Czerniak, C. & Lumpe, A. "Teacher beliefs and intentions regarding the implementation of science education reform strands". *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 33:9 (1996), 971-993.

⁵ Pajares, M.F. "Teachers' belief and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct." *Review of Educational Research* 62 (3) (1992): 307-332

⁶ Borg, M. "Key concepts in ELT: Teachers' beliefs." *ELT Journal*, 55:2 (2001): 186-188

⁷ Work cited by Khader, F.R. "Teachers' Pedagogical beliefs and actual Classroom practices in social studies instruction." *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*. , 2(1) (2012): 73-92

⁸ Vibulphol, J. "Beliefs About Language Learning And Teaching Approaches Of Pre-Service Efl Teachers In Thailand." A dissertation., Oklahoma State University, 2004.

and learning takes place, and when is about the time of teaching or learning which is not merely about the school hour or exact time period, but more about the phases or stages of teaching and learning foreign language.

B. Teachers' Belief and their Classroom Practice

What teachers do in the classroom is said to be governed by what they believe and these beliefs often serve as a filter through which instructional judgments and decision are made. A belief about language learning and teaching that they apply when they plan their instruction; choose the teaching strategy, the media, the material and the type of resources; interact and communicate with their students in the class; manage classroom; and react to whatever possible conditions in the classroom. Being aware or not by certain belief in their mind, the teachers are influenced by this belief when they think, react and respond during their professional routine tasks and performance.⁹ Most of the time, teachers are not aware of the existence of the belief inside their mind, and that belief shape the way the do their profession for example how they view the students and the materials, how they use teacher talk and code switching,

how they develop their supplementary materials, which approach they employ most of the time, and how they interact with their colleagues and students.

In language learning, teachers' belief is considered one of the key factors in how classroom instruction is planned, managed, and evaluated, and there have been studies about it, especially the relation between belief and the application of certain strategy or certain language skill learning, for example writing, speaking, listening and reading. For example in 2004, Vibulphol investigated the EFL pre-service teachers' belief and their classroom practice in Thailand. He found out that the classroom instruction of the pre-service teachers, for example in selecting materials and activities, in using English as medium of instruction, their instruction on vocabulary, and their focus on form or meaning are influenced by his/her belief about language learning. Later, Ardriani conducted a research and investigated two reading lecturers in Malang State University in relation to his/her belief and the classroom practice.¹⁰ Her study revealed that lecturers' practices reflected his/her belief that learning is successful when learners are able to absorb the lesson well, are well motivated, achieve well and meet the goal of the course.

⁹ Xu, L. "The Role of Teachers' Beliefs in the Language Teaching-learning Process." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (2012): pp. 1397-1402 .

¹⁰ Ardriani, N.N.D. "Teachers' Beliefs about Strategies in Teaching Reading and Their Classroom Practices." Thesis., State University of Malang, 2014

Furthermore, teachers' pedagogical belief's decisive role in their teaching practice where the beliefs are reflected in the teaching method, selected activities, decision-making, and evaluation in the classroom has been known and studied. Beliefs give a remarkable influence on how teachers actually teach.¹¹ An example would be that if the teacher believes that mother tongue (or a foreign language) can be better learned by students by investing more time in teaching grammar, the teacher will provide a greater unit of time to grammar.

All previous studies' findings above show common trends that are classroom instructions are the reflection of what is working inside teachers' mind which they perceive to be true conception about language learning. The perception is called belief about language learning.

C. The Contextual Factors that Influence the Teachers' Belief about Language Learning

As there are some contextual factors that contribute to the development of beliefs, the investigation of beliefs and teachers' belief is contextual and local bound. It means that because of some possible contextual factors that contribute to the development of beliefs, such as

¹¹ Nespor, J. "The Role of beliefs in the Practice of teaching." *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. 19 (1987): 317-328.

educational policy, curriculum mandate, social environment, and etc, finding in one study will probably not applied in another study depending in what circumstances, in which environment, in what educational culture and etc., the study is conducted. Teachers' belief and practices significantly differ depending on schools' socioeconomic status, class size, and grade levels they teach. Teachers' level of general education, training, age, salary, and the principals' support were also related to beliefs and practices of teachers.¹²

Stergiopoulou proposes several factors that affect how teachers develop their beliefs about their profession and their classroom practice.¹³ The first one is the teacher's learning experience from the very first schooling to the latest which is very strongly influential in the beliefs the teacher has later positively or negatively. The second factor is the knowledge and educational development. Teachers in a study by Bailey and her colleagues.¹⁴ for example, expressed

¹² Faour cited by Khader, F.R. "Teachers' Pedagogical beliefs and actual Classroom practices in social studies instruction." *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*. , 2(1) (2012): 73-92

¹³ Stergipoulou, E. "Comparing experienced and inexperienced foreign language teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching." *Research on Steiner Education Journal*, 3(1) (2012)

