

PRESERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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First received: 25 April 2016

Final proof received: 21 July 2016

Abstract

This paper explores ESL preservice teachers' beliefs regarding teaching English to young learners, and examines the interplay between their beliefs and instructional practices. Seventy ESL preservice teachers at a university in Malaysia participated in the study. Data is drawn from semi-structured interviews and lesson plan analysis. The results indicated that the preservice teachers' classroom practices did not often reflect their stated beliefs about young learners language learning. Although there was a strong consensus that English should be taught communicatively, the preservice teachers also employed structural based approach when teaching grammar. Contextual factors hindering this consistency were attributed to exam focused instruction and time constraints. Thus, this paper argues that reform in language teacher education need to address factors that hinder preservice teachers from implementing instructions which aligns with the theoretical beliefs espoused by their teacher training program.

Keywords : pre service teachers' beliefs, young learners, English language.

In the field of second language education, teaching is widely acknowledged as a cognitive activity and that beliefs are important concepts in understanding teachers' thought processes and instructional decisions in the classroom. Kagan (1992) defines teacher cognition as "pre-service or in-service teachers' self-reflections, beliefs and knowledge about teaching, students and content"(p.421). As Borg (2003) argues, "teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs" (p.81). Indeed, much of the literature on teacher education has reported that student teachers' experiences and beliefs which they held prior to entering preservice teacher education greatly influenced their teacher learning and instructional practices (Kiely & Askham, 2012; Borg, 2003; Johnson, 2009; Lortie, 1975). The pre-existing beliefs that student teachers bring with them prior to formal teacher education come mostly from their previous learning experiences especially in language classrooms. As language learners, they experience an 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975). They observe what their teachers do and say. Through their years of language classroom experience, they internalized many of the values, beliefs and practices of their teachers (Lortie, 1975). Lortie argued that this apprenticeship is largely responsible for the deep-seated beliefs that preservice teachers hold about teaching. As a result of the

apprenticeship period, student teachers may have a partial view of the teaching profession. Lortie (1975) points out that "what students learn about teaching, then, is intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytical; it is based on individual personalities rather than pedagogical principles" (p.62). Student teachers' preconceptions about how language should be learned are likely to influence their way of teaching.

Apart from formal schooling experience, students teachers' personal experiences are also known to have an impact on their construction of beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning. These personal experiences include informal learning experiences and life experiences. Johnson (1994) study examines the inter-relationship between preservice teachers' beliefs about second language teachers and teaching, and their perceptions of instructional practice during the practicum. She found that preservice teachers' instructional practices during their teaching practicum were based on their previous L2 learning experience with teachers, instructional activities and classroom organization. This finding is consistent with a few other related studies (eg. Borg, 2005; Kiely & Askham, 2012; Golombek, 1998; Numrich, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010; Mattheoudakis, 2007) highlighting the role of prior learning experiences and beliefs which may influence their teaching during teacher education programme and throughout their professional teaching profession.

In Asia-Pacific context, a number of studies have attempted to investigate the beliefs of preservice teachers in the EFL contexts (Mak, 2004; Pennington & Richards, 1997; Farrell, 1999; Peacock, 2001, Liu, 2005; Tang, Lee & Chun, 2012). Pennington & Richards (1997) investigated the extent to which novice English teachers in Hong Kong implemented the principles they were exposed to during their teacher education. The researchers found that the teachers coped with their instructional challenges by “abandoning much of what they were taught in their course and reorienting their teaching universe away from communicative to a more traditional transmission model” (p.175). In a similar vein, Mak (2004) looked at Hong Kong preservice teachers’ beliefs about communicative language teaching (CLT) and their classroom language choices. The results indicated that their pre-existing beliefs based on their learning experiences and cultural backgrounds were influential in shaping their perceptions of CLT. It is interesting to note while the student teachers agreed that English should be the language of instruction, most used their mother tongue with the weak learners during English lessons.

