

Teachers' Beliefs About Teaching English to Elementary School Children

Posen Liao

National Taipei University
posen@mail.ntpu.edu.tw

Abstract

It is generally agreed that teaching is greatly affected by the belief systems of its practitioners. However, teachers' beliefs need to be probed before teachers can critically reflect on their teaching practices, and in turn facilitate changes to teach more effectively. In Taiwan, research is still at an early stage in terms of evaluating teachers' beliefs about teaching children English. In order to deepen our understanding of teachers' beliefs regarding teaching English to children, and discover what similar and different beliefs might be held by in-service and pre-service teachers, this study elicited teachers' beliefs and also compared the belief systems of in-service teachers with those of their pre-service peers. A total of 99 teachers participated in this study. In an attempt to identify these teachers' explicit beliefs in a more systematic way, a research instrument, *The Questionnaire of Elementary School English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs*, was developed. The questionnaire asked participants to assess their beliefs about teaching children English in three major areas: (1) the nature of children's English development, (2) teaching methods and techniques, and (3) self-efficacy as an English teacher. Moreover, one open-ended question about "qualifications of a successful elementary school English teacher" was added to the end of the questionnaire to elicit additional beliefs. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, independent *t* test analyses, and content analysis. It is hoped that teachers in Taiwan can raise their own beliefs about teaching children English to a level of conscious awareness, and then further improve their classroom practices.

Key Words: teachers' beliefs, beliefs inventory, elementary school English education

INTRODUCTION

Recent trends in Taiwan's educational policy have focused on meeting the challenges of globalization and internationalization. As English has achieved the status of a major international language, the government of Taiwan has been actively expanding the teaching of English as an essential part of the school curriculum. Starting in 2001, English education became a required course for fifth and sixth graders in elementary school. And in 2005, the English teaching policy changed again to require that elementary school students begin their English learning from the third grade onward. Such mandates, however, have not been strictly followed in all elementary schools around the nation. Further, in some more affluent cities, English is actually now a required subject starting as early as the first grade.

The implementation of an English curriculum in elementary schools has created a huge demand for qualified children's English teachers, thus placing more importance than ever on studying the issues related to teacher education. However, the research in English teacher education thus far has focused on secondary and tertiary schools. Very little attention has been paid specifically to elementary levels of English teaching. Thus, this study is an attempt to examine issues concerning teaching English in elementary schools, with a particular emphasis on the role of teachers' beliefs.

Virtually all English teachers have 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 (Johnson, 1992a;

Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Smith, 1996). Since English teachers bring their unique sets of beliefs to bear in situations and decisions related to language teaching, these beliefs are usually recognized as significant predictors for their actual teaching practices. Thus, understanding teachers' specific beliefs about English teaching can inform researchers and teacher trainers about how teachers are likely to implement their teaching, and how to provide appropriate teacher education programs.

In studying teacher education and development, researchers have shown how teachers' beliefs play a critical role in affecting their teaching and the kinds of thinking and decision making that underlie their classroom practices (Moon, 2000; Richards, 1998; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Smith, 1996; Trappes-Lomax & McGrath, 1999). Furthermore, these beliefs are stable sources of teachers' reference, are built up over time, and are related to teachers' theories of language, the nature of language teaching practices, roles of themselves as teachers, and relationships with their students (Johnson, 1992b; Richards, 1998).

However, research is still at an early stage in terms of evaluating teachers' beliefs in Taiwan, not to mention the paucity of literature on the subject of teaching elementary school English. In order to develop more effective teaching approaches for elementary school English programs, English teachers' beliefs need to be understood well. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the teaching beliefs held by elementary school English teachers. Moreover, because teachers may derive beliefs from their current teacher training programs or teaching career (Johnson, 1992a; Selby, 1999), this study also attempts to compare in-service and pre-service

teachers' conceptions of English teaching to determine if there exist any similarities and/or differences that result from their teaching status. The two research questions to be addressed in this study are as follows:

- (1) What core beliefs do English teachers hold about the process of teaching and learning English in elementary schools? Are these beliefs consistent with accepted learning principles or teaching approaches?
- (2) What are the similarities and differences among in-service and pre-service elementary school teachers' beliefs about English teaching?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In exploring the origins of metacognitive theories, Schraw and Moshman (1995) suggested that cultural learning, individual construction, and peer interaction all play important roles in the emergence of metacognition among individuals. It seems plausible that teachers' beliefs develop along with and become part of their metacognitive theories because beliefs are usually internalized from one's culture via social learning, are spontaneously constructed by individuals, and involve a process of social construction through peer interaction (Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Moreover, based on research conducted on the nature and effects of beliefs, White (1999) made the following claims: (1) beliefs have an adaptive function to help individuals define and understand the world and themselves, and (2)

beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and behaviors. Thus, the belief systems that teachers develop are often held to be true and can guide their teaching behaviors.