¹⁴ Bailey, K., Bergthold, B., Braunstein, B., Fleischman, N., Holbrook, M., Tuman, J., Waissbluth, X. & Zambo, L. The language learner's autobiography: examining the 'apprenticeship of observation'." In *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching*, edited by D.

strong beliefs in the importance of the teacher's style and personality, and of creating a positive learning environment which they themselves had felt to be crucial in their own language learning. The third factor is the teacher's experience. In the classroom teachers have the opportunity to experiment with new ideas, to construct hypotheses that they then confirm or disconfirm. This means the more classroom they attended, the more opportunity they had to experiment with new ideas, to construct hypotheses, and these would make them shape their beliefs from time to time.¹⁵

The other factor is the contextual factors which refer to the social, psychological and environmental realities of the school and classroom, i.e. parents, the school society, curriculum mandates, school policies, availability of resources, government documentation.¹⁶ Braun suggests that teachers' belief is influenced by many factors, that are blended in personal and professional values as well as the culture in which they work.¹⁷ Differently, Kim reported that years of teaching was an important

predictor of the beliefs teachers hold but not of their practice. However she also cited some previous studies' findings that length of teaching experience was not predictor of the teachers' belief and practices in US, and was predictor of teachers' belief and practices in Korea. Years of teaching was a significant predictor of teachers' belief but not of teachers' practices in this study.¹⁸ Because of the discrepancy in the results among previous studies, it demands further investigation about the relationship between years of teaching and teachers' belief and practices. Therefore it will be clear whether or not years of teaching can really affect the teachers' belief and their teaching practices.

As there are some contextual factors that may affect the teachers' belief and their teaching practice, it is important to take education and school environment, including curriculum, school management, and education policy as one consideration when discussing the topic. This is in line with Bandura's Social cognitive theory which states that self-regulatory and self-reflective cognitive processes play in adaptation and/or to changes. He further clarifies this with suggestions that "human functioning is the product of dynamic interplay of personal,

Freeman & J. Richards, pp. 11-29. Cambridge: CUP, 1996

¹⁵ Williams M. & Burden R. L. "Psychology for Language Teachers: a Social Constructivist Approach." Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (1997) .

¹⁶ See appendix

¹⁷ Braun, S. "Unseen Threads: Weaving The Stories Between teacher Beliefs And Classroom Practice." Thesis., University of Manitoba, 2011.

¹⁸ Kim, K.R. "Teacher Beliefs And Practices Survey: Operationalizing The 1997 Naeyc Guidelines." A dissertation. The Louisiana State University, 2005

behavioural and environmental influences".¹⁹ People, he suggests, are not only shaped by of the environment where they live, but are also shaping the environment as well. The ability to create their own believed theories and self-manage confidence enables individuals to control their behaviour and plan actions to their direction.

D. The Enactment of Teachers' Beliefs into Their Teaching Practice

Teaching is a routine task that teachers perform in their professional work. They plan their teaching scenario, prepare all the necessary materials and media, come to class, execute the plan, manage their class and students, evaluate their students works and their teaching and do the planning again. These process is going on and on like a cycle of day and night. Doing this routine task for years will of course shape their beliefs about learning. Classroom instructions are the reflections of what is working inside teachers' mind which they perceive to be true conception about language learning. Further, whatever teachers do in the classroom is more or less affected by their beliefs about what learning is, no matter whether these beliefs are implicit or explicit. Even if the teachers act spontaneously or routinely,

¹⁹ Pajares, F. Albert Bandura: Biographical sketch. <http://des.emory.edu/mfp/bandurabio.html> (2011). Accessed on November 5, 2015.

their actions are prompted by their beliefs that have been implanted in their minds without being spoken or stated with or without awareness.²⁰

However, findings of other studies concluded that the teachers' beliefs were not related, disconnected, inconsistent, or misaligned with teaching practices in social studies.²¹ This is also strengthened by Phipps who observed the consistency and inconsistency in the role of teachers' belief in their actual teaching practices, especially grammar teaching. His finding showed that teachers' practices do not always reflect their beliefs, but show the complexity of reasons such as cognitive, affective, contextual and experiential factors.²²

This result was one common situation where external factor hinders the enactment of teachers' belief to their teaching practices. Various external factors are identified to be the possible hindrances such as students' ability, curriculum standard, education -related

²⁰ Williams M. & Burden R. L. "Psychology for Language Teachers: a Social Constructivist Approach."

