

TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION LEVEL

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Abstract

This study reports the results of a qualitative case study research design. The aims of this study are to explore teachers' beliefs about teaching English in primary school, to investigate how those beliefs are reflected in classroom practices, and to explore factors that affect the shaping of teachers' beliefs in teaching and learning process in primary school. The respondents of this study were three English teachers of three different primary schools in Metro. The data was taken by using semi-structured interview, documentation, classroom observation and questionnaire. Then the data was analyzed using *line by line analysis*. The results of this study show teachers' beliefs in teaching English to young learners covering beliefs about EYL and TEYL, beliefs about learning, learners, assessment, beliefs about themselves and beliefs about program and curriculum. The next results provide factors shaping teachers' beliefs in teaching such as experience in learning and teaching, teachers' motivation, sharing with other teachers and school context (facility). In addition, the results also prove that there are mismatches between teachers' beliefs and their practices in the classroom. This condition is caused by several factors such as facilities, time allocation, classroom condition, and number of students.

Keywords: *Teachers' beliefs, TEYL, classroom practices*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English at early age is beneficial for children. It deals with the idea that “young children can learn a second language particularly effective before puberty because their brains are still able to use the mechanics that assisted first language acquisition” (Cameron, 2005:13). Although English is beneficial for children, it has also become controversy in Indonesia. English has been local content subject for more than ten years in Indonesia. In the curriculum 2006 which is still used states that English is a local content subject which is allotted two 35-minute lessons per week from grade one until six. In the field, English is taught in elementary school started from class one. Most teachers who teach English in elementary schools do not have English education background. Generally, they are the class teacher who graduated from different subject education. In addition, teachers who have English education program were not trained as primary school English teachers. Furthermore, the limited availability of the resources to teach English in primary school affects the process of teaching and learning. The condition of the schools which are far enough from the city is also as factor that makes teachers find difficulties in gaining resources. The position of English as local content subject causes some teachers teach students as it comes (Hawanty 2014: 165). It is also found by the researcher. In teaching English to students, some

teachers do not compose lesson plan first. They only use LKS as guidance and media to give students tasks. Realizing those problems, the ministry of education stated that elementary school will focus on the building of children's nationality character. This idea brings effect to English as subject matter in elementary school. English does not become local content subject again in the 2013 curriculum for elementary school. Every school and regency can determine whether English will be taught or not to students depending on the context of school. To face this condition, some teachers and headmasters of elementary school in Metro stated that English will be still taught to students as extracurricular program. It is because English has existed in elementary school in Metro for a long time. Then, the existing of English also will attract parents to have their children studying in the certain school. In other words, English becomes additional points for schools.

Teaching English as a foreign language to young learners needs to consider a lot of things, including the teachers, methods, and facilities (Mustafa, 2010). If the strategy used does not meet students' learning nature, it will become their burden and the learning will be fail. Besides, young learners are still learning their first language, so that the difficulties might be doubled. Teacher factor also influence teaching and learning process. What teacher thinks, knows, and believes, will affect their practices in the classroom (Borg and Busaidi, 2012:6). The researcher will focus on teacher's beliefs in influencing their practice in the classroom. The term of teachers' beliefs refers to how language teachers conceive of what they do: what they know about language teaching, how they think about their classroom practice, and how that knowledge and those thinking processes which are learned through formal teacher education and informal experience on the job (Freeman and Richards, 1996:1). It means that teachers' beliefs are influenced by teachers' education background and experience in teaching.

