An Analysis of Language Teachers’ Beliefs in Their Teaching Learning Process

Dini Handiani
Politeknik Manufaktur Negeri Bandung

Abstract

Language teachers play a very important part in language education and learning. What they do in classroom is a reflection of what they know and believe about issues related to their professional practices. Their knowledge and beliefs provide them with the underlying framework guiding their teaching learning process related to the content, approach, and evaluation of teaching and learning. The objective of this paper, therefore, was to examine the beliefs of language teachers in teaching learning process. Based on the discussions and conclusions, it is recommended that the English language teachers need to have clear beliefs about their teaching learning process, and be very much willing to improve the language pedagogy through self-reflection/self-study.

Key words: teaching learning process, beliefs

Introduction

A school is a place where teaching learning process takes place. Several factors are involved in this process: students, teachers, principals, curriculum, facilities, etc. A good teaching-learning process is marked with the involvement of all factors above to achieve the objective of education in the school itself.

Today, education is doing a basic innovation related to the school curriculum. The innovations demand the change of the way of thinking, the learning method, and the evaluation technique. Related to this problem, The National Educational Department has changed the previous curriculum Competency based-Curriculum (CBC) with the new one called Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) and in English language it is School Level-based Curriculum (SLBC). SLBC is an operational curriculum which is prepared and implemented in each educational unit. SLBC consists of target of education of level based education, structure and contents of curriculum in educational unit level, educational calendar and syllabus.

Curriculum is one of the factors that determines the success of teaching learning process. According to Depdiknas (2006 :46), curriculum is defined as a set
of plan as regulation? about the purpose, content, and teaching materials and the technique which are used as orientation of the implementation in teaching learning processes to achieve certain education objectives. It involves the objectives, facilities, and evaluation of education.

In this study the writer analyzed the teachers’ beliefs in teaching learning process. It is because no matter what kind of language approach or method is being implemented, teachers remain the ones who take the control on most of the values involved in the classroom by making a series of decisions. (Richard and Lockhart, 1994). Furthermore it is stated that the instructional decisions stem directly from the teachers’ beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning, which play a central role in their teaching (e.g their conceptions about the subject matter that they teach, how students learn, how to facilitate students’ learning as well as how they conceptualized their work).

**Theoretical Foundation**

Nowadays, Indonesia implements SLBC. This curriculum is the seventh curriculum that has ever been implemented in Indonesia after 1954, 1964, 1975, 1984, 1994 curriculum, and Competency based Curriculum. There are some components in the new curriculum. Those components, include the objectives, teaching materials, teaching learning process and assessment, and evaluation (Depdiknas, 2006). Every component is related to one another. The objectives are related to the teaching materials, teaching learning process and evaluation.

The government of Indonesia decided that English is the first foreign language which is learned and it is put in the school curriculum. It is hoped that by using SLBC the students will comprehend and master the language better. Considering that SLBC is new and it is not fully implemented yet, the writer tries to find out the result of analysis how the SLBC is implemented especially in teaching English.

One of the components of curriculum is teaching-learning process. According to Kimble & Garmezy (1963:133) in Brown (2000:7), learning is a relatively permanent change in behavioral tendency and is the result of reinforced practice while teaching is defined as showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instructions, guiding in the study of something, providing with
knowledge, causing to know and understanding. From the definition above it can be concluded that teaching-learning process is the real activity in implementing the curriculum in the classroom. School Level -based Curriculum gives a school a broad chance to arrange and develop a syllabus which accommodates the school potentials, students’ needs and ability and the needs of the surrounding society.

Definition of Teachers’ Beliefs

Mainstream educational research has recognized that beliefs play important roles in both teachers’ personal and professional lives. Murphy (in Richard and Lockhart, 1994) said that although beliefs have been described as the most valuable psychological construct to teacher education, these constructs are considered difficult to define. In fact, to name a few, Pajares (in Richards and Lockhart, 1994) in his review of the research on the topic reported that beliefs have been travelled under the alias of various other words, such as attitudes, values, judgement, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding and social strategy.