To put it another way, belief systems are dynamic and permeable mental structures (Muijs & Reynolds, 2001). Teachers' belief systems, including their attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning, are considered a primary source of teachers' classroom practices. These beliefs are usually guided by a number of factors: their own experience as learners in classrooms, prior teaching experience, classroom observations they were exposed to, and their previous training courses at school (Richards, 1998).

Much of the literature on teacher education has suggested that teachers' beliefs affect their teaching practices and instructional decisions in the classroom (Donaghue, 2003; Johnson, 1992a; Muijs & Reynolds, 2001; Richards, 1998; Richards & Lockhart, 1996), but Pajares (1992) noted the difficulties involved in investigating teachers' beliefs due to several factors including "definitional problems, poor conceptualization, and differing understanding of beliefs and belief structures" (p. 307). He argued that a broad psychological construct like beliefs must be context specific and relevant to teaching behavior to be useful for empirical study. Brown and Rodgers (2002) agree with this idea and suggest sub-classifying different areas of language teachers' beliefs in order to operationalize the construct of beliefs.

In fact, teachers' beliefs have already been classified into various sets of categories by some researchers (Johnson, 1992b; William & Burden, 1997). William and Burden (1997) divided their discussion

of teachers' beliefs into three areas: (1) about language learning, (2) about learners, and (3) about themselves as language teachers. Likewise, Johnson (1992b) identified and grouped ESL teachers' beliefs into three methodological approaches. Most teachers in his research held beliefs that clearly reflected one of the following theoretical orientations: (1) a skill-based approach, which views language as consisting of discrete skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking; (2) a rule-based approach, which sees language as a process of rule-governed activity; and (3) a function-based approach, which focuses on the use of authentic language in social context. All these teachers were observed in classrooms, and they were found to be generally consistent with their reported orientations.

Furthermore, a number of studies have attempted to investigate the beliefs of ESL teachers through questionnaires or inventories (Hsieh & Chang, 2002; Johnson, 1992b; Kern, 1995; Liao & Chiang, 2003; Richards, Tung, & Ng, 1992; Yang, 2000). For example, Richards, Tung, and Ng (1992) reported that English teachers in Hong Kong held a set of relatively consistent beliefs relating to such issues as the nature of the ESL curriculum, the role of English in society, the relevance of theory to practice, the teachers' role in the classroom, and others. In the educational context of Taiwan, Yang (2000) discussed prospective teachers' beliefs in four areas: (1) general beliefs about child development, (2) general beliefs about language learning, (3) specific beliefs about teaching English to children, and (4) self-efficacy and expectations. More recently, five categories of teachers' beliefs were investigated in Hsieh and Chang's (2002) study,

including: (1) beliefs about the role of culture in EFL learning, (2) beliefs about aptitude in EFL learning, (3) rule-based beliefs, (4) skill-based beliefs, and (5) function-based beliefs. These two Taiwan-centered studies measured and identified a wide variety of beliefs held by prospective and current elementary school English teachers respectively, but little research has compared the beliefs held by these two groups of teachers for similarities and differences. Thus, a further study to demonstrate the relationship between pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs seems necessary in order to give a better picture of elementary school teachers' beliefs about English teaching.

METHOD

Research Design

The current study primarily involved a survey, comprised of two sets of questionnaires concerning teacher's beliefs and their biodata information. 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, aimed at identifying and comparing beliefs about English teaching shared among in-service and pre-service elementary school teachers in Taiwan. The researcher personally administered the survey. After the participants finished the survey, their responses were collected for analysis.

Participants

Convenience sampling (Nunan, 1999) was used to select participants based on the availability of respondents. A total of 99 subjects agreed to participate in this study, including 21 in-service English teachers teaching in various elementary schools around northern Taiwan and 78 pre-service teachers taking credit-based training courses at a Teachers College in northern Taiwan. Some of the pre-service teachers were already teaching English to children at private language schools or cram schools. However, because of the limitations in terms of research sites and the unequal number of teachers in each group, the sample used in this study may not be truly representative of the population of all elementary school English teachers in Taiwan as a whole.

