

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF BELIEFS ABOUT
LANGUAGE LEARNING OF PRE SERVICE TEACHER
TRAINEES' IN A TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTE**

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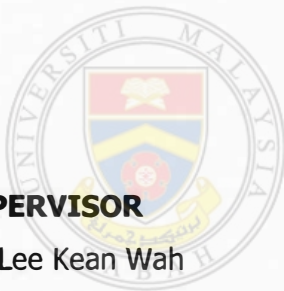
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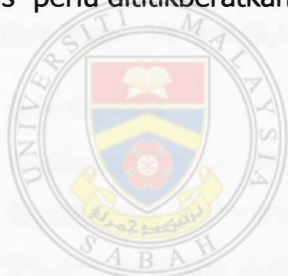
ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG PRE SERVICE TEACHER TRAINEES' IN A TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTE

The main objective of this study is to investigate the language learning beliefs and explore the extent of change in language learning beliefs of a group pre service teacher trainees' of Mathematics and Science options with an elective paper in English language in a teacher training institute in Sabah. The study comprised of two phases namely the quantitative phase and the exploratory practice phase. The Horwitz (1987) Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was used to collect the data for the quantitative phase at the beginning of the English language elective course and at the end of the course after their 12 week teaching practice phase. A focus group interview and the teacher trainees' teaching practice reflective journals were the primary data source for the exploratory phase of the study. Data analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics in the quantitative phase showed significant changes in only three of the thirty four items in the category of the difficulty of language learning and learning and communications strategies. Most of the belief items in the inventory appeared to be stable over time. These three items with items in the inventory which were further explored in the exploratory phase also indicated very minimal change/development in the course of their training. The results from both the quantitative and the exploratory phase suggest the need for language training courses to make explicit the language learning beliefs of pre service teacher trainees' in teacher training institutions.

ABSTRAK

Objektif utama tesis ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti kepercayaan dalam cara-cara bahasa kedua dipelajari dan sejauh mana kepercayaan ini boleh berubah di kalangan sekumpulan guru pelatih opsyen Matematik dan Sains dengan elektif Bahasa Inggeris di sebuah institusi pendidikan guru di Sabah. Penyelidikan ini dibahagi kepada dua fasa iaitu fasa quantitative dan fasa exploratori. Inventori yang dikenali sebagai 'beliefs about language learning' (BALLI) yang diperkenalkan oleh Horwitz pada tahun 1987 telah digunakan dalam pengutipan data dalam fasa kuantitatif pada permulaan dan penghujung kursus elektif Bahasa Inggeris selepas latihan pengajaran selama 12 minggu. Dalam fasa exploratori, penemubualan secara focus group dan jurnal reflektif guru-guru pelatih adalah instrumen pengutipan data yang utama. Analisis data secara deskriptif dan inferensi dalam fasa kuantitatif menunjukkan tahap perubahan yang signifikan untuk hanya tiga daripada tiga puluh empat item dalam inventori tersebut. Ketiga item yang menunjukkan tahap perubahan yang signifikan dikaji dalam fasa explorasi juga menunjukkan tahap perubahan yang minima sepanjang kursus elektif ini. Analisis data dari kedua fasa dalam tinjauan ini membawa implikasi bahawa latihan perguruan terutamanya dalam kursus pembelajaran dan pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris perlu dititikberatkan.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the realm of language learning has shifted from searching for the most effective teaching methods to looking at the individual language learner. Language practitioners have started to recognise that language learners bring to the language classroom a complex set of attitudes, expectations and experiences and in particular beliefs. Borg (2001) defines beliefs as 'a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held and accepted true by the individual and most importantly it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour' (p:186) Studies have indicated that the perception or beliefs primarily about language and language learning that second and foreign language learners bring into the language classroom illustrate their expectations and their actions about their own language learning. (Holec,1987; Horwitz,1987; Wenden 1987). In the context of second or foreign language learning, learners may hold certain beliefs about the nature of the language under study, its difficulty, the process of its acquisition and perhaps the usefulness of various learning strategies. In an attempt to understand what learners perceive, researchers have begun to look into learner beliefs' "to account for individual differences, potential learning and teaching implications" (Bernat, 2005 p: 40)

