



## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS' BELIEFS, TEACHERS' BEHAVIORS, AND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

#### Article History

Received: 15 October 2018

Revised: 21 November 2018

Accepted: 31 December 2018

Published: 24 January 2019

#### Keywords

Foreign language teaching

Teachers' beliefs

Teaching and learning

Teaching methodology

Teachers' professional

development

Classroom management.

Foreign language teaching and learning is one of the topics in the field of K-12 education and adult learning. Most of the current research studies tend to focus on the development and training of foreign language learners. However, issues such as teaching strategies, methodologies, classroom management, and personal beliefs of teaching and learning are neglected. As teachers are primary tools to deliver lessons at all different levels, educators and researchers are increasingly concerned about how teachers' beliefs and personal background may influence classroom management, curriculum and instruction planning and expectations of students. The current study is a literature review of the concept of teachers' beliefs, followed by a review of studies exploring teachers' beliefs using different methodologies. The relationship between teachers' beliefs and teachers' classroom practices is also discussed, along with factors influencing teachers' beliefs in teaching professional development courses.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature on teachers' personal beliefs and teaching behaviors. The paper's primary contribution is also to study how teachers' personal beliefs influence their classroom management, teaching styles, and instructional feature.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers' beliefs about teaching strategies and methodologies about foreign language teaching and learning impacts their classroom management, curriculum and instruction planning, as well as expectations of learners. In fact, teachers develop a personal understanding, beliefs, and expectations about the direction, mission, planning, and objective of their teaching. Therefore, learning in any teaching and learning setting is influenced by a few comprehensive factors and elements. These elements include teachers' beliefs, teachers' professional development through training, as well as their teaching and learning style (Dos Santos, 2018).

Teachers' beliefs refer to the perspective and conception of teachers' roles, positions, and teaching and learning strategy. Teachers' beliefs also identify teachers' classroom behavior, teaching methodology, strategy toward their students (Li, 2012). Teachers' beliefs are more about instructional behaviors and attitudes, rather than their research knowledge; hence it is important to examine their characteristics, their content, and their expression (Turner *et al.*, 2009). Teachers' beliefs in this study are therefore defined as personal constructs that can provide understandings, judgments, and evaluations of teachers' practices.

Classroom practices constitute a broad framework that includes a teaching culture and environment, academic achievement and consequences related to students' classroom behavior. Such practices help to establish a Quality Teaching framework positioning the teacher as a mentor, embedded with formative assessment strategies and collaborative practices to enhance the teachers' professional development (Lopes and Oliveira, 2017).

Teachers' professional development refers to specialized training, training in teaching strategies, formal education, peer exchanging, and professional learning focused to assist school leaders, teachers, administrators, school counselors, and other professional staff at schools improve their professional skills and knowledge, ability, and effectiveness (Kelly, 1969).

This literature review begins with the concept of teachers' beliefs, followed by a review of studies exploring teachers' beliefs using different methodologies. Then, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and teachers' classroom practices is discussed, followed by a discussion of factors influencing teachers' beliefs with a particular emphasis on professional development courses. A summary and the identification of relevant research gaps follow.

Currently, there exist only a few research studies about the relationship between teachers' beliefs and teachers' classroom practices in relation with the professional development of teachers and a change in their beliefs due to training. Owing to this research gap, this study has focused on the interaction between three components: teachers' beliefs, classroom practices and teachers' professional development. Thus this study aims to highlight the significance of the teachers' beliefs formed through professional courses and evident in their own classroom practices

## 2. TEACHERS' BELIEFS

The concept of teachers' beliefs has been associated with different labels. Borg (2003) for instance, offers a list of relevant terms associated with similar concepts. These terms include personal pedagogical systems, teacher cognition (Borg, 2003;2006) pedagogical knowledge (Gatbonton, 1999) and personal theories (Sendan and Roberts, 1998).