Research Instrument

In an attempt to identify, in a more systematic way, these teachers' explicit beliefs about teaching children English, a research instrument, *The Questionnaire of Elementary School English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs*, was developed by the researcher. The researcher first reviewed available theories related to teachers' beliefs to lay out a conceptual framework, and then drew on a number of related questionnaires (Horwitz, 1987; Hsieh & Chang, 2002; Oxford, 1990; Yang, 2000) to devise items for the current questionnaire, thereby contributing to the validity of the instrument.

This questionnaire is written in Chinese, is composed of 40 discrete items and is organized into three major categories to assess participants' beliefs about teaching children English: first, the nature

of children's English development (items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 13, 16, 22, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 34, 37, 38, 39); second, teaching methods and techniques (items 8, 9, 10, 15, 19, 20, 21, 23, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36); and third, self-efficacy as an English teacher (items 4, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 40). In the questionnaire, the participants were asked to assess their beliefs about teaching English to elementary school students on a five-point Likert scale, by indicating the extent to which they agreed with each statement using (1) SD = strongly disagree, (2) D = disagree, (3) N = neither agree nor disagree, (4) A = agree, or (5) SA = strongly agree.

In addition to the selected-response items on the questionnaire, one open-ended question was added to the end: "*What qualifications does a person need to acquire in order to be a successful English teacher in an elementary school?*" Teachers could respond in Chinese to this question using their own words so that we could elicit free-form responses about additional beliefs from the participants.

Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data involved descriptive statistics and independent-sample *t* tests. Frequencies, means, percentages, and standard deviations were first computed to identify the overall pattern of the participants' teaching beliefs in order to answer the first set of research questions. Next, to address the second research question, an independent-sample *t* test was calculated to discover the similarities and differences between in-service and pre-service teachers' beliefs.

Regarding the content analysis of the teachers' answers to the last open-ended question, the data were transcribed, segmented, coded,

and analyzed, and this served as an additional source of information to supplement the questionnaire survey. The researcher examined the teachers' statements to find areas of commonality or recurring patterns, and then to generate general categories. Soon after the questionnaire survey was completed, informal interviews were conducted with some of the respondents to have them further clarify or explain their own written statements. The interviews were held in Chinese and tape-recorded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability of the Survey

First of all, internal consistency reliability was calculated for the participants' responses to *The Questionnaire of Elementary School English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs*, and a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .71 was obtained, which indicated the teachers tended to respond to the questionnaire items with a relatively high level of consistency.

Statistical Analysis of the Survey

The specific means and standard deviations for the 40 items in the questionnaire are presented in Appendix. Among the 40 items, 27 items had means greater than 3.5, whereas only 3 items received means lower than 2.5. In general, most participants agreed with most items. Further analysis using independent-sample *t* tests revealed that significant differences were found between in-service and pre-service teachers on only three items (items 10, 20, 37). Due to space

limitations, the following discussion will only summarize highlights of the quantitative data results rather than examine each item exhaustively. Overall comparisons across both the in-service and pre-service teacher groups were also made through the following three major areas in the questionnaire: the nature of children's English development; teaching methods and techniques; and self-efficacy as an English teacher.

The Nature of Children's English Development

Several items in the questionnaire address the issue of how elementary school children learn English in the classroom. More than 90% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that doing activities with English, moving around, having fun, and interacting with others in the classroom (items 1, 5, 25, 29, 30) and getting support from teachers and parents (items 6 and 7) can facilitate students' English learning, and students should study English with their own learning styles (item 16). Further, more than 80% of the teachers supported the statements that children have individual differences in their cognitive development (item 3) and that it was important for them to comprehend the lesson content (item 26). However, more than a third of the teachers (38.4%) did not believe that children should learn English the same way as they learn their mother tongue, Chinese (item 38). The findings from these teachers' beliefs about children's English development appear to be generally compatible with the literature on children's second language learning and development (Brown, 2000; Cook, 1996; Moon, 2000; Vale & Feunteun, 2003). For instance, Moon (2000) suggested that physical activities such as playing games, making things, action songs, rhymes

and drama can provide excellent contexts for children to learn English. When children are having fun, they usually want to continue the activities. Children also need individual attention and support from the teacher to make them feel more confident and secure about learning English. In addition, it may be most helpful to view children's native language as a useful strategy and resource for checking understanding and for communicating with others. In a similar manner, to criticize the direct analogies between first and second language acquisition, Brown (2000) dispelled the myth that second language teaching should resemble first language teaching.