There are several kinds of teachers' beliefs which are discussed in this study: beliefs about EYL, TEYL, learning, learners, assessment, beliefs about themselves, and beliefs about program and curriculum.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies qualitative case study research design. Creswell (2009:9) states that case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. The researcher explored the case of teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching English for young learners in primary level. The respondents of this study were three English teachers of three different primary

schools in Metro. The data was taken by using semi-structured interview, documentation, classroom observation and questionnaire. Data was triangulated from multiple data sources and techniques. Data sources were participants, events and documents. Then the data was analyzed using line by line analysis consisting the data coding, the categories/ concepts, theoretical sampling, core category/ concept, data saturation, memoing, and writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Belief about English may influence classroom practices.(Richard and Lockhart, 1996: 33). Based on the research finding, teachers believe that TEYL is as the introduction of English as foreign language to young learners. They also believe that TEYL will be beneficial for children's future. The finding shows that teachers' beliefs affect their teaching practices. Teachers who believe that TEYL is important for students teach as well as they can and prepare before teaching. In contrast, teacher who believes that TEYL is not important for students teaches as it comes. It is in line with the statement that explains individuals' beliefs strongly affect their behavior (Abelson, 1979; Bandura, 1986; Clark and Peterson, 1986; Nespor, 1987; Rokeach, 1968; Ernest, 1989; Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1984 in Pajares, 1992:326).

Teachers' beliefs about what learning is will affect everything that they do in the classroom, whether these beliefs are implicit or explicit (Williams and Burden., 1997). The first teacher believes that students should be active and creative in learning activities. This belief is reflected in the classroom practices. She tried to guide students to be active in the classroom by providing questions and answer stage. The second teacher believes that in learning, students should be fun. This belief is also reflected in the classroom. This teacher succeeded in providing fun learning and teaching practices. Then, the third teacher believes that students should be active and creative in learning processes. Moreover she also believes that students should be fun in learning. Unfortunately, in the practices there were mismatches between her belief and practices. She couldn't provide fun learning process. In addition, students also became passive in learning activities. Although teacher tried to encourage their enthusiasm in learning by providing questions to be answered. The researcher found that this condition is caused by the condition of the classroom context which doesn't support learning activities. The noisy of the next room could be heard clearly in that classroom. This condition also broke students' concentration and focus in learning.

All teachers believe that their role in teaching English to young learners are as facilitator. This teacher's role is to help students discover their own ways of learning and to work independently.(Richard and Lockhart, 1996: 105). Brown (2007: 215) added

that teacher as facilitator capitalizes on the principal of intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover language through using it pragmatically, rather than by telling them about language. In the practices, the first teacher tried to be facilitator but she is limited by the condition of students who have limited knowledge of the material. In this case, she also became resources for students in providing material for students. In this role, students will have initiative to come to teacher. Teachers are available for advice and counsel when the students seek it Brown (2007: 215). That condition also happened to the second and the third teacher. The second teacher can be a half-facilitator, role model and resources, meanwhile the third teacher only became the source for students. This condition also closed related to the condition of the context of students and classroom. Students of beginning level couldn't be the full-active learners because the lack of knowledge that they have. They need teacher to provide material for them and role model in providing sample for students.

Teachers' beliefs about program and curriculum in their school affect their motivation and practices. Richard and Lockhart (1996:38) states that any language teaching program reflects both the culture of the institution (i.e., particular ways of thinking and of doing things that are valued in the institution), as well as collective decisions and beliefs of individual teachers. Every institution has certain goals which reflected in their programs. In the findings, teachers show different motivation in teaching English because their schools have different goals. In the second school, the goal is to provide Islamic atmosphere in learning and teaching activities. This condition causes teacher tries to provide the material which is appropriate and in line with the institutional goals. In other side, the third school only provides English as the fulfilment of curriculum. This school only provides LKS as the main source for students and teacher in learning and teaching English. This condition causes teacher delivers material as it comes.

Teachers' beliefs about school context refer to teachers' beliefs about their school environment or circumstances, including its administrative staff, students, other teachers, school buildings and equipment (Lumpe, Haney, & Czerniak, 2000). The first and the second teacher believe that their schools support the teaching English for students. This belief affects their performance in teaching practices. They become more enthusiastic in teaching because of the support of the headmasters and institution in teaching English to students. Meanwhile, the third teacher inferred that her school didn't support teaching English in her school. It causes she teaches students in a very moderate manner. This condition is in line with Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis (1996) who states that every element in the environment also contributes to different needs,

constraints and opportunities which can shape teachers' beliefs about what they can do in responding to those needs, constraints, and opportunities.