These terms can be used to describe either similar concepts or utilized to refer to different concepts with the same term (Clandinin and Connelly, 1987) which inevitably leads to confusion, as pointed out by Eisenhart *et al.* (1988). Teacher cognition, for instance, was used to describe "what teachers know, believe, and think" (Borg, 2003) which might be interpreted as consisting of three key elements, namely, knowledge, beliefs and thoughts.

A few researchers (Pajares, 1992; Gatbonton, 1999) make a distinction between these three elements. Gatbonton (1999) uses pedagogical knowledge to describe a teacher's knowledge that is evident in his/her practice in classrooms. Further, Pajares (1992) advocates that teachers' beliefs should not only be conceptualized differently, distinguishing it from the concept of knowledge, but should also be the focus of educational research on its own.

However, on the other hand, the concepts of beliefs and knowledge for a few researchers are not as distinguishable as one might intuitively think. Researchers, such as Grossman and Wilson (1989), Verloop *et al.* (2001) and Woods (1996) failed to completely separate teachers' knowledge and beliefs. For instance, when looking into subject matter knowledge of teachers, Grossman and Wilson (1989) concluded that the borderline between knowledge and beliefs is "blurry at best" (Grossman and Wilson, 1989). Indeed, Verloop *et al.* (2001) point out that such concepts as knowledge and beliefs are indeed "inextricably intertwined" (Verloop *et al.*, 2001) in a teacher's mind.

As a result, more recent research (Nishino, 2012) uses the terms teachers' belief and teacher cognition almost interchangeably. In the light of this trend, the present study uses teachers' beliefs in the same sense as Borg (2003) used teacher cognition to describe "what teachers know, believe and think."

### 2.1. Exploring Teachers' Beliefs

One approach to exploring teachers' beliefs is to use self-report questionnaires such as Allen (2002) Foreign Language Education Questionnaire (FLEQ), Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) Foreign Language Attitude Survey for Teachers (FLAST), and Horwitz (1985) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). For example, Horwitz (1985) BALLI was originally designed to understand learners' beliefs, but now has been adopted to investigate what teachers believe about language learning in general (e.g. (Kern, 1995; Peacock, 2001;1999; Jayakumar, 2016; Var, 2018)). Peacock (1999) focused on teachers' belief as one aspect of the study (i.e. as one set of research questions), and administered BALLI upon 45 teachers of English in a university in Hong Kong. The author asked the teachers to rate 28 statements, out of 34 questions in the original BALLI that were relevant only to teachers, on a five-point Likert-scale where participants could choose from "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Neither Agree nor Disagree," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree." These statements addressed five aspects of language learning: the nature of language learning, the difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, pronunciation, and language learning strategies. Examples of these statements included: "It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language;" and "It is better to learn a foreign language in a foreign country" (Peacock, 1999). The teachers' responses were taken to reflect what teachers believed in. Comparing the responses of the teacher participants and those of the student participants from the same university, Peacock was able to conclude that beliefs of teachers and those of learners could be different. Specifically, the learners reported that they believed that both grammar and vocabulary were important, while only a small percentage of teachers believed the same.

One of the key strengths of this methodology (i.e. the use of self-report questionnaires) may be its ability to survey a relatively large number of participants in the sample, making statistical analyses an option for researchers. In Peacock (1999) 45 teachers and 202 learners were surveyed. However, one limitation of this methodology could be that the pre-set questions were often open to individual interpretation by the participants, leaving relatively little room for clarification when ambiguity arises. Also, there could be a lack of flexibility in eliciting more in-depth responses from the participants. Indeed, Peacock supplemented this quantitative approach with qualitative interviews, but they were only conducted with the student participants only (Dos Santos, 2017; Ezati *et al.*, 2018; Make and Yonas, 2018).