With respect to the results of the independent-sample *t* tests, the two groups of in-service and pre-service teachers differed significantly in their responses only to item 37 in this category. While 52% of the in-service teachers supported the statement that it is best for children to learn English from as early as the first grade, only 27% of the pre-service teachers supported this statement. This suggests that in-service teachers might be prone to believe that younger children are better English learners and should consequently reach higher levels of proficiency. This belief may explain the fact that many elementary schools with strong financial support have implemented English instruction as early as the first grade. On the other hand, the lower percentage of pre-service teachers' agreement with the same statement may reflect more of their willingness to follow the Ministry of Education policy to begin teaching English from the third grade onward.

This different belief held by in-service and pre-service teachers touches on the issue of the relationship between age and English

acquisition. From the neurological perspective of language acquisition, Lenneberg (1967) hypothesized that there is a period in a child's development during which language can be acquired more easily than at any other time. This critical period is believed to last until around puberty. Piaget (1972) further outlined children's intellectual development through different stages, and stated that during the concrete operational stage (8-11 years), children depend more upon concrete referents before they become capable of formal thinking which transcends concrete experience and direct perception. Therefore, lower-order processes such as pronunciation are learned optimally in elementary school, while higher-order language functions such as semantic relations (e.g., grammar, vocabulary), which are more dependent on late-maturing neural circuits, could be acquired more efficiently later on (Walsh & Diller, 1981). Moreover, empirical studies conducted locally in Taiwan often suggest that teaching English to children at an early age might not necessarily prove as efficient as allowing the children to wait until their analytical abilities have improved. However, the significant difference of opinions between the two groups of teachers might indicate that more in-service teachers are inclined to take the stance of "the younger, the better" in terms of their students' English acquisition.

Teaching Methods and Techniques

Teachers' understanding of how children learn English will determine their philosophy of teaching, teaching styles, methods, and classroom management techniques. In terms of these teachers' reported teaching methods and techniques, the majority (more than 90%) considered the use of multiple assessments, singing,

role-playing, games, multimedia equipment and culture teaching to be essential (items 9, 27, 28, 35, 36). Additionally, more than 80% of them endorsed the statements that it is necessary for children to learn English listening and speaking skills (item 8), but not spelling and grammar (item 32), in the early stage of teaching. Furthermore, only a few teachers (9%) believed that teaching children English vocabulary is the most important thing (item 23).

Up to this point, these teachers' beliefs seem compatible with some underlying teaching principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Certain major characteristics of CLT described by various researchers include: role plays or skits help students to adjust their use of English to different social contexts; games are important because they are real communicative events; the focus is on the spoken language, with reading and writing taught only after an oral base in lexical and grammatical forms has been established; and less attention is placed on grammatical rules in terms of their overt presentation (Brown, 2001; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Indeed, as currently promoted by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan (Ministry of Education, 2001), the CLT curriculum implemented in elementary school English programs is required to develop students' communicative competence, which could explain why most teachers' beliefs are in line with CLT. Most elementary school teachers may agree with the use of a CLT curriculum, in contrast to their peers using the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) at secondary schools, where the teaching focus is more on grammar parsing and translating sentences from English texts into Chinese.

In some items, however, the independent *t* tests showed

significant differences between the in-service and pre-service teachers, who seem to have different ideas about how to assess students' learning achievement and when to correct their English mistakes. For example, around 33% of the in-service teachers agreed (but none strongly agreed) with the statement that paper-and-pencil tests should still be widely used in the English classroom (item 10), whereas more than 55% of the pre-service teachers tended to agree or strongly agree. In addition, while 67% of the in-service teachers believed that if they do not correct beginning students' errors, it will be more difficult to correct them later on (item 20), many more pre-service teachers (80%) expressed the same thought. These results may imply that pre-service teachers tend to have a somewhat restricted view of English learning in comparison with their more experienced peers.