Due to the finding of the research, there are some factors which influence in shaping teachers' beliefs:

1) Learning experience

Everyone learns from what they see. When the learners observe what their teacher gives, they tend to assume that their teacher as a model that should be imitated. Learning experience influences teachers' beliefs. It is in line with the statement of Johnson (1994: 450) 'preservice ESL teachers' beliefs may be based largely on images from their formal language learning experiences, and in all likelihood, will represent their dominant model of action during the practicum teaching experience.' Then, Bailey et al. (1996) investigate about the role of teachers' language learning histories in shaping their current teaching philosophies and practices. As a result, the writers identified several factors related to teaching and learning situations which had made their own language learning experiences positive: (1) teacher personality and style mattered more than methodology; (2) teachers were caring and committed, and had clear expectations of their students; (3) teachers respected, and were respected by, the students; (4) as students, their motivation to learn enabled them to overcome inadequacies in the teaching; and (5) learning was facilitated by a positive classroom environment. By exploring their experiences in this manner, the authors of this study felt they were able to begin to articulate their own theories of teaching and to become aware of their origins. It can be inferred that the experience in learning influences what they perceive to be the right one in teaching and guides teachers to do their practices in the classroom.

2) Teaching Experience

The experience in teaching gives teacher knowledge which becomes the basis of their beliefs about something. Experience for many teachers is the primary source of beliefs about teaching. In teaching process, teacher can observe learners activity, decide certain method which is suitable with context and sharpen their ability in teaching. Experience in teaching adds knowledge for the teacher and develops their paradigm about teaching and learning. The more their experience is, the more their proficiency level in teaching. Teachers' beliefs can be changed depending on what they meet in classroom practices. It is in line with Diaz (2015: 183) who argues that some beliefs are not then static, they are very much influenced by what works well and unwell for teachers. It can be inferred that, teacher can change their beliefs when the fact is different with their expectation. This condition may be repeated as time flies. The more experience teachers have, the stronger belief they have.

3) Teachers' Motivation

Teachers' motivation gives inspiration for teacher about what should they do as teacher. In line with their motivation, they will also have certain beliefs to gain their target in teaching. In other words, their motivation will lead teachers to have certain belief to reach their target.

4) Sharing with other teacher

Teachers believe that the need sharing with other teachers. They need to share not only to fellow teachers but also to professional trainer or teachers. The teachers stated that by sharing to other teachers, she can get new knowledge how to solve problem that she faces. In addition, sharing also can give enlightenment for her whether something is wrong or right. Teachers also can absorb the new information about teaching, learning and curriculum by sharing to other teachers. This condition is supported by Vonk (1991: 64) who says that complex interaction between individual and the environment can creates change in teachers' thinking about thye profession and their conduct. By communicating to other teachers, the changing of beliefs may be shaped. Then those changing of teachers' beliefs and thoughts can be reflected in the classroom practices. As Bandura (1995) says, people do something as persuaded by someone else that he/she is able to do. In addition, Joyce and Showers in Harwell (2003:4) say that change in teachers' beliefs are more likely to occur in setting in which teachers consider learning communal activity.