Another approach to teachers' belief is conducting interviews. Interviews may be structured (i.e. all participants are asked the same questions in the same wording and order), or they may be semi-structured (i.e. the interviews are guided only by a general theme, rather than specifically worded questions in a particular order). Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) developed a standard interview protocol for their interviews with 10 high school teachers of Japanese in 10 Australian state schools (9 females and 1 male; 9 native Australian English speakers and 1 native Japanese speaker; having years of teaching experience: 0.75 – 13 years). Through 12 major interview questions, the authors attempted to explore the teachers' beliefs about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), specifically how CLT was understood, how textbooks were used, what role grammar played and what communicative activities were included in the class. The interviews were recorded and transcribed as descriptive data for qualitative analysis (i.e. identification, comparison and classification of common concepts and trends). From such descriptive data, the authors were able to identify four main conceptions about CLT held by teacher participants: CLT meant learning to communicate in a second language; speaking and listening were the foci of CLT; little grammar teaching was involved; and many activities needed to be included.

Similarly, Kim (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 native English-speaking teachers of proficiency courses in a Korean university (2 females and 6 males; age range: 30 – 52 years; mean number of years of teaching in Korea: 5.3 years). The author attempted to explore these teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching English in Korea. Specifically, the author was interested in the teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching, the sources of these beliefs, as well as the role of teachers. The transcribed data were first cross-checked by the interviewees before analyzing qualitatively.

Kim adopted the data analysis method similar to the procedure followed in grounded theory in which the author first read the transcripts without a pre-set coding scheme. Relevant concepts were then labeled in verbatim to avoid confusion and misinterpretations. Then, these labels were first categorized into broad categories, such as “learning experience” (Kim, 2011). Items in each of these categories were then further grouped into subcategories, such as “be responsible” (Kim, 2011). This is the stage, according to the author, when a “storyline” would emerge to help the researcher understand the account of the teachers’ beliefs. A validation of interpretation procedure, where author’s peers (i.e. master’s and doctoral students) cross-checked and verified the categorization, was also in place to avoid subjective bias. From the analysis, the author interpreted that the teacher participants believed the key to success in language learning was students’ active participation. Also, the analysis led the author to argue that the teachers’ beliefs were closely associated with the teachers’ own language learning experience (Dos Santos, 2016).

In terms of methodological considerations, conducting interviews allowed researchers to follow up any issue they deemed worth pursuing during the course of an interview. Therefore, more in-depth responses could be expected. However, unlike using questionnaires, the number of participants in studies using this qualitative approach is often limited. For example, beliefs of eight teachers were explored in Kim, who may cast doubts on representation and significance of the findings in which the beliefs held by this sample of participants may not necessarily represent the beliefs of a larger population.

However, using these two self-reported instruments (i.e. questionnaires and interviews) on teachers’ beliefs also needs caution. First, in terms of theoretical implications, Borg (2003) casts doubts on the usefulness of studying teachers’ beliefs without references about authentic classroom practices. Truly speaking, one of the many motivations in this research is to explain practices (Grotjahn, 1991) because there is a general impression that teachers’ beliefs could be a basis for actions (Borg, 2011) and that beliefs provide guidance for teachers’ decision making (Arnett and Turnbull, 2008). Therefore, studying the mental aspects of a teacher in an isolated manner may not be ideal.

Further, in terms of methodology, both self-reported instruments rely heavily upon the honesty of the teachers concerned. Researchers need to accept the limitation that the participants may not be speaking the truth when they report their beliefs. Even if the participants were honest, there would still be a risk that the teachers are not consciously aware of what they actually believe in. Also, the teachers’ accounts may not be entirely accurate. Basturkmen (2012) reviewed 13 doctoral theses, three journal articles and a book chapter, while searching four electronic databases. The author investigated the extent of correspondence between teachers’ stated beliefs and practices. The researcher found that such correspondence was mainly reported in studies involving experienced teachers and planned instruction. In other words, teachers’ stated beliefs are not always a “very reliable guide to the reality” (Pajares, 1992) perhaps especially in the case of novice teachers and in unplanned situations (Basturkmen *et al.*, 2004). In the light of this limitation of self-reported instruments, it may be important for researchers to look into real classroom situations for the sake of maximizing theoretical implications and triangulating the data in methodological terms.

## *2.2. Relationship between Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices*

As discussed, teachers’ beliefs could be a factor influencing classroom practices. But, there could also be incongruence between the teachers’ stated beliefs and classroom practices. The relationship between the two has been studied in the area of grammar teaching by Basturkmen *et al.* (2004). The researchers focused on teachers’ beliefs and practices related to incidental focus on form (i.e. drawing students’ attention to grammatical forms during communicative language activities). The authors investigated three male native English-speaking teachers in a private language school in Auckland, New Zealand, whose students had a mean age of 22 and came mostly (>75%) from such Asian countries as Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan. Two of the teachers had 11 and 15 years of

teaching experience, while one teacher had only one year of teaching experience. Also, all three of them had received related teacher training prior to the study.

The researchers used both self-report and observational methodologies. The self-reported instruments included in-depth interviews, cued responses scenarios (i.e. participants were given a hypothetical scenario to comment on), and stimulated recalls (i.e. participants were presented extracts of the records and transcriptions of their own lessons, and were asked to verbalize their thoughts during the captured moments in class). The self-reported data were analyzed qualitatively to identify recurring themes. For class observations, a researcher observed naturally occurring lessons as a non-participant. From the observational data, target practices (i.e. instances of incidental focus on form) were identified, classified and coded, before a frequency and duration count. The two sets of data (i.e. self-report and observational data) were analyzed independently by different researchers before being compared with each other.

Results were inconclusive as there seemed to be degrees of both congruence and incongruence. On one hand, for instance, the stated beliefs of one teacher concerning the importance of attending to target grammatical structures were reflected by the higher percentage of focus on form in the teacher's lessons. On the other hand, focus on form was often not prompted by misunderstandings in communication as stated in the self-report data by the teachers. The authors attempted to account for such incongruence by distinguishing technical (i.e. theoretical) and practical knowledge (Eraut, 1994). According to the authors, when the participants were asked about their beliefs without a concrete event, they might draw on their technical knowledge. In contrast, when the teachers were in the classroom, they had to resort more to their experience and understanding of teaching. Also, it was suggested that experience had a role to play in aligning technical and practical knowledge because a teacher participant with only one year of teaching experience showed the most incongruence in this study. This suggestion implies that teachers' beliefs might be subject to change as a result of experience.

Another example showing that teachers' beliefs may or may not be reflected in classroom practices is Farrell and Lim (2005). The authors conducted a case study that examined the stated beliefs and practices of two female primary school teachers of English in Singapore with 10 and 24 years of teaching experience. The focus of the study was also grammar teaching. Data collection for stated beliefs involved primarily interviews, while classroom practices were investigated through classroom observations, and examination of lesson plans, teaching materials and samples of marked students' writing.

Analysis showed that one teacher showed a "strong sense of convergence" (Farrell and Lim, 2005) between the stated beliefs and practices. For example, she expressed her beliefs in explicit grammar instruction, which were also observed in her classrooms as manifested in the explicit emphasis given to grammar. However, another teacher's beliefs only partially matched her practices. On one hand, she claimed that grammar teaching was best integrated with actual language use, such as speaking and writing tasks, but it was observed that she provided explicit grammar explanation and decontextualized grammar drilling. The researchers attributed the lack of correspondence between the stated beliefs and actual classroom practices to contextual factors such as the demand on time for communicative activities. Perhaps one limitation of this study was that the authors did not attempt to explain why there existed different degrees of correspondences between beliefs and practices between the two participants. Assuming both participants were under the influence of similar contextual factors because they were in the same school, the different degrees of correspondence between beliefs and practices implied some other factors in action in their relationship.

Although it appears that teachers' beliefs are not always reflected in classroom practices and that other factors could have a role to play, there is also some evidence that beliefs and practices could be congruent with each other. Kuzborska (2011) looked into the instruction of reading in the English for Academic Purposes program in a state university in Lithuania. Although all eight teacher participants had four years of experience in teaching English for Academic Purposes, none had any professional teacher training at all, except one who attended one-day training.

Similar to studies reviewed earlier, the author conducted observations, interviews and stimulated recalls in order to obtain data for the teachers' beliefs in teaching reading and their actual practices. From the analysis, the results showed that their beliefs and practices were matched through a skill-based approach emphasizing on vocabulary, reading aloud, translation and whole class discussion. Such an approach was not only adopted in classroom practices, but was also stated as their beliefs.

At the surface level, the findings of Kuzborska (2011) appear to be inconsistent with those of Basturkmen *et al.* (2004) for example. But if Basturkmen and his colleagues' explanation on different degrees of congruence (i.e. experienced teachers being more able to align technical and practical knowledge than less experienced teachers, hence experienced teachers' beliefs correspond more to their practices) is accepted, it may be interesting to note that the participants in Kuzborska's study did not receive teacher training (except one who had attended a one-day workshop). Therefore, it could be speculated that the teachers in Kuzborska (2011) may not possess much technical knowledge, specifically about how reading should be taught. As a result, there could be relatively little conflict between technical and practical knowledge, and hence their beliefs and practices were relatively more congruent.

In short, the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and classroom practices does not seem to be straightforward in that different levels of correspondence between beliefs and practices have been found in this research. Therefore, a caution is suggested in the course of investigating teachers' beliefs.

### 3. CHANGES IN TEACHERS' BELIEFS

Although teachers' beliefs and classroom practices may not always correspond to each other, it is still one of the motivations of studying teachers' beliefs to inform teacher education (Borg, 2006). Borg (2003) attempts to model teachers' beliefs, identifying various factors that interact with teachers' beliefs, or in his own term, teacher cognition. From Borg's conceptual framework, it could be seen that teachers' beliefs could be influenced by Schooling (i.e. the teachers' previous learning experience), Professional Coursework (i.e. pre- and / or in-service teacher training), Contextual Factors and Classroom Practice. Besides the relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices and that between beliefs and contextual factors as discussed in the previous sections, schooling and professional coursework could have an impact on teachers' beliefs. However, due to the limit of space and the scope of the present study, only the influence of professional courses on teachers' beliefs is discussed. Borg (2011) conducted a qualitative longitudinal study looking into the influence of an eight-week professional development course at diploma level on the teachers' beliefs of 6 female in-service teachers of English in the UK whose years of experience in teaching ranged from 2 to 10 years. Data were collected mainly by means of questionnaires, interviews, and examination of the teachers' coursework, such as lesson plans and reflective journals, as well as the feedback that course tutors provided. The qualitative data analysis was conducted at two levels, namely cyclical and summative. In line with the longitudinal nature of the study, each data collection phase was informed by the data (i.e. interview data and coursework) from the previous phase. For example, the researcher reviewed the interview transcript from Interview 2 and the most recent coursework and tutor comments while preparing for Interview 3 with the same teacher. Therefore, the issues discussed in each interview could be directly linked to evidence from the previous phase. In addition to the cyclical analysis, there was also a summative analysis in which the data were reviewed chronologically upon the completion of data collection. The analysis showed that the teachers did not go through "a deep and radical reversal in beliefs" (Borg, 2011). But the author suggested that three out of the six teachers demonstrated their progress from having limited awareness of their own beliefs to have a strong awareness of the beliefs underpinning their work. What might require caution is that the interviewers themselves could have prompted the participants to reflect more on their own beliefs than they would normally do during a professional development course. In other words, the suggested impact on the teachers' beliefs (i.e. becoming more aware of their own beliefs) was a result of the uncertainty of the interviewers. Unlike Borg (2011) and Urmston (2003) focused on 40 pre-service student teachers (31 female and 9 male) of English in Hong Kong at the undergraduate

level. The author used a questionnaire developed by Richards and Pennington (1998) to survey the attitudes of the participants toward the teaching of English in the city. There were in total 51 questions (excluding those asking for personal information) covering five areas: Language Use, Instructional Planning and Decision Making, Teaching Approach, Professional Relationships and Responsibilities, and Perceptions and Values. Most of the questions were on the Likert scale, while some of the questions were open-ended for short responses. The questionnaire was administered twice: once at the beginning of the participants' three-year undergraduate course, and second at the end. Statistical tests (i.e. dependent sample t-tests and chi-square tests) were performed to identify any possible change between the scores in the first and second administration of the questionnaire. Results found that the most significant change was observed in the area of teachers' role and responsibilities. However, the teachers' beliefs in teaching were less changed by three-year teacher training. The researcher suggested that the lack of change may be a result of the deep-rooted beliefs that were based on their own learning experience as a student. Therefore, the impact of a three-year course on beliefs formed by being in the education system for more than a decade was limited.

However, the stability of the beliefs of pre-service teachers was not observed consistently. Busch (2010) offered some evidence of change in beliefs of 381 pre-service teachers (82% female and 18% male) enrolled in a course in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) during their three-year teacher training in a state university in California. Busch used a similar methodology to Urmston (2003) i.e. pre- and post-course beliefs surveys on a Likert scale supplemented by open-ended questions on their beliefs in language learning in general. Results showed the change in beliefs in several areas such as the length of time and difficulty for acquisition, the role of cultures and error correction, and the importance of grammar. At the surface level, Busch (2010) results appear to be a conflict with Urmston (2003) in a manner that the former demonstrated a change in beliefs as a result of a professional course, while the latter showed a lack of change. However, it could be important to note that Busch administered the post-course questionnaire during the last week of the class, while Urmston (2003) conducted the survey in the participants' third year of studies (i.e. not immediately following any particular course). Therefore, the questionnaire in Busch (2010) was almost like a test of knowledge at the end of the term when the theory could still be relatively fresh in the participants' mind. It could be even better if there were delayed post-test(s) in order to investigate the impact of professional development courses. Indeed, all three studies reviewed in this section appear to suggest mixed results regarding the impact of professional courses on teachers' beliefs. The methodology used in all three studies also relied on self-reporting. It might have been interesting if lesson observations had been conducted, in order to explore the impact of the professional course on the classroom practices.

#### 4. SUMMARY

This literature review first reviewed studies that explored teachers' beliefs using various methodologies, such as questionnaires and interviews. The advantages and limitation of these approaches were briefly discussed. Then, the relationship between stated teachers' beliefs and classroom practices was examined. It appears that this relationship may not be straightforward since beliefs and practices may or may not be congruent. Also, studies on the influence of professional coursework on teachers' beliefs yield mixed results. Therefore, it was felt that a very clear picture of the relationship between professional course, teachers' beliefs and classroom practices was yet to emerge. Indeed, while much research has been done to explore the relationship between beliefs and practices, and that between professional courses and belief change, to the knowledge of the author of this study, a very limited work has been done specifically addressing these two relationships, i.e. the interaction among the three components: Professional development course, beliefs and practices. This potential interaction is important because it is an ultimate aim for teacher education to inform frontline practices. Also, the results from this line of research could be evaluative regarding how well teacher education serves as an agent to allow practical classroom application of research in second language acquisition and foreign language education. As a result, the main objective of the

present dissertation is exactly the interaction of professional development courses, teachers' beliefs and classroom practices.

**Funding:** This study received funding from Woosong University, South Korea.

**Competing Interests:** This literature review is a part of the author's doctoral dissertation.

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