This area of research has since gained momentum in recent years as beliefs have been found to significantly influence language learning and the outcomes. One of the earliest studies on language learning beliefs by Horwitz (1987) indicated that learner beliefs about language learning can influence both their action and experiences as language learners. Since then, Horwitz's development of the BALLI- Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory has been widely used to study learner beliefs about language learning. This instrument has also been used as the basis of many studies on factors affecting language learning beliefs. One such research is by Bernat (2005) in her study of Vietnamese ESL learners in which she attempted to find the link between belief and motivation. Tanaka (2004) carried out a study on Japanese learner's beliefs and language proficiency. Yang, (1992), Kern (1992), Kunt (1995), have all explored learner beliefs with other variables like strategy use, motivation and anxiety respectively with various groups of second and foreign language learners in different contexts. Findings from studies such as these have revealed

that learner beliefs have had some influence on language learning. Learner beliefs are also said to be situation specific and dynamic (Ellis, 2008; Horwitz, 1999). Kern (1995), reported of some changes in beliefs of student learning French over a period of one semester or fifteen weeks. In another study by Peacock (2001), on beliefs of trainee ESL student teachers over a time frame of three years indicated that there appeared to be some differences although no significant changes. In view of this, Richardson (1996) argues that beliefs about teaching and learning should be surfaced and acknowledged during the teacher education programme if the programme is to make a difference in the deep structure of knowledge and beliefs held by pre service teacher trainees.

The concept of beliefs in teacher education research has made a significant debut in recent years. Current research on teacher education has moved from attempting to understand what the teacher is from the 'inside rather than from the 'outside in' (Cochran-Smith *et al*, 1990 p :9). What the teacher is on the 'inside' is his or her underlying principles and beliefs about learning and teaching. Pajares (1992), defines beliefs as an 'individual's judgement of the truth or falsity of a proposition and that a judgement can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say, intend and do' (p: 143). There appears to be a general consensus as well as a growing body of evidence all demonstrating that the beliefs teachers have are strongly influential in how they view teaching and learning. Teachers' assumptions about how a foreign or second language should be learned are likely to affect the way they teach. One can envision many ways in which teachers' beliefs about language learning may influence their effectiveness in the classroom. Horwitz, (1985) stated that pre service second language learners enter the teacher training programmes with pre conceived ideas about language and language learning and that these notions may impede and inhibit their development as a language teacher.

In light of this important and rather abstract issue, teacher beliefs are therefore important concepts in understanding teachers' thought processes, instructional practices and change and learning to teach. Teacher beliefs are also imperative considerations in conducting teacher education designed to help pre-service and in-service teachers in their thinking and practices. There have been quite a number of important and relevant studies examining the language learning beliefs of pre service and in service teachers in both ESL and EFL contexts for over a period of time. Johnson (1994) and Peacock (2001) are some researchers who have explored pre service teacher's language learning beliefs development

over the course of the teacher education programmes. Vibuphol, (2004), carried out a study examining the language learning beliefs of pre service EFL teachers and the changes in the beliefs after the teaching practice in Thailand. Incecay (2011), completed a study on the effects of language learning beliefs of pre service teachers on their teaching practice in Turkey. Debreli (2012), investigated change in beliefs of pre service teachers throughout an undergraduate pre service teacher training programme. In Malaysia, there appears to be scarcity in the number of longitudinal studies examining language learning beliefs of pre service teacher trainees' undergoing training in teacher training institutions and observing the development and change in the beliefs. One of the more current studies is by Mary Wong (2010), who carried out a research on the language learning beliefs of pre-service ESL teacher trainees' and the stability of the beliefs after fourteen months . Her study however was based on a quantitative analyses and did not really disclose the reasons for the stability or change in her teacher trainees' language learning beliefs.

Although a considerable amount of research has already been conducted about the change/development in pre service teachers' beliefs, not many have attempted to shed light into understanding the language learning beliefs of pre service teacher trainees' who are non-English majors with a minor in English. Debreli (2012), in her study to bridge the gap in literature concerning change and development of beliefs of pre service teacher trainees' stated that there is a paucity in studies examining the growth and development of learning and teaching beliefs and that such an exploration would contribute to a more holistic picture of the belief structure. This study is an attempt to better understand the change/development of the language learning beliefs of a group of non-optionist TESL pre service teacher trainees'. Moreover unlike the earlier mentioned studies, this study also adopts the exploratory practitioner research approach in understanding the change and development of learners' beliefs which will be further dealt with in the next section. In addition, this study also attempts to heed Borg (2006)'s call to investigate the development of beliefs in non-native contexts.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY (SITUATING THE STUDY IN THE CONTEXT)

This study attempts to bridge the gap in the literature concerning language learning beliefs of pre service teacher trainees' in teacher training institutions in Malaysia. In particular this study will look at the extent of change/development of language learning beliefs of pre service teacher trainees' who major in Mathematics and Science but with an elective in English Language and would have to complete twelve weeks of teaching practice which includes teaching English in primary schools. It is of great interest to me both as a teacher trainer and a researcher to examine the language learning beliefs of these pre service teacher trainees' who only do English Language as an elective course for four semesters and would then have to go out on teaching practice to teach English in primary schools around the district of Tuaran. This interest was borne out of the fact that I was one of supervising lecturer to some of these pre service teacher trainees' during teaching practice and therefore had spent some time with them talking about language learning and their classroom practices.

This study will adopt both a quantitative as well as a qualitative approach within an Exploratory Practice framework in which the former approach will be used to establish a basis to the study while the latter will attempt to explore and understand the development and change of my pre service teacher trainees' language learning beliefs. In the quantitative phase of the study, the beliefs about language learning inventory (BALLI) survey instrument will be used to investigate the initial language learning beliefs of this group of pre service teacher trainees' in the beginning of the elective course and the language learning beliefs at the end of the elective course to note for any significant changes. Two qualitative instruments which include interviews and data analysis would be utilised to gather the pertinent data in the exploratory research phase of this study.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In 2007 teacher training institutions in Malaysia reached a milestone when they were recognised as playing a pivotal role in teacher training and development and were mandated to award teaching degrees' instead of certificates and diplomas as they used to . It was also the year when teacher training institutions across Malaysia began receiving the first cohort of undergraduates to be trained as primary school teachers for all subjects. The B.ED or PISMP programme in teacher training institutions is aimed at equipping pre service teacher trainees' with both pedagogical and practical skills to teach in primary schools. Pre service teacher trainees' who have successfully completed the four year or eight semesters of training would be awarded with a teaching degree with honours. Pre service teacher trainees' under the PISMP Mathematics and Science for Primary school programmes would be required to do English as part of their elective two component. The four main elective courses offered for English are ELE3101 (English for Undergraduates), ELE3102 (Principles for English Language Teaching), ELE3103 (English for Language Teachers) and ELE3104 (English Language Teaching Methodology for Young Learners). The diagram below has been adapted from the PISMP Guidebook by IPGM, KPM (2007).

Table 1.1 : English Language Elective Component

No	ELECTIVE 2	COURSE	KREDIT	SEMESTER
12	ENGLISH LANGUAGE	ELE3101 English for Undergraduates	3(3+0)	3
		ELE3102 Principles for English Language Teaching	3(3+0)	4
		ELE3103 English for Language Teachers	3(3+0)	5
		ELE3104 English Language Teaching Methodology for Young Learners	3(2+1)	6
		Total Credit Hours	12	

These elective courses would form a basis for preparing these pre service teacher trainees' to be able to teach English in primary schools. In particular ELE3102 and ELE 3104 are the two core courses which focus on the principles underlying the practice of teaching the English language in primary schools. These courses encompass topics such as language acquisition and language learning, theories of second language acquisition, teaching approaches and methods, classroom skills and classroom management, material selection and adaptation, the general principles of the teaching of the language skills, lesson planning, testing and evaluation in the language curriculum for primary schools and the interpretation of language skills and language content. (PISMP Guidebook, 2007-2008).

It is in light of this, this study would be of some importance to shed some insight into the language learning beliefs of these teacher trainees' of a completely different subject major. It would also be interesting to note any significant changes in these beliefs at the end of the training programme and to explore the extent of change/development of these beliefs particularly after the teaching practice phase. It is also hoped that the findings from this study would be of some small use in improving the English Language elective component for pre service teacher trainees' of a different subject major in teacher training institutions in Malaysia.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Pre service teacher trainees' majoring in different subject matters other than languages enter their training with different beliefs on how languages are learnt. These beliefs will have vital impact on their training and eventually their classroom practices. It is therefore of great interest to me as a researcher and a teacher trainer to investigate the initial language learning beliefs they come in with and the stability of these beliefs after the four semesters particularly after their 12 week teaching practice and to explore the change/development of these beliefs at the end of the training programme. The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the initial language learning beliefs of the pre service teacher trainees at the beginning of their English language elective course.