5) School context (Facility)

The facility in the school context influences teachers' beliefs in choosing activities for students. They can determine what appropriate activities depending on the context and facility which are available. T1 inferred that the facility influences her teaching practices. She stated that the availability of media will help her to explain material to students. Then T3 added that the lack of facility in her school causes she teaches as it comes. She inferred that the program in curriculum has been good theoretically, but for practice she find difficulties because of the lack of facilities in her school. Then, the factor in the school context which influences in shaping teachers' beliefs is the supports of the head master and other teachers. The supports of the head master as the chief in the school affect teachers' beliefs whether the subject is important in certain school or not. The good relation among teachers in the school context will also give contribution to teacher in providing the best practices in the field. Nespor (1984) conducted a study on the interaction of school context and teachers' beliefs. For Nespor, the school context meant the school's location, country or city and he identified some factors, which significantly distinguish the conditions between countryside schools and city schools, and how these conditions contribute to shaping different

forms of teacher beliefs at significant points. Schools in the country often lack resources and their teachers may lack access to professional communities and professional training. Schools in a city usually have better access to resources and teachers have broader access to a professional community and professional training. Nespor (1984) argues that these differences influence teachers in acquiring new knowledge and in shaping their beliefs about teaching because the lack of access to resources or to a professional community limits teachers' opportunities for acquiring knowledge related to teaching. Conversely, teachers in city schools may be able to acquire broader knowledge from their being involved in a professional community and professional training.

Based on the findings of this study, teachers' beliefs are not always congruence with their practices in classroom. It proves theories that language teachers do not always teach in line with their stated beliefs (Karavas-Doukas 1996:194). In the context of this research, this condition can be happened because some factors such as facilities, time allocation, classroom condition, and number of students (large classes).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Teachers' beliefs which are discussed in this study are related to their practices covered several aspects such as about: beliefs about EYL, TEYL, learning, learners, assessment, beliefs about themselves, and beliefs about program and curriculum. All respondents believe that TEYL is an attempt to introduce English as foreign language to children. Moreover the second teacher adds that learners need application in learning English. They also believe that in TEYL teachers need to understand students' characteristic, have English proficiency, apply appropriate techniques and media in teaching, and provide fun learning activities. To increase their performance and knowledge about TEYL, they need training. They hope that the institution will provide certain training about TEYL. Then respondents state that their role in teaching is as facilitator. The first and the second teacher believe that they also should be a good model for their learners. Based on the findings of the study, all respondents have similar beliefs in TEYL except about the importance of English, the first and the second teachers agree that English is important for learners' academic, meanwhile the third teacher argues that English is not quite important for learners' academic. This can be happened because the different context of their schools.

Reflection of teachers' beliefs in classroom practices shows that : a) Teachers' role as facilitator, sources and role model for students depending on the context of classroom activities, b) teachers use formal assessment in teaching practices, c) in explaining material, teachers use textbook, LKS or worksheet as source of material, d) before teaching, there is teacher who doesn't prepare lesson plan first, e) teachers tend

to use integrated approach in teaching, and f) teachers tend to apply the similar steps in teaching such as opening, main activities, and closing. After comparing between teacher beliefs and their practices, it is found that teachers' beliefs are not always in line with their practices in teaching. This condition can be caused by several aspects such as the context of the school. In this study the factor which causing teachers' beliefs are different from their practices are facilities, time allocation, classroom condition, and number of students.

The next finding shows that there are several factors that influence in shaping teachers' beliefs and its implementation. Those factors in the context of this study are experience as learner, experience in teaching, school context (facility), teachers' motivation and sharing with other teachers.

Related to the finding of this study, a teacher should be a good model for students and understand about students' needs and characteristics. To be a good model, teachers are required to foster their capability in teaching English. To foster teacher's capability, teachers should have desire to continue educating themselves. Teachers can get more information about material and teaching techniques from books, internet and other teachers. Teachers can also join training to charge their knowledge and spirit. In addition, teachers should realize that the use of syllabus and lesson plan is beneficial to manage classroom well. Those will provide control in teaching and avoid unimportant discussion, so students can prepare lesson well. Then, dealing with the role of headmaster as teachers' chief, headmaster should support teacher in doing their tasks. The support of the headmasters for teachers helps them to be more enthusiastic in teaching. Teachers' enthusiasm in teaching will make them provide the best way in teaching students. In addition, the institution should also provide good facility for teacher and students in order to build appropriate teaching and learning environment.

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