The Links between Beliefs about Language Learning and Approaches to EFL Instructions of In-service EFL Teachers

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Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: *Teacher's belief;* *EFL approaches;* *Language learning*	*This research reports the in-service teachers' beliefs about language learning and their approaches to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instructions. The study was conducted to answer the main questions: What are the common beliefs about language learning do the in-service EFL teachers have regarding the approaches to EFL instructions? and what are, in specific, the beliefs about language learning they have in the links with their teaching approaches? The data collected using survey called the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) provided quantitative data and interviews were used to elicit the qualitative data. The result revealed that in-service EFL teachers share common beliefs regarding their approaches to EFL instructions, with an inconsistent links between their approaches in the importance of grammar in learning a foreign language and the beliefs of nature of language learning. As to the held beliefs there are four beliefs were reported, i.e.: Language learning aptitude, Difficulty of language learning, Nature of language learning, and Learning and communication strategies. This study is hoped to be significant for both theoretical and practical considerations for teachers in the EFL context.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Beliefs about language learning have been one of the research focuses in the field of second language acquisition, yet, teachers' beliefs about language learning is a relatively new topic in language, tracing back to the mid-1970s when Lortie published his classical study on teachers' socialization (Lortie, 1975 in Barcelos, 2000). Researchers began to realize that in order to understand teaching it was necessary to study it from the teachers' point of view. The emphasis of the research is on understanding how teachers' interpretations and cognitive processes are embedded in their practice (Johnson, 1999). Likewise, Prabhu (1990) brought a concept about sense of plausibility which refers to teachers being able to act according to their beliefs and to explain why they do and why they do what they do (Barcelos, 2000).

A number of studies have been conducted to examine language teachers' beliefs which have suggested that such beliefs may influence the teachers' actions in the classroom. Some researchers have argued that not only do language teachers' belief influence their practice, but their beliefs also help shape the nature of the classroom interaction (Johnson,

1992), as well as students' perceptions of classroom practices (Fang, 1996). Another study conducted by Johnson in 1992 investigated the beliefs of thirty ESL teachers and found out that teachers' literacy instruction was consistent with their belief. Mangano and Allen (1986 in Barcelos, 2000) studied the relationships between teachers' theoretical orientation towards students' writing and their (teachers') instructional practices. This result suggested that not only were teachers' belief consistent with their practice, but teachers and students interacted differently because of the teachers' theoretical beliefs about language instruction. Smith (1996) conducted a research on the influence of teachers' belief on their decision-making process and found out that, whereas teacher decisions revealed an eclectic use of theory, their beliefs and practices were internally consistent.

Some beliefs about language learning have been found to be correlated with teacher education programs (Dole & Sinatra, 1994; Horwitz, 1985 in Vibulphol 2004) which can limit their choices of instructional practices. Li Li (2013) suggest that the relationship between teacher's beliefs and teaching practices in macro and micro context is complex. In Indonesian context, studies on teachers' beliefs vary from high school to higher education level (Lengkanawati, 2016, Karim, et.al., 2020, Putra, 2021, Ma'wa and Madya, 2021). Munandar and Newton (2021) reports that teacher's pedagogical beliefs allowed them to address the complexities of culture and interculturality, students' needs and contextual constraints into their teaching practices. When English teaching practices conducted via digital learning, Indonesian teachers' beliefs are influenced by their English digital learning efficacy (Nugroho & Mutianingrum). Despite the constraints, teachers in Indonesia have shown that their beliefs play important role in their teaching practices, for instance, teachers from Islamic schools in teaching reading display their beliefs that goes beyond the belief that *teaching reading is merely teaching students to answer questions* (Nurkamto, et.el., 2021).

Although there were a few studies (Almarza, 1996; Brown & McGannon, 1998; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Johnson, 1994; Peacock, 2001 and Vibuphol 2004) focused on pre-service ESL/EFL teachers' belief development during their teacher education programs and only Peacock conducted his study in an EFL context, there had not been a study that focused on development of beliefs about language learning of in-service EFL teachers—the teachers who have more learning experience in English and would be more proficient in English as compared to the pre-service teachers (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

This particular study is aimed at finding out the common beliefs about language learning of the in-service EFL teachers have regarding the approaches to EFL instructions and the specific category of language learning beliefs in their teaching approaches. This study is hoped to be significant for both theoretical and practical considerations. Theoretically, this study is important in that it shed understanding on the beliefs about language learning of in-service teachers in the EFL context in Indonesia by undertaking a qualitative investigation that looks the reflections of teachers' beliefs through actions in the classroom. Practically, the result of this study could be an input for teachers to enhance their language learning instructions to achieve the language learning targets.

2. METHODS

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods to elicit data for the analysis were used for this study. Using a combination of both methods allows for triangulation of the data to achieve accurate and reliable findings (Ellis, 1994). Two major complementary sources of data were used i.e. two parts of a survey called the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) provided quantitative data and interviews were used to elicit the qualitative data. The study was originally designed to survey 20 in-service EFL teachers who are taking their S2 study in a state university in Indonesia and having teaching to various level of education in several places in Indonesia. However, there were only 13 subjects participated. The instrument used in this study was a modified version of a survey, Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (ESL student version), which was published by Horwitz

in 1987. The data were analyzed through by firstly counting each answer given. Each response from each statement had a numerical value, i.e., *1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neutral; 4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree*. The statements on the questionnaire were then grouped into four beliefs categories, which are *Beliefs about Language Learning Aptitude, Beliefs about Difficulty of Language Learning, Beliefs about the Nature of Language Learning, and Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies*.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The common beliefs about language learning that the in-service EFL teachers have regarding the approaches to EFL instructions

The in-service EFL teachers share common beliefs regarding their approaches to EFL instructions. The vast majority of the subjects (84.6%) were in favor of the belief that *language can be thought of as meaningful communication and is learned subconsciously in non-academic, social situations*. There were 61.5% of the subjects who held beliefs that *as long as EFL students understand what they are saying, they are actually learning the language* and *if EFL students understand some of the basic grammatical rules of the language they can usually create lots of new sentences on their own*. Another similar beliefs was that *as long as EFL students listen to, practice, and remember the language which native speakers use, they are actually learning the language*; which was reported by 53.8% of the subjects.

Johnson (1992) mentioned, some researchers have argued that not only do language teachers' belief influence their practice, but their beliefs also help shape the nature of the classroom interaction, as well as students' perceptions of classroom practices (Fang, 1996 in Barcelos 2000). The interview result reflects that the subjects believed that forms of instructions such as lecture, tutorials, and pre- or post-reading assignments were important in learning a foreign language. They believe that their instructions and teaching styles affect the learners' success in learning the target language. As regards to the fact that they were non-native English speaking lecturer, they perceived themselves having more benefit in teaching their students. Harmer (2008) explained that non-native-speaker teachers may have advantages in teaching because they often had the same experience as their students in learning English, and this gives them a quick understanding of what their students are going through.

The beliefs (in specific) about language learning that the in-service EFL teachers in their teaching approaches
a) Beliefs about Foreign Language Aptitude

In general, the subjects endorsed the concept that there is such a thing as foreign language aptitude. There were 61.54% subjects agreed with the statement "It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language", 30.77% strongly agree and only 7.69% were neutral. None of the subjects disagree with this concept. With the belief about the special ability for language learning, more than sixty percent agreed and 23.08% strongly agree. Interestingly, with those beliefs, the subjects were not confident to say that "People from my country are good at learning foreign languages." (53.85%) and to affirm that "It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one." (50%).

The subjects did not associate second language learning ability with other ability and intelligent. The responses to the statement "People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning a foreign language" varied. As to 'People who speak more than one language are very intelligent', more than half of the subject agreed with the statement, since they also held a strong belief that 'Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language'. The other items in the category of beliefs about foreign language aptitude concern some individual characteristics such as gender that some people believe can affect success in

language learning. The responses to the items were 69.23% stayed 'neutral', 23% 'disagree' and 7.69% 'strongly disagree'.

Barcelos (2000) explained that EFL teachers, with their beliefs in teaching the language may influence the learners' experience in language learning. Horwitz (1987), nevertheless, claimed that a belief in the existence of foreign language aptitude may result from unsuccessful learning experience. Thus, understanding this belief is helpful in helping teachers to adjust their role in the classroom (Holec, 1987 in Barcelos 2000).

b) Beliefs about the Difficulty of Language Learning

Half of the participants (50%) reported believing that some languages are easier to learn than others, while about fifty three percent disagreed with the statement that it is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language and 46.15% chose 'neutral' about the statement of 'It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it'. Regarding the difficulty of English, 53.85% rated it as "a language of medium difficulty." An equal percentage (23.08%) of the subjects believed that English was "a difficult language" and also "an easy language." None of the participants rated English as "a very easy language" or "a very difficult language."