Teachers’ Beliefs and Classroom Practices

Teaching activities have been considered complex in the mainstream educational theories and research. Shulman and Elstein (1975 as cited in Richards and Lockhart, 1994) for example, consider teaching as clinical information processing. They said that the teacher role could be conceptualized like a physician’s role- as an active clinical information processor involved in planning, anticipating, judging, diagnosing, prescribing, problem solving. The teacher is expected to function in a task environment containing quantities of different kinds of information that far exceed the capabilities or capacities of any human information processor with these entire tasks in hands, thus the teachers should take into account many teaching and learning factors (such as defining appropriate teaching methods and activities that are relevant to students characteristics and learning context.)
No matter what kind of class a teacher teaches, he or she is typically confronted with the tasks of: selecting learning activities, preparing students for new learning, presenting learning activities, asking questions, conducting drills, checking students’ understanding, providing opportunities for practice of new items, monitoring students’ learning, giving feedback on student learning, and reviewing and re-teaching when necessary. In trying to understand how they deal with these dimensions and/or tasks of teaching, it is necessary to examine the beliefs and thinking processes, which underlie their classroom actions. This view of teaching involves a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral dimension (Clark & Peterson 1986; Lynch 1989, cited in Richards & Lockhart, 1994). The assumption in turn entails understanding the ‘living theories’ and the grounds upon which the learning takes place.

The Sources of Teachers’ Beliefs

Teachers’ belief systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs they hold in relation to the content and approach of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it. These beliefs and values serve as the background to much of the teachers’ decision making and action, and hence constitute what has been termed the culture of teaching. They are beliefs about appropriate ways of acting on the job and rewarding aspects of teaching, and knowledge that enables teachers to do their work (Richards and Lockhart, 1994) have been glossed hereunder.

1. Teachers’ professional code of ethics
2. Level of teachers’ effectiveness
3. Dispositions or attitudes of language teachers
4. Their own experience as language learners
5. Experience of what works best
6. Established Practice
7. Personality factors
8. Educationally based or research-based principles
9. Principles derived from an approach or method
10. Understanding of the “why” of “what” they teach
Language Teachers’ Beliefs about English Language

The English language currently enjoys a status of a world language, an international system of communication, and is widely regarded as the language of opportunity opening the door to higher education, a better job, upward social mobility, dominant medium of higher-level administration, the learned professions, large scale industry and commerce, and a considerable literacy and artistic activity (Richards and Lockhart, 1994).

In short, people’s views of English, or of any language, are influenced by contacts they have had with the language and its speakers. These contacts vary significantly from one individual to another. It is therefore instructive to examine the underlying beliefs teachers hold about English and how these influence attitudes toward teaching it. These beliefs of teachers can be clarified by considering questions like:

• Why do you think English is an important language?
• Do you think English is more difficult to learn than other languages?
• Do you think it is important to speak English with native-like pronunciation?
• Do you think English has any qualities that make it different from other languages? (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

Although language teachers’ beliefs about English may sometimes represent stereotypical impressions, these beliefs do nevertheless express realities, which may influence classroom practices. It is, thus, important for language teachers to hold appropriate beliefs about English and its roles in developing learners for life, for the world of work and to be effective in this volatile and global world for the reason that English language enjoys a status of a world language, an international system of communication and business, and is widely regarded as the language of opportunity opening the door to life. (This sentence is too long, it should be broken down into two sentences).

Language Teachers’ Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching

Learners and teachers bring with them different expectations concerning the learning process in general, and what will be learned in a particular course and how it will be learned (Brindley 1984:95, in Richards & Lockhart, 1994). The
expectations, nonetheless, may be under or over. Brindley’s observation draws attention to the fact that both teachers and learners bring experience to the classroom that influences their perceptions in subtle ways. Language teachers’ beliefs about learning may go back to their own experience as language learners (Freeman 1992a, in Richards & Lockhart, 1994). These beliefs represent answers to questions like the following:

- What are the best ways to learn a language?
- What kinds of exposure to language best facilitate language learning?
- What kinds of students do best in your classes?
- What kinds of learning styles and strategies do you encourage in learners?
- What roles are students expected to assume in your classroom?

Overall, language teachers hold different beliefs about language teaching and learning. Some believe in teaching information, whereas others prefer to teach how to get information. What is important, any ways is not only to teach information, but also how to teach what the learners do with the information provided in the language practices.