In Malaysia, a very small number of studies conducted tend to focus on teachers beliefs in teaching grammar (Zain, 2007; Ting, 2007). Zain (2007) study explored ESL primary school teachers’ beliefs about teaching grammar. She examined the link between their beliefs with classroom practices. Her study reported that teachers’ previous personal and professional experiences were found to have an influence on their classroom practices. In another study, Ting (2007) examined the beliefs and practices of ESL preservice teachers about grammar and grammar teaching at different stages of the teacher education programme. The findings reveal that exposure to and training in communicative language teaching during the teacher education program may not be effective in changing their classroom practices.

As there have been relatively little attention given to ESL preservice teachers beliefs and practices in implementing the communicative language teaching in Malaysian primary schools, the present study seeks to fill the knowledge gap left by a scarcity of research in this area. It is hoped that the insights gained from this study on preservice teachers’ beliefs can contribute to the improvement of teacher education curricula which may enhance beliefs that are supportive to the teaching approaches reflected in the national curriculum.

Context of the study

The issue of how to improve the standard of teaching of English at primary school level has been one of the most discussed in Malaysia. Learning English according to the Malaysian primary school curriculum should ensure that pupils would acquire

linguistic knowledge and skills through learner centred and activity-oriented teaching-learning strategies. Given that establishing basic English language skills in the primary classrooms is the main goal in the curriculum, it is important to examine the ESL primary teacher education development in the country. Without effective training, these teachers will not be able to implement the principles they were exposed to during their teacher education programme in their language classes.

Despite various initiatives taken by the Ministry of Education to enhance the standards of English language teaching in Malaysia, there is very little research available on the impact of such investment. Implementing teaching standards in schools need to begin with teacher education for which institutes of higher education and schools have important roles in shaping effective practices. It is often taken for granted that English language teacher education programs had an impact on changing teachers’ beliefs, understanding, knowledge and practices. However, research (Waters and Vilches, 2005) shown that this is often not the case.

Educational researchers recognised the need to examine ESL preservice teachers’ practices in order to raise the standard of teaching and learning (Borg, 2006; Peacock, 2001; Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010; Velez-Rendon, 2006). In recent years, researchers have started to focus on the cognitive components of how second language preservice teachers’ beliefs and decisions influence their classroom instructions (Richards & Nunan, 1990; Woods, 1996; Kiely & Askham, 2012). Teachers’ beliefs has been widely acknowledged in educational research to influence their classroom practices as beliefs, as a filter, are firmly coupled with prior expectations, and former practices and habits, and are thus hard to change within short time span (Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992; Weinstein, 1990). Upon embarking on teacher education program, most preservice teachers would have held certain preconceived ideas or beliefs about how best to approach English teaching. They often come into an English classroom conditioned by their previous educational experiences, cultural backgrounds, and social interaction, which may further shape their beliefs about English teaching (Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010; Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Since preservice teachers draw upon their unique sets of beliefs to language teaching, these beliefs are usually recognized as significant predictors for their actual teaching practices. Research focusing on the teaching practicum experience is essential because this activity has the potential to influence the ESL teacher educational initiatives at the beginning of new teachers’ profession. Thus, in order to develop more effective English language teaching instructions for learners at primary school level,

preservice teachers' beliefs and classroom practices need to be examined.

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to investigate the teaching and language learning beliefs held by pre-service ESL teachers at a local university in Malaysia and examines the congruence and incongruence of their beliefs with classroom practices. This study adopted a mixed mode approach to research. The first phase of the study started with a survey in which quantitative data were first collected through a questionnaire. The survey was aimed to obtain generalizable conclusions about teaching and language learning beliefs of these pre-service teachers. In the second phase of data collection, four pre-service teachers who completed the questionnaire were randomly selected and interviewed with the purpose of finding out more information about the reasons which influenced their teaching beliefs and practices. A further check on the respondents teaching practices was made by reviewing their lesson plans implemented during their practicum.