²¹ Bisland, B., O'Connor, E. & Malow-Iroff, M.. "Beliefs and Issues in Social Studies Instructional Practices: A Case Study of Alternatively Certified Elementary Teacher." Paper presented at the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies, Atlanta, GA., November 11, 2009

²² Phipps, S. "The Relationship between Teacher Education, Teacher Cognition and Classroom Practice in Language Teaching: A Case Study of MA Students' Beliefs about Grammar Teaching The University of Leeds School of Education." A dissertation. The University of Leeds, 2009

policy, school culture and community, and instructional resources. These factors may impede teachers from enacting their beliefs to their teaching practices. Some factors are sometimes beyond the teacher's authority to change and modify, for example education-related policy and curriculum standard. Some factors still give hopes for the teacher to employ their beliefs into their teaching practices depending on how creative, resourceful and innovative the teachers are in doing their profession.²³ However, these factors, along with the internal factors, such as other beliefs, experience, knowledge, self awareness and self reflection may play as the supporters of the enactment of beliefs into the teachers' teaching practices.²⁴ Teachers probably view this as challenge and in this manner these factors support them to enact their beliefs, otherwise these hinder them to employ their beliefs into their teaching practices.

As an illustration is a teacher who believes that learning a language is a life long process which emphasizes on the use of language as means of communication will find it difficult to enact that belief when the education-related policy mandates that the learning

of a language is for the sake of final examination. Teachers who view this as a challenge will make the best effort. They can accommodate the two objectives by integrating the different instructional media or modifying their lesson plans. What is important for them is that their belief is realized and the policy pressure is accommodated. Whereas, the teachers who view this as the obstacle will give up and let their beliefs unspoken. This happens probably because they have lack of pedagogical or professional knowledge or their other belief states that as a teacher the main task is to accommodate what the policy says.

Despite the mentioned findings, there is no evidence that teachers' belief is disconnected fully or completely enacted into the teachers' teaching practices. As Fives and Buehl stated that it is the degree of congruence and incongruence between beliefs and practice that matters.²⁵ There is always a relationship or connection between what teachers believe and their teaching practices. The problem is to what degree their beliefs influence and are reflected in their teaching practices and what possible consequences that the teachers may encounter.

²³ Buehl, M.M., & Beck, J.S. "The Relationship Between Teachers' Beliefs and Teachers' Practices." in *International Handbook of Research on Teachers' Belief*, edited by H. Fives & M.G. Gill, pp. 66-84, New York: Routledge, 2015

²⁴ See appendix

²⁵ Fives and Buehl cited by Buehl, M.M., & Beck, J.S. "The Relationship Between Teachers' Beliefs and Teachers' Practices." in *International Handbook of Research on Teachers' Belief*.

E. Conclusion

Even there have been some proofs about the strong relation between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practice, and several disagreements, it can be concluded that teachers' beliefs is something dynamic, changeable, and resistant to contextual factors around them. However, it is still relevant topic to study from time to time in the field of second language learning, especially the psychological and pedagogical domains. Within Indonesian context, in which the process of shaping its educational system is on process, and secondary education, discussion on this topic will contribute immensely in the teacher professional development program.

In every day practice, teachers are not commonly aware that the beliefs they hold about language learning affect their teaching practice and subsequently influence their students' effective learning.²⁶ Teachers think that what drives them to perform and make a decision about their classroom is just because of the students and the environment. They believe that it is the students who make them to be effective or ineffective teachers. In fact, teachers, students and the environment play a significant role in influencing each other. Teachers' are not aware that their beliefs

are resulted from factors such as training, professional development, and etc. This makes them reluctant in joining such program to upgrade their pedagogical competence. They believe that it does not significantly contribute to their beliefs which subsequently influence their teaching practice.

To make teachers aware of their beliefs about language learning is the most important step to make positive change in EFL classroom visible. As mentioned previously that beliefs are not resistant to change, it is very possible to change the negative beliefs the teachers possess to the positive ones through various activities and agendas planned by both the teachers and the school administrator. Various activities can be conducted to enhance the teachers' pedagogical competence such as workshop on teaching methodology, training on professional development, seminar on pedagogical and professional aspects and even giving financial support for teachers to extent their study to higher level.

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²⁶ Xu, L. "The Role of Teachers' Beliefs in the Language Teaching-learning Process." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (2012): pp. 1397-1402 .

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Xu, L. 2012. "The Role of Teachers' Beliefs in the Language Teaching-learning Process." Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 2, No. 7: pp. 1397-1402.

Appendix

Figure 1: Factors that influence teachers' belief

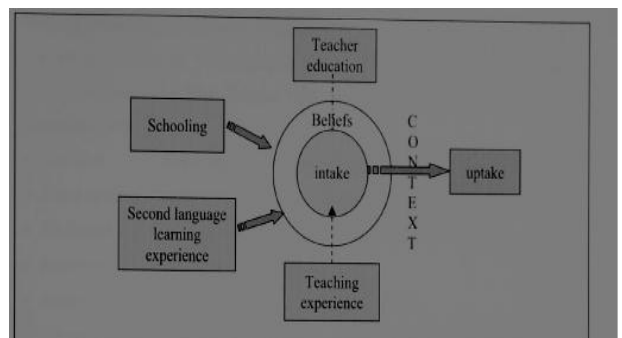


Figure 2: Relationship between teachers' belief and practices in a system of internal and external supports and hindrances.