2. To examine if there are any significant changes to the language learning beliefs of the pre service teacher trainees' at the end of the elective component which ends with a 12 week teaching practice phase.
3. To explore the extent of change/development of the language learning beliefs of the pre service teacher trainees' at the end of the training programme (specifically after the teaching practice phase)

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The three main research questions that will frame the basis of this study are:

1. What are the initial language learning beliefs of this group of pre service teacher trainees' in the beginning of their English language elective course?
2. Are there any significant changes in these language learning beliefs' at the end of their English language elective course ?
3. What is the extent of change/development in their language learning beliefs at the end of the training programme? (specifically after their teaching practice phase)

1.6 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The research hypotheses in this study are formulated from the five main categories in the beliefs about language learning inventory (BALLI).

1. There is a significant change in the belief items in the category of foreign language aptitude.
2. There is a significant change in the belief items in the category of the difficulty of language learning.
3. There is a significant change in the belief items in the category of the nature of language learning .
4. There is a significant change in the belief items in the category of learning and communication strategies.
5. There is a significant change in the belief items in the category of motivation and expectations .

1.7 EXPLORATORY PRACTITIONER APPROACH

Exploratory Practice (Allwright, 2003; Allwright and Hanks, 2009) is a principled way of carrying out research that is "indefinitely sustainable" involving the idea of 'on-going' rather than experimental classroom research. The main aim of Exploratory Practice is to turn issues and problems into puzzles mainly because not all puzzles are problematic and these puzzles may emerge from a teachers' long term concerns. (Dar, 2011) Exploratory Practice (EP) is a "a way of getting teaching and learning done so that the teachers and the learners simultaneously develop their own understanding of what they are doing as learners and teachers" (Allwright, 2006, p:15). Inside the classroom, Exploratory Practice seeks to make teachers and learners understand their positive and negative puzzles about their lives in their classroom. Outside the classroom, Exploratory Practice helps set a working atmosphere that allows other professionals to seek understanding of positive and negative puzzles that they experience in their professional practices. Thus within this framework of Exploratory Practice, both researcher and research participants find possibilities of working together towards the notion of mutual understanding and development.

In trying to understand my pre service teacher trainees' change and development of language learning beliefs before and after the training programme has led me to situate my research within the Exploratory Practice framework. One of the main contentions outlined in Exploratory Practice is the need to look for deeper understanding instead of trying to rush to solve problems.

"the term puzzle represents our concern for developing understandings in relation to issues of immediate interest, whether or not they are 'problematic' and whether or not we connect them to theory. What matters is that someone is interested enough in something to be seriously puzzled about it and so willing to work to try to understand it." (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p.146)

In placing this study within the context of Exploratory Practice, I seek to understand two main puzzles. The first being what are the initial language learning beliefs my non- ESL pre service teacher trainees' start with the beginning of the training programme and the second puzzle is to explore and understand the changes and development of these beliefs at the end of the training programme specifically during the 12 week teaching practice stint. Exploratory Practice would allow me to develop both my understanding as well as that of my

pre service teacher trainees' of the change and development of their language learning beliefs.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are basically three main limitations that I perceive in the process of conducting this study. The first limitation to this study is the scope of this study is specific to a small group of pre service teacher trainees' in a teacher training institution in Malaysia. Therefore I will not be able to generalize the findings of this study and apply it throughout the 26 other teacher training institutions.

My own personal bias as both the researcher and a teacher trainer may come into play as a delimiting factor in carrying out this study. My own beliefs, expectations and perception of language learning beliefs as well as on the pre service teacher training programme are some of the influences that may affect the way I carry out the study in terms of the methods, instruments and on the findings. Therefore in order to ensure credibility, I will use a number of instruments for the purpose of triangulation.

Weir and Roberts (1994) have listed down questionnaires and interviews as self-report methods "as information is obtained at second hand through informant's accounts rather than by first-hand description such as test scores, documentary evidence or classroom observation"(p : 140). I will be using two of the self- report methods in my study as I do think they are pertinent to gather the data I require. In order to lessen the desirability effect, I will be adopting other first-hand methods of gathering the data.

1.9 OPERATIONAL TERMS

2. Beliefs about language learning inventory : The 34 item likert scale stating beliefs about language learning created by Horwitz (1987)
3. English language elective course : The English language elective course offered to pre service teacher trainees' of Mathematics and Science majors in teacher training institutions in Malaysia.
4. Pre service teacher trainees' : Undergraduate student teachers in teacher training institutions in Malaysia
5. Change : movement/development in beliefs about language learning

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a brief overview of studies on language learning beliefs in the field of second and foreign language. In setting the context of the brief review of the studies the following section provides the background and significance of the present study. This is then followed by the objectives and the three research questions and the research hypotheses that would guide the course of this study. The chapter then concludes by stating the operational terms and the limitations present in the current study.