In response to the question about time commitment for English learning, the subjects had different ideas. About forty nine percent believed that it would take a person one to two years of studying English one hour a day to be able to speak English well. Thirty eight percent of the subjects believed that it would take "less than a year"; the rest, fifteen percent of the subjects, believed that no one can learn to speak English well if he or she only spent one hour a day learning it.

The beliefs about language difficulty of the target language were associated with anxiety. Learners who perceived foreign language was relatively difficult were found to have higher anxiety than those who believed they were learning an easy langauge (Horwitz, 1989 and Truitt, 1995 in Vibulphol, 2004). Accordingly, in the classroom instruction and practice, Horwitz (1985) underpinned that teachers who underestimated the difficulty of the language they are teaching may have false expectations about their students' progress.

c) Beliefs about the Nature of Language Learning

In the third category, the nature of language learning, the results showed that the subjects believe that knowing about English-speaking cultures is necessary in order to speak English (53.85%) and also believed that learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects. The majority of the participants reported believing that it is best to learn English in an English speaking country (69.23%) and that vocabulary (69.23%) was important in learning English. By contrast, grammar was viewed not as the most important part of learning a foreign language (38.46% agree, 38.46% neutral, 15.38% disagree, and 7.69% strongly disagree). This, however, contradicts their reported beliefs regarding their approaches in the language instruction which revealed that sixty one percent believed *if EFL students understand some of the basic grammatical rules of the language they can usually create lots of new sentences on their own*.

The strong beliefs about the importance of vocabulary and grammar in language learning risk negative effects (Horwitz, 1987 in Barcelos, 2000). Horwitz uttered that when teachers exaggeratedly believe in the importance of vocabulary and grammar, then, the approach of memorizing vocabulary lists and grammar rules may put learners spend a lot of time in their expense of other language learning practices. On the other hand, a study conducted by Wen and Johnson in 1997 (Vibulphol, 2004) challenged the arguments, coming with the finding that it is not likely that beliefs about grammar and vocabulary would yield negative effects.

d) Beliefs about Learning and Communication Strategies

The fourth category of BALLI items addresses issues about learning and communication strategies. The result showed that majority of the subjects believed that it is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation and strongly agreed that practice to repeat a lot was important in learning English. Interestingly, two groups of subjects were contradict in that they agreed (38.46%) that 'If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on' while the other (38.46%) disagreed and strongly disagree (15.38%). For learning strategies, the subjects' beliefs were varied concerning the use of cassette tapes in practice or learning the language (46.15% agreed, 38.46% were neutral, and 15.38% disagreed).

In the classroom instructions, teachers' beliefs about learning and communication strategies may undermine learners' success in learning a foreign language, since the teachers may unconsciously inhibiting their attempts, limiting their perception about new approaches to language learning, and reducing their use of the target language; thus, misleading the students expectations on their own learning (Vibulphol, 2004).

4. CONCLUSION

The result revealed that in-service EFL teachers share common beliefs regarding their approaches to EFL instructions, with an inconsistent links between their approaches in the importance of grammar in learning a foreign language and the beliefs of nature of language learning. As to the held beliefs of Language Learning Aptitude, they believed in the existence of a special ability for language learning, they thought that average ability was adequate for language learning and that young learners can learn a second language more easily than adult learners. In the category of the difficulty of language learning revealed that half of the in-service EFL teachers in this study reported believing that different languages had different relative difficulty levels and they viewed English as a language of medium difficulty. About the relative difficulty of language skills, a majority of the participants reported perceiving that some language skills were easier than others.

Most of the in-service EFL teachers reported believing that learning vocabulary, and culture were important for English learners, but they did not believe that grammar played the most important role in English learning. They also believed that the best place to learn English was to be in an English-speaking country. Concerning learning and communication strategies showed that the in-service EFL teachers had some beliefs that facilitate the concept of English learning for communication such as practicing, learning about cultures, and using communication strategies.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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