This study took place at a local university where the Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (B.Ed.TESL) program is being offered. It is a four-year program. The students undergo their teaching practicum in the fourth year for 12 weeks. The practicum allows students to experience teaching in real situation. It is an important component of teacher education. Its main function is to provide student teachers with the opportunity to develop teaching competencies in a variety of instructional contexts, and at different levels, under the guidance and supervision of cooperating teachers and of the university lecturers.

As the focus of this study is to look at the correspondence between preservice teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices, the following research questions were addressed: 1). What core beliefs do pre-service ESL teachers hold about the process of teaching and learning English in primary schools? Are these beliefs consistent with accepted learning principles or teaching approaches? 2). To what extent do the pre-service teachers' beliefs consistent with their instructional practices?

Participants

Convenience sampling were used to select participants based on the availability of respondents. Data were collected during the preservice teachers' teaching practicum. The participants of the survey include 70 pre-service ESL teachers at a local university in Malaysia. Thirty seven male and 33 female pre-service teachers responded to the survey.

Questionnaire

The current study primarily involved a survey, comprised of a set of questionnaire concerning pre-service teacher's beliefs. Although data obtained from a questionnaire survey only provide indirect evidence of teacher's thoughts, they can still serve to broaden our understanding of the role of beliefs and their relation to decision making in terms of teaching (Richards, 1998). The survey used in this study, through its standardized and structured design, was aimed at identifying beliefs about the process of teaching and learning English in primary schools among pre-service teachers at a local university in Malaysia.

In the questionnaire, items were designed to probe the pre-service teachers instructional practices in teaching English to primary pupils. The questionnaire is divided into four sections, focusing on respondents' background information, participants' beliefs about teaching English, instructional practices and influential factors on instructional decision. This research instrument was developed by the researcher based on available theories related to teachers' beliefs. In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to assess their beliefs about teaching English on a four point Likert scale, by indicating the extent to which they agreed with each statement using (1) SD= strongly disagree, (2) D= disagree, (3) A=agree and (4) SA= strongly agree. The internal consistency reliability was calculated for the respondents' response to the questionnaire. A Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.78 was obtained, which indicated the respondents responded to the items with a relatively high level of consistency.

Interviews

The main purpose of the interviews was to engage in a dialogue with the preservice teachers to elicit their beliefs about teaching and learning as well as their classroom practices. The interview protocol was developed based on relevant literature. Questions asked include the participants' general background, their English learning experience, their ideal English teachers, their approach to English teaching and influence of their second language teacher education on their instructional practices. The data gave insights into the participants' beliefs about language learning and teaching as learners who went through the apprenticeship of observations (Lortie, 1975) before they themselves had a chance to teach.

Four pre-service teachers were chosen by using the information obtained from the survey. Two male and two female student teachers participated in the interviews. The participants' names were changed for the protection of their identities. They are, hereafter, named as T1, T2, T3 and T4. Table 1 summarizes their background including academic performance and language proficiency.

Table 1. Background of participants

	T1	T2	T3	T4
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male
Language Proficiency	Upper intermediate	Upper intermediate	Upper intermediate	Upper intermediate
Academic performance	Good	Good	Good	Good

The interview was a semi-structured conversation. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes with each participant. A total of 240 minutes of interview sessions were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The goal was to determine whether there are discrepancies among the respondents regarding their beliefs and actual classroom practices. The interview data were then transcribed for interpretation of emergent patterns and themes. The reliability of the data analysis was enhanced by having two independent data coders as a check for inter-coder reliability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There were two types of findings, quantitative data derived from survey questionnaire and qualitative data from the interviews and lesson plans. Presented in this section are the results obtained from the Likert-style items questionnaire. On a scale from 1 to 4 (1=Strongly disagree and 4= Strongly agree) we calculated the top ten beliefs held by the ESL pre-service primary teachers. Descriptive statistics are presented in tables and the most relevant findings are highlighted.

Table 2. ESL Pre-service teachers beliefs

Item	Mean	Std Dev	Frequency %			
			1	2	3	4
1. Every child learns English with different learning styles	4.63	0.54	0	3.8	28.2	67.9
2. Interesting classes can speed up students' English process	4.63	0.56	0	2.6	32.1	65.4
3. The earlier English is taught to children the better the results	4.51	0.60	0	5.1	38.5	56.4
4. It is important for primary school children to read and write in English.	4.50	0.70	0	9.0	32.1	59.0
5. Children can learn English better if they fully understand the content of the lesson.	4.44	0.61	0	6.4	43.6	50.0
6. Children can learn better when they are using English to do activities.	4.44	0.63	1.3	3.8	44.9	50.0
7. It is important to teach primary school children English listening and speaking skills.	4.42	0.61	0	6.4	44.9	48.7
8. Singing and role-playing are appropriate English teaching activities.	4.38	0.75	1.3	6.4	44.9	47.4
9. Integrating games into English instruction can facilitate children's learning.	4.24	0.65	1.3	7.7	56.4	34.6
10. Multiple assessments should be implemented to evaluate students' English performance in the classroom.	4.18	0.67	1.3	10.3	55.1	33.3

* Value based on 4 point likert scale: 1= Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly agree

Table 2 showed the mean and frequency of the preservice teachers' beliefs in teaching English to primary school learners. Analysis of the data showed that the 96.1 % (m=4.63) of the respondents of our survey believed that "interesting classes can facilitate English learning process". 97.5 % (m=4.63) of the respondents believed that "every child learns English with different learning styles and 94.9 % (m=4.51) stated that "the earlier English is taught to children the better the results. These preservice teachers' beliefs with regard to primary pupils language learning are in accord with the literature on young learners' second language development (Moon, 2000; Vale & Feunteun, 2003 & Liao, 2007).

They also held strong beliefs with regards to communicative language teaching principles. These beliefs are evident in their agreement with statements such as "Children can learn better when they are using English to do activities" 94.9 %(m=4.44), "integrate games into English instruction" 91 %(m=4.24), and "singing and role=playing are appropriate English teaching activities" 92.3 %(m=4.38).

As for the top ten instructional practices which the respondents reported to implement in the English language classrooms in Malaysian primary schools, findings in Table 3 showed that 99.1% (m = 3.61) of the respondents conducted teaching and learning activities that focused on helping students to achieve the learning outcomes stated in the

primary school syllabus. It is interesting to note that 95.8% (m = 3.42) of the respondents reported that they used both Malay and English in translating during classroom talk and 94.4 % (m =3.41) of them used sentence drilling activities to practice

grammar rules. This finding corresponds with Ali's (2003) study which reported that the use of Malay and pattern drillings are common practices among English language teachers in primary schools.

Table 3. ESL Pre-service teachers instructional practices at primary school

Item	Mean*	Std dev	Frequency %			
			1	2	3	4
1. Activities are focused on helping students to achieve the learning outcomes stated in national curriculum syllabus.	3.61	0.51	0	0.9	37.2	61.9
2. Use both Malay and English & translating during classroom talk	3.42	0.57	0	4.2	49.3	46.5
3. Use sentence drilling activities to practice grammar rules	3.41	0.60	0	5.6	47.9	46.5
4. Instruction includes the active participation of students.	3.39	0.51	0	0.9	59.1	40.0
5. Use a variety of reading activities to make language and content more accessible.	3.19	0.63	0	10.7	61.9	27.4
6. Use a variety of writing activities to develop pupils writing skills	3.17	0.65	0	10.2	60.9	28.8
7. Use cooperative group learning	3.18	0.60	0	10.7	60.5	28.8
8. Make use of a variety of grouping techniques.	3.14	0.59	0	11.2	63.3	25.6
9. Carry out communicative activities such as role plays and simulations to promote speaking skills.	2.97	0.70	0.9	14.9	70.2	14.6
10. Carry out listening activities in the classroom	2.74	0.73	0.5	35.8	52.6	11.2

* Value based on 4 point Likert scale: 1= Not at all 2=Somewhat 3=Moderately 4=A lot

Eventhough the English curriculum emphasizes on the development of literacy skills, only 89.3 % (m=3.19) of the respondents reported they used a variety of reading activities to make language and content more accessible and 89.7 % (m=3.17) of them carried out a variety of writing activities to develop pupils writing skills.

From Table 3, we could see that the respondents stated that they employed instructional practices which involved learners' active participation and group work. However, in terms of carrying out oral communication and listening activities, the results indicated that 84.8 % (m=2.97) of the respondents taught speaking skills and only 63.8 % (2.74) taught listening skills in the English classrooms at the primary schools. This finding is not surprising as Ali (2003) points out that listening skill had been neglected in primary schools since this skill was not tested in the examinations.

Qualitative Data

The purpose of this qualitative part was to verify information given in the questionnaires to discover reasons for their responses and to interpret ways in which their beliefs influenced their practice when teaching. Participants interview data were transcribed and coded. In addition, the respondents' lesson plans were also analysed to verify their interview data. Two main categories of teaching and learning beliefs were identified in the analysis: 1) Overview of the pre-service teachers' language

learning experience 2) Link between language learning experience and approach to teaching.

Overview of the pre-service teachers' language learning experience

Studies (Borg, 2003; Peacock, 2001; Farrell & Lim, 2005) have indicated that the way teachers learned second language (L2) as students seemed to influence their beliefs about language teaching. Thus, it is safe to assume that what pre-service teachers observed and experienced in their previous English classrooms could have an influence on their perceptions about language learning and teaching.

Data from the interviews provided insights on what could have influenced the pre-service teachers beliefs about language teaching and learning. In general, all four of the pre-service teachers started learning English at the national primary school. Most of them reported that they enjoyed learning English through singing English songs, reading story books and watching English television programmes.

Thinking back on her own experiences in learning English, T2 recalled that she enjoyed learning English very much because her English teachers used big books, games and songs to make her English lessons interesting.

T2: *Ok! Big Books! I was exposed to big books when I was in primary school. They show us big books...They seldom use puppet, but they use stick puppet for few times. Primary school*

teachers are very good. They use songs. Songs and then games.

Like T2, T3 shared similar language learning experience in English.

T3: *Okay, my teacher is a very good teacher for me. Umm, I still remember her, Mrs. Chew. Err, she helped me a lot by creating a lot err, fun activities. Lots of games, singing English songs and sometimes, she gives us err, presents for doing well in English.*

In contrast, the English classes that the other two pre-service teachers recalled having at their respective primary schools tend to focus on grammatical accuracy rather than fluency. They all had clear memory of having to memorize English grammar rules using substitution tables and structure drills. T1 relates her primary school experience in learning prepositions through drilling method. She gave an example of how she was able to memorize the grammar rules this way. The following quote from the interview data illustrates her belief.

T1: *Ok, they will show you table. It's like preposition, they will show you substitution table. Then they show you pictures. They draw the table on the spot. Yeah.. This really help you to remember better.*

T4 has the same kind of learning experience. He commented on how he found English lessons boring during her primary school as he had to memorize grammar rules using substitution tables.

T4: *I don't really remember my teachers during my primary school. Ohh, yeah, I have one. She gave me a lot of things to memorize. Past tense, present tense, all these in tables forms.. so that I can memorize it. That's why in my primary school, I thought that English was boring, because.... I need to memorize a lot of things.*

Link between beliefs and teaching approaches

Research in second language education has indicated that teachers' beliefs greatly impact their instructional practices in the classroom (Farrell & Lim, 2005; Borg, 2003; Golombek, 1998). Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver and Thwaite (2001) made observation that teachers' classroom work is highly influenced by their prior experiences as learners from their early childhood.

After having explored the pre-service teachers' language learning beliefs, the influence of those beliefs on their teaching during practicum were investigated. Based on the interview data and lesson plans, we examined the respondents stated beliefs with what their reported classroom practices to look for evidence of convergence or divergence between the two.

The analysis of the interview data and lesson plans reveals that the four pre-service teachers' teaching approaches were influenced by their beliefs

about language learning to a certain extent. In general, they seemed to rely on their own L2 learning experiences and previous English language teachers way of teaching when conducting English lessons. The main themes emerged from the qualitative data namely, (1) focus on form (2) fun activities and (3) use of mother tongue.

Focus on form (Audio lingual method)

Personal experience in learning English seemed to influence many of these preservice teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning. Beliefs about grammar instruction appeared to affect the preservice teachers' focus on form.

Although many of these preservice teachers reported that they adopt a communicative perspective, they still strongly believe that grammar is central to learning English as a second language. They taught grammar in their classes extensively and were concerned about drilling sentence structures rather than practising communication skills. They argue that direct grammar teaching would result in more accurate language use. This finding seems to be consistent with the survey results where third most frequently employed practices among them is sentence drilling activities.

From the interview data, one of the pre-service teachers expressed preference for using grammar drills and substitution tables in teaching grammar. The respondent believed that teaching of grammar is important to enable learners to use grammar structures accurately. This belief came from her previous learning experience where her English teachers used drilling and substitution tables in teaching grammatical structure. She believed that she benefited from the utilization of drills and tables in learning grammar rules during her school days.

For T1, we found a strong link between her stated beliefs and instructional practices she carried out during her teaching practicum. Having experienced learning English through audio lingual method, she firmly believes that her students would benefit from drilling and using grammar substitution tables.

Following quote taken from the interview illustrates this belief.

T1: *I was sent to a Chinese medium school ...I learnt English based on this... drilling, repetition. I remember the teacher would give us a sentence and we have to copy that. Like, for ten times, twenty times. So for now, I still believe that's the best way to teach the weak learner, not for the good learner.*

On the other hand, T2 who had a more communicative based language learning which involved the use of big books and language games, had this to say regarding the use of drilling and grammar substitution tables.

T2: *The weak students, they need to start with something they used to. So, I'll stress on*

repetition, drilling... Once they understand it, I'll only like explain to them the rule... So.. for weak students, I believe in drilling.

This finding is in line with Ting (2007) study on the beliefs and practices of preservice teachers in Malaysian tertiary institution concerning grammar teaching reported that majority of the respondents used deductive approach to teach grammar. Ali (2003) points out that grammar was taught using rote learning and pattern drillings in primary ESL classroom for examination purposes.

Fun activities

In general, the findings show that all four pre-service teachers seem to be very supportive of their pupils' learning of English. A practice which the respondents seem to favour is employing fun activities in their classrooms. They shared similar beliefs with regard to the importance of carrying out activities like games, role plays, singing and group work activities in their English classroom. This view is consistent with results from the survey conducted which showed that majority of the primary preservice teachers believed in employing active participation activities in their classroom. Ali (2003) points out that "the KBSR English language curriculum, in principle attempts to ensure that the pupils would acquire knowledge and skills through direct experience in learning the language skills" (p.5).

T3 and T4 focused on oral skills and conducted a lot of interactive activities in their language classrooms. This classroom practices are in contrast to what T4 experienced as language learners. He believed that learning English should be fun. The following comments illustrate his beliefs clearly. T4 expresses his prior experience as follows:

T4: *For me, based on my experience, the best way to learn English is like...Is not grammar based. I do not really agree on that. Of course grammar based is important. It shouldn't be a focus; shouldn't be a major part of the learning English. Learning English should be fun.*

This view is also shared by T3.

T3: *So, and I get them involved with the games, activities and I asked them how they want me to teach them. And of course, they say, "Teacher, we want more games, we want to make it fun."*

These quotes showed that the respondents were aware of the importance of fun element in teaching young learners. In general, the preservice teachers' teaching methods and techniques employed in their English classroom are basically in accord with their previous experiences as language learners in primary schools.

The pre-service teachers beliefs about children's English development appear to be

generally consistent with the literature on children's second language learning (Moon, 2000; Vale & Feunteun, 2003). Their beliefs seem compatible with some underlying teaching principles of communicative language teaching. They believe that using games, action songs and role plays in the language classroom can facilitate young learners language development.

Use of mother tongue

Apart from the preservice teachers' language learning experiences, their teacher education programme is believed to have an impact on their beliefs and classroom practices. Johnson (2009) points out that teachers tend to follow the instructional approaches that they were exposed to during their preservice training or their own language learning experiences.

The preservice teachers in this study appeared to have problems in applying teaching principles which they have learned in their teacher education course. They seemed to struggle with regard to the use of translation method in their classrooms. The preservice teachers reported the tensions they felt between their desire to use only English in the classrooms and to ensure their low proficiency learners understand their instructions.

Although they were aware of the drawbacks of using the L1 in the English classroom, their lack of experience in dealing with low English proficiency learners' had led them to fall back on the use of L1. They employed Bahasa Malaysia as a strategy for ensuring low proficiency learners' understanding of lesson materials. T2 and T3 believes that using MT could help weak learners to understand better. On the other hand, T1 used MT only when deemed necessary. T2 had this to say regarding the use of mother tongue in English language classes.

T2: *But for weaker students, I believe that direct translation method is still the best. Because no matter how simple I try to break the instruction or the words, they couldn't understand it.*

T2 employed the use of L1 in terms of giving instructions and making his students understand the lesson better.

T2: *I think that if I insist on using English... they end up either some understand and some don't. The one that don't understand, they'll just keep quiet. You'll never know it. When you tell that in Bahasa Melayu, I think, all of them can understand Melayu, at least they'll can get something of it.*

As for T1, she had to compromise her belief that only English should be spoken in English classes by making allowances for the use of L1 to weak learners.

T1: *In teaching English; my principle is always... You shouldn't use grammar translation method. Ok. Once I went to the school, I got to*

know that most of the kids they really can't speak English. Ok, I have to modify my approach includes once in a while, not all the time. It's like 10 to 20 percent... So that they can understand what am I saying.

Another possible reason for the preservice teachers' use of the mother tongue could be due to their sense of obligation to keep students on task and maintain efficiency in covering the prescribed syllabus. As Ali (2003) points out "the easiest way to make the pupils understand what they wanted the pupils to learn was through the translation method. Economy of time was the main factor" (p.4).

Most of the preservice teachers resorted to the use of L1 as a means of enabling pupils to understand instructions and lesson materials without wasting much time. They said that they use the translation method with the weaker learners so as to facilitate the flow of instruction and to make sure the learners could follow the lesson.

It can be said that there was a slightly ambivalent attitude towards the use of the learners' L1 in English language teaching. Most of the respondents agreed that the use of L1 had potential benefits but they also believe that it should be kept to a minimum.

T3: *So, whatever I teach them, I'll make sure they understand and I'll like explain it even though I cannot err, like my lecturers, they didn't allow us to speak in Bahasa Melayu in, in my classroom. But still, I am going to speak Bahasa Melayu if they still don't understand what I, whatever I said. If, if the teacher speaks English all the time and they don't understand, then what is the point of learning.*

Analysis of Teaching Practicum implemented lesson plans

In order to examine the preservice teachers instructional practices during their practicum, four randomly selected lesson plans implemented in their teaching practicum from each subject were reviewed by two independent raters. In table 4, lesson plans from the participants portfolio collected from their practicum was analysed to identify distinctive features of lessons implemented. The features included teaching procedures adopted and methodological approaches used. An inter rater agreement of 100% was obtained.

From the analysis, the most dominant teaching approach adopted by the four preservice teachers was a mixed of audio-lingual and communicative approaches. Characteristics of communicative approach observed in the lesson plans included the use of games, group work, role plays and the use of authentic materials. As for audio-lingual method, activities such as oral repetition of language items, sentence structures and pattern drill exercises were also identified in their lesson plans. When asked for reasons as to why they adopted a mix of audio-lingual and communicative approach in their classroom practices, the preservice teachers stated the age and low level proficiency of the learners as main factors influencing their teaching approach. T1 and T2 cited factors such as difficulty in classroom management and covering the syllabus for examination purposes affecting their decisions in implementating of their lessons.

Table 4. Teaching approaches shown in participants' lesson planning

	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4
T1	Rule-based	Mainly communicative with a bit of rule based	Mainly communicative with a bit of rule based	Rule-based
T2	Mainly communicative with a bit of rule based	Rule-based	Mainly communicative with a bit of rule based	Rule-based
T3	Mainly communicative with a bit of rule based	Communicative	Communicative	Communicative
T4	Communicative	Mainly communicative with a bit of rule based	Communicative	Communicative

CONCLUSION

It is widely claimed that what pre-service teachers practices in their classroom is largely influenced by their beliefs of teaching and learning. This study sets out to examine pre-service teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning at primary school level and the extent to which their beliefs are manifested in their classroom practices.

The findings shown in this study indicated that the preservice teachers' practices in their classroom did not often reflect their stated beliefs about young learners' language learning. The survey and interview data revealed that the preservice teachers

seem to adopt an eclectic approach towards teaching their young learners. They appear to lean towards communicative language teaching (CLT) in their classroom practices as demonstrated when they use games, action songs and role plays to promote learners' active participation. These practices seemed to align with the philosophy of the current Malaysian English language curriculum for primary school level.

On the other hand, they also adopt a structural based approach towards teaching grammar where accuracy is the main focus. This could be due to the over emphasis on examination in the Malaysian

education system. As Yamat, Fisher & Rich (2014) points out that the English examination at the primary level tend to focus on “accuracy in literacy skills, which is reflected by the structured examination questions”. Unfortunately, listening and speaking skills were given little attention. These findings are also similar with Pennington and Richards (1997) study, where the preservice teachers seem to have difficulties in applying the teaching principles they had learned in their teacher education program in their classroom practices. They reported that novice ESL teachers in Hong Kong shifts their focus from teaching language communicatively towards product oriented teaching practices to cope with their instructional contexts.

The inconsistency between the preservice teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices is not unexpected. What caused these preservice teachers to shift their orientation from communicative teaching principles and practices towards structural based approach? Earlier studies (Peacock, 2001; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Johnson, 2009; Ogilvie & Dunn, 2010) have shown that the complexities of contextual factors such as tight schedule and lack of support can hinder preservice teachers' abilities to attend to their beliefs and provide instruction which aligns with the theoretical beliefs of their teacher training program.

This study reveals that we need to take the context of teaching practicum into consideration when we examine preservice teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. By gaining insights on preservice teachers' beliefs, teacher educators may use these findings to better design teacher training programs so as to address the needs of preservice teachers. It has been argued that teacher education programs should facilitate teacher trainees to relate their content knowledge to teaching practice and provide them with opportunities to reflect on their experience of learning to teach. As Liu and Wang (2014) rightly points out “ teachers' belief play an influential role in the decisions they make in classroom teaching when they enter the profession, changing student teachers' beliefs is a task teacher educators need to handle”.

It seems reasonable to suggest that pre-service teachers' beliefs should be made explicit through training of their reflective skills in the teacher education program so that they will be more aware of their beliefs and able to be more critical of their repertoire of teaching principles and strategies. Pre-service teachers are more likely to change when they are shown that a discrepancy exists between what they would ideally like to do and what they actually do. Thus, they should be trained to acknowledge how their beliefs and contextual factors contribute to their instructional practices. By providing pre-service teachers with opportunity to reflect on their beliefs, we can facilitate their professional development.

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