Language Teachers’ Beliefs about the Curriculum

Particularly, as some programs may have a distinct philosophy, teachers themselves also have specific beliefs and perspectives about the programs they teach and the institution they work in. Consequently, teachers’ rooted views on such things as lesson planning; the use of objectives and assessment may lead to quite different classroom practices. Some teachers make significant use of published textbooks and “teach to the book,” letting the textbook make many of their instructional decisions. Others regard textbooks as a hindrance to their creativity and prefer to make more use of authentic materials or teacher-generated materials.

It is also true that teachers have specific beliefs about problems with the programs they work in, which they may pass on to new teachers who enter the program. It is therefore, advisable to raise the following central questions concerning teachers’ beliefs about their programs and to find answers to each of them:
• What do you think are the most important elements in an effective language-teaching program?
• What do you think the role of textbooks and teaching materials in a language program should be?
• How useful do you think instructional objectives are in teaching?
• How do you decide what you will teach?
• To what extent is your teaching based on your students’ needs?
• What is your attitude toward assessment in a language program?

Methodology

This study uses qualitative case study design, since it focuses on describing one phenomena which is the language teachers’ beliefs in teaching learning process. (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2007).

The research site is one junior high school in Bandung. The participants are four English teachers. The instruments used in this study are questionnaires and interview.

Findings and Discussions

This section describes the result from questionnaires and interview and which are used to answer the research question perviously stated.

Data from questionnaire

The data from the questionnaires are used to answer the research question, which is teachers’ beliefs about English, teaching and learning, and curriculum. The result can be seen in the tabulations of the answer to the questionnaires (See Appendix 1). Where is the Appendix?
Teachers Beliefs about English Language

The respondents gave various answers about teachers’ beliefs about English language. This may imply that the respondents had different opinions about the issue.

Table 1 Teachers Beliefs about English Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>English is an important subject to be taught.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>English is more difficult to learn than other languages</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It is important to speak English with native-like pronunciation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>English has any qualities that make it different from other languages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data from questionnaires above concerning teachers’ beliefs about English language in general shows that all participants, seemed to have knowledge about English. It can be seen from their answer to the questionnaires. Almost all participants agreed that English is an important language to be taught to students, and it is therefore important to speak English with native-like pronunciation. Some of them (50%) agreed that English is more difficult to learn than any other languages, because it has any quality that make it different from other languages (50%).

It can be said that in general the participants have good beliefs about the English language concerning its importance and quality. They should bring this knowledge especially if they want to teach in the classroom by providing suitable materials for the students based on this assumption.

Teachers’ Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching

The data showed that almost all participants (75%) agreed that the student is the subject in teaching learning process and developing curriculum. Meanwhile, almost all of the respondents (75%) strongly agreed that it is important for teachers to know the students’ competence before the lesson begins (item 3), so they can
determine the most appropriate teaching method to be applied in the classroom. This is in line with item 4, they disagreed that teacher has difficulties in knowing the students’ competence (50%). It can be concluded that teacher has the instrument to find out the entry level of the students, i.e by giving the placement test.

Table 2 Teachers’ Beliefs about language learning and teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>1 SA</th>
<th>2 A</th>
<th>3 D</th>
<th>4 SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Student is the subject in teaching learning process and developing curriculum.</td>
<td>1 25%</td>
<td>3 75%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Mastering English means being able to communicate in English</td>
<td>3 75%</td>
<td>1 25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>It is important to know the students’ competence before the lesson begins</td>
<td>3 75%</td>
<td>1 25%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Teacher has difficulties in knowing the students’ competence.</td>
<td>1 25%</td>
<td>2 50%</td>
<td>1 25%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Teacher is not the only information resources in class.</td>
<td>1 25%</td>
<td>2 50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be said that because the student is the subject in teaching learning process and developing curriculum, it is important for teachers to have knowledge about who their students are, so they can determine the learning strategies suitable for them, provide students with suitable materials in order the student can perform well in teaching learning process. How can you come to this conclusion while you did not discuss this before. This part is called an interpretation not a conclusion.