First of all, paper-and-pencil tests are just one of a number of possible types of assessment in the classroom. The Nine-Year Curriculum Guidelines in Taiwan mandate the development of multiple assessments as one of the core objectives in the elementary school English curriculum. To follow such a guideline, Hsu (2003) has promoted the use of multiple assessments in elementary school English classrooms. In her study, she documented how multiple assessments, including portfolios, journals, activity-based assessments, oral tests, role plays, group work, observations, student-teacher conferences, and other tasks could serve as effective assessment measures for children's English abilities. Pre-service teachers may need to expand their repertoire in assessing learners' overall performance for their future teaching career.

Next, teachers often feel that students can learn from their mistakes, and so they need to make sure that everything students say

or write is correct. However, as indicated by Doff (1988) in his teacher training handbook, it is now widely believed that teachers do not have to correct students all the time, as this may lead to students becoming unwilling or unable to produce any output. If teachers, especially pre-service ones, maintain the belief that they should be directive and even authoritarian in correcting students' every mistake, such teaching behaviors may lead to a high degree of language anxiety on the part of learners (Young, 1991). It is recommended that elementary school teachers be realistic and tolerant of students' errors, so that students feel they can express themselves more freely and develop fluency in using English.

Self-Efficacy as an English Teacher

This category of self-efficacy mainly deals with teachers' personality factors and the affective domain of English teaching by investigating how they place worth and value on their teaching career. Teachers are more likely to engage in certain teaching behaviors when they believe they are capable of executing those behaviors successfully, or in other words, when they have higher self-efficacy. In this study, most teachers (90%) overwhelmingly felt that teaching English in elementary school is a meaningful job (item 12) and they are capable of doing this job well (item 14). Likewise, more than 80% of them also agreed or strongly agreed that they are confident of being (or becoming) good teachers (item 18), are having (or will have) a lot fun doing this job (item 17), and can get along with children (item 11). Nevertheless, only 12% of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that teaching English in elementary school is (or will be) easy (item 4).

As Brown (2000) pointed out, “people derive their sense of self-esteem from the accumulation of experiences with themselves and with others and from assessments of the external world around them” (p. 145). Teachers in this study make and maintain self-evaluations as English teachers working in Taiwan’s societal and educational contexts. The survey results indicate that these teachers generally express a high level of self-efficacy, and believe themselves to be capable, significant and worthy of their jobs.

Research on educational psychology also tells us that people’s self-efficacy affects aspects of their behavior, including their choice of activities, their effort and persistence, and ultimately their achievement (Bandura, 1977; Ormrod, 1999; Schunk, 1989). Although teachers in this study felt that they face a challenging job in terms of teaching English in elementary schools, they still believe in their ability to accomplish the teaching tasks and requirements. Furthermore, after conducting a *t* test, this study found no significant difference between in-service and pre-service teachers in their self-efficacy levels. Both groups of teachers seem confident and determined insofar as teaching elementary school English is concerned.

Content Analysis of the Open-Ended Question

In the present study participants were asked to answer one open-ended question: “*What qualifications does a person need to acquire in order to be a successful English teacher in elementary school?*” However, some teachers did not give any response, while others provided numerous statements. In the data base of teachers’ responses, a total of 100

summary statements were collected. Among them, 39 statements were recorded from the in-service teachers and 61 from the pre-service group. Through the use of content analysis, all written responses were transcribed, segmented, coded, and examined for patterns. Finally, five major categories were classified as follows:

- (1) English proficiency: referring to teachers' good command of English as a foreign language, particularly their pronunciation, oral communicative competence, and other general English skills.
- (2) Teachers' personality: regarding teachers' personal traits and attitudes toward their jobs dealing with children, such as gentleness, kindness, patience, and enthusiasm about teaching; in addition, they also need to be optimistic, cheerful, flexible, motivated, and open-minded to do the job well.
- (3) Teaching skills: including their understanding and application of various teaching methods and techniques, their classroom management abilities, as well as their awareness to keep up to date and acquire the latest knowledge and information in the field of elementary English teaching.
- (4) Student-centered concerns: mainly about developing good teacher-student relationships by creating a fun, secure learning environment; also, teachers need to care about children, to respect, support, and encourage them to learn, and to build up their confidence and autonomy.
- (5) Physical readiness: concerning their health state or the stamina needed to cope with the stressful and tiring teaching job for a long period of time on an almost-daily basis.

To further illustrate the distribution of beliefs between the two

teacher groups and make a brief comparison, the following two tables rank these five categories by the frequency and percentage of responses made by the in-service and pre-service teachers respectively.

Table 1

The Ranking of In-service Teachers' Beliefs about a Successful Elementary School English Teacