

TEACHERS' BELIEFS ON THE POLICY OF ELT IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The policy of ELT in Indonesia has attracted so much attention from those working in the field of English language teaching. This is because the policy has been changed from time to time and the changes of the policy always require English teachers to keep adapting their teaching practices to comply with the new policy. In theory when English teachers believe in the importance and benefits of the new policy they are likely to be willing to implement the policy in the classroom level. However when the teachers have no beliefs in the importance of the policy it is unlikely that they are going to bring the new changes in their teaching practices. Therefore it is important to conduct a study in the field of teachers' beliefs as it is teachers who can bring the policy down into the classroom level. This paper reports the findings of a small study on English teachers' perceptions about the policy of ELT in Indonesia. This study has been conducted in Pekalongan University by involving 37 preservice English teachers who were required to complete a questionnaire. The findings suggest that these pre-service English teachers have various beliefs regarding the new policy of ELT in Indonesia which results in different concerns related to the practices of English teaching.

Keywords: teachers' beliefs, policy, ELT

Introduction

Every teacher in their own educational setting holds beliefs about teaching and learning. Teachers beliefs has been defined by Borg (2001, p.186) as "a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour". This definition suggests that teachers' beliefs lead to teachers' way of thinking and also actions. In this way, the word beliefs have often been used interchangeably with the word "perspectives" which is defined as "an interrelated set of beliefs and

intention that gives directions and justifications to someone's action" (Thomas, 2013, p. 32).

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), teachers' beliefs have frequently been linked to the enactment of the policy of English teaching. The policy is believed to be well implemented when the teachers hold strong beliefs about the importance of the policy. However when the teachers do not perceive the policy positively it seems that the policy is hard to bring to the classroom level. Therefore when a new policy in ELT is introduced it is always important to study how teachers feel and perceive about it.

This is to find out the how the teachers proceed with the implementation of the curriculum in their classrooms.

Teachers' beliefs have been studied in many educational settings as what teachers believe affect so much of what they practice in the classrooms (Pajares, 1992; Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001; Ročāne, 2015; Thomas 2013). As an example, in the implementation of the 2013 curriculum in Indonesia, Agustina (2017) found that English teachers with strong beliefs about learner autonomy supported the use of scientific approach and independent learning in their teaching practices. The teachers were willing to reduce their dominance in the class and they agreed to leave what so called teacher-centred approach. The teachers took a new role as a facilitator and provided chances for students to search the materials from the internet independently. After the teachers introduced a particular text as a main topic for learning, the students independently discussed the examples of the texts, the characteristics of the texts, the generic structures, and language features of the texts with their friends. The results were then presented in front of the class and students were facilitated by the teachers to make the conclusion about what had been learnt in that day. On the contrary, those who did

not believe with the feasibility of the 2013 curriculum were not able to implement the scientific approach and independent learning. They thought that the curriculum was not applicable to their teaching contexts. Thus the policy did not really touch the classroom levels. In this example, it is clear that how teachers perceived a particular policy affected how they might go with that policy.

These days, teachers' beliefs still become an area of research which is important to explore and study. Thus the writer conducted a small study on the pre service English teachers' beliefs about the policy of ELT in Indonesia. This paper reports the findings of this small study and presents further discussion on the main findings.

Methodology

This study used a survey to collect the data. The main instrument used was a questionnaire with several open-ended-questions. The study was conducted by involving 37 preservice English teachers in English Language Education Department of Pekalongan University Indonesia who were required to complete the questionnaires with their own words. The study was conducted in March to May 2019. The data were analysed descriptively by reading and coding the preservice teachers' answers. The data were then categorized into several sub themes and themes. At

the end the data were presented descriptively.

Discussion

The findings of the study suggest that preservice teachers had various beliefs about the policy of ELT in Indonesia. If in Agustina's study in 2017 the findings showed that the main concerns of the teachers were on the use of scientific approach and a more independent learning activity in English classrooms, the findings of the current study were quite different. Although the curriculum used in Indonesia was still the 2013 curriculum, the teachers concerns were mainly on the omission of the English lesson in elementary schools.

The followings are some of the teachers' beliefs about the policy of ELT in Indonesia.

a. English teaching is important

All of the preservice teachers in this study believed that English is an important subject to be taught to the students. They recognized that English has been an important international language and thus it must be taught in Indonesian schools. They also had the beliefs that English teaching should help the Indonesian students to master English skills. One of the respondents wrote:

“I think in Indonesia, policy on teaching English is one of the important things because English is also one of the lessons that are examined in the National Examination. Besides English language is one of the international languages in the world. So the policy of the English teaching is too influential in English teaching and learning. Especially in elementary school, Junior High School and Senior High Schools, the curriculum and the method [of teaching] have to develop or increase the students' ability to learn English language”. [Respondent 22]

The answer above suggested that the respondent believed in the importance of teaching English as an international language which is also an important subject in the national examination. The respondent also believed in the needs for the curriculum designed by the government and the teaching methods used by the teachers to enable

students to improve their mastery of English.

Another respondent wrote:

“In the policy on the English teaching in Indonesia, English has become a lingua franca [international language] which aims to make students globally competitive thus student must be able to acquire the competency in the language (English)”. [Respondent 2]

The answer above similarly described the respondent’s view that the students in Indonesia were required to have a good mastery of English. This view calls for a more responsibility for the students to gain more competence in English and similarly English teachers would get more responsibility to help students master English. This may relate to the respondent’s perceptions that the students would live and work in a competitive global society.

Based on the examples of the preservice teachers’ beliefs above, it could be concluded that the preservice teachers believed in the importance of English teaching especially as

English is used in the international communication and would help students to be more competitive in the global society.

b. English should not be omitted in Elementary Schools

The study also found that the preservice teachers believed in the need of English teaching in the Elementary schools. Most of the teachers disagreed with the omission of the English subject in the elementary schools as described in the following statements:

“I disagree with the policy that limiting English subject in elementary school because I think the children need to be prepared to learn foreign language for their own benefits too. Foreign Languages are important in the future.” [Respondent 3]

The statement above suggests that the preservice teacher above was aware of the future needs for the students to master foreign languages. This preservice teacher was then disagreed with the government’s policy in omitting the English subjects

in the elementary schools as this teacher believed that children need to be equipped with skills to master a foreign language like English.

Another respondent also expressed the disagreement with the omission of English:

“The government just focuses on *Bahasa Indonesia* because it is regarded as the mother tongue. So they omit English learning materials especially in Elementary School. About the policy I disagree about it because as we know English is international language and it should be taught at least when we are at Elementary Schools. So in middle school we have basic competence about English.” [Respondent 4]

The statements above reflected the preservice teacher's beliefs on the need to start the English teaching in the early educational level so that students could obtain the basic knowledge of English before entering high schools.

The two answers above represented most of the respondents' views about the importance of keeping English subject in Elementary schools. Others respondents also stated their objection about the omission of English due to their concerns that the students would face difficulties when they learnt English without getting the introduction in elementary schools. They also worried that students would get confusion in learning English when they entered high schools. Some also had the concerns that English teachers in high schools would get more burden in teaching as they had to teach basic English to students while at the same time they had to follow the curriculum in which the materials may be more advanced than the basic English.

c. The policy of ELT in Indonesia is the teachers' guide

While most respondents expressed their disagreement on some aspects of the policy of ELT in Indonesia, they still believed that the policy would remain to be their guidelines in teaching

English. One of them described:

“The policy on the English teaching is like rules to guide the teachers in learning process so it can be easy to know what the goal in each learning process”. [Respondent 9]

Based on the answer above, it could be concluded that teachers perceived the policy as their guide in their teaching practices. Despite many other influential factors which affected the actual teaching practices, this statement suggested that the preservice teachers were willing to follow the mandate of the government.

d. The policy of ELT in Indonesia needs revisions

Apart from agreeing and disagreeing with the government policy, the preservice teachers suggested some revisions on the current ELT policy in Indonesia. These teachers expressed some of their beliefs that the policy should be made appropriate to the need of teachers and students in each of educational context especially with the demands of the global era.

One of the preservice teachers wrote:

“In the policy on the English teaching in Indonesia, there is a need for various corrections and improvements to policy in teaching of English; on what can be translated properly and correctly in schools” [Respondent 5]

This answer implied that there was a mismatch between the policy and the understanding of the teachers at schools. Therefore this particular teacher expected a betterment of the policy which may be in the form of more guidance on how to put the policy into the real classroom practices.

Another teacher shared similar idea:

In my opinion the policy on the English teaching in Indonesia needs more consideration in certain parts especially in the curriculum. [The] government wants a better curriculum for Indonesia but the

implementation also needs clearer guidance and preparation such as for the teacher, students and others. The curriculum has to cover the needs for all people in Indonesia such as for those in beach area, in mountain area, etc. [Respondent 18]

Based on the answer above, the preservice teacher believed that in introducing the new policy on ELT, it was necessary to prepare the teachers and students so that they were ready to accept and implement it. Besides, this preservice teacher also held the belief on the importance to accommodate the needs of students with different background.

Some other respondents suggested that English could still be put as a local content or introduced as one of extracurricular subjects in elementary schools rather than omitting it. Some of them were aware that there was parental expectation that students in elementary schools or even kindergarten got English subject. Thus,

they believed that English could still be taught even in a small portion. In short, the preservice teachers in this study had some suggestions to address the omission of English in Elementary schools.

Conclusion

The findings of the study had signalled that the preservice teachers in English Education Department in Pekalongan University had various beliefs about the ELT policy in Indonesia. In general they all agreed and believed that English teaching in Indonesian schools is important. They believed in the importance of mastering English as an international language especially as the students would live in a competitive global community. Holding these beliefs made the teachers have various concerns related to the practices of implementing the policy. Although they believed that the policy still became their guide in teaching, but they disagreed with some aspects of the policy like the omission of English in Elementary schools. Thus they suggested some alternatives to address this

problem like designing English as a local content or inserting English as an extracurricular subject. With these various beliefs and understanding about the policy of ELT in Indonesia, it seems that more training and workshop in implementing the policy of ELT are needed by preservice English teachers so that they have less worry or concerns about the policy. Without having a lot of concerns about the policy, preservice English teachers may develop more positive perceptions about the policy and this is likely to be a good start for those who will implement the policy in the classroom level.

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