Teachers’ Beliefs about curriculum

Based on item 1, 75% of the respondents agreed that teachers develop teaching objective based on the standard from BNSP. Referring to the teacher’s ability to determine and apply various methods in teaching (items 4 – 9), all the respondents agreed that they should know the most appropriate method to be applied in the class, and they apply various methods of teaching (50%). Almost all participants(75%) also agreed that evaluation is important to plan the next lesson.
It can be concluded that teacher makes preparation before they come into the class by making the lesson plan, determining the teaching method, providing the learning resources for the students and making use the facilities available. It means that the teachers’ beliefs about curriculum is good enough. The problems they faced are in terms of making use of facilities related to teaching learning process. How can you come to this conclusion while you did not discuss/mention earlier about making preparation before they come into the class by making the lesson plan, determining the teaching method, providing the learning resources for the students and making use the facilities available. What you say or state in this part is called an interpretation not a conclusion.

### Table 3 Teachers’ Beliefs about curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>1 SA</th>
<th>2 A</th>
<th>3 D</th>
<th>4 SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teachers develop teaching objectives based on the standard from BNSP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher has difficulties in implementing the lesson plan they previously prepared.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher has difficulties in finding other materials instead of text book.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher faces the difficulties in determining the most appropriate teaching method to be applied in class.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The most used teaching method in class in lecturing.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teacher applies the other methods of teaching instead of lecturing.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teacher should know the most appropriate method to be used in the classroom.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The teaching method used is the teacher’s favourite method.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The facilities available are used to support the teaching learning process.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>SCBD demands teachers’ creativity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Evaluation is important to plan the next lesson</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data from interview

Data from interview were also used to answer the research question. The result can be seen in the interview categories. (see Appendix 2). Where is it?

The data reveal that the respondent knew exactly how to present the school’s potency and how to develop them into continuing and dynamic English teaching and learning activities. There are also some steps that can be taken to create a positive learning environment but ultimately it is the teachers’ efforts, commitment, and resourcefulness that will determine the success of a program. Students’ position in curriculum development is important. The idea is in line with Shavelson and Stern cited in Nunan (1992) states that teachers are trained to plan instruction by specifying students’ entry behavior. The interview data shown that, teachers had understood the role of students. It was nourished by the belief that individual schools could best meet the different needs and interest of students, and that teacher involvement in curriculum determination would produce both commitment and ownership.

The result of interview reveals that evaluation is important to plan the next lesson. Written test was mostly used than spoken or oral test. The reason was written test was easier to do and did not spend a lot of time. On going process was not a new thing to do for teachers, so teachers can identify students’ problems based on the evaluation conducted during the teaching learning process.

You cannot say these things while you did not mention anything about these beforehand. You should describe briefly what you asked in the interview before you make an interpretation about the finding of your interview.

Conclusions and Recommendations

English language programs have become more important in today’s Indonesian schooling because of the process of globalisation. To respond to the challenges and reforms that globalisation has brought schools will have to continuously upgrade their English teaching practices. School-based curriculum, as one of the reforms, does have good intentions.

The current curriculum in Indonesia, KTSP (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan) or SCBD (School-based curriculum development) has been launched in
2006 based upon The Republic Indonesia Act No. 23 year 2003 and since then some schools have applied this newest curriculum.

The implementation of the curriculum should be based on the potency, the progress and the need of the learners to master the competence that useful for their life. The students should be facilitated to make improvement and enrichment and also acceleration that is in line with their potency and it is implemented in the nuance of students-teachers’ relationship that appreciates one another.

Based on the analysis, the teachers’ beliefs influence (you did not mention about this before, you only mention about the percentages etc., the influence on the teaching and learning process) the teaching learning process. It can be concluded that the teachers in the research site have good beliefs about English, teaching and learning, and curriculum, therefore they make the preparation before they come into the class. (You did not mention this either in your finding or in the discussion). They are also creative because they try to make use the facilities available, and apply the various teaching methods.

Nevertheless, to make the better quality of teaching learning process, it is recommended that English language teachers need to hold clear visions and/or beliefs about their professional practices, and be very much willing to improve the language pedagogy through self-reflection/self-study.

References


New Jersey: Prentice Hall.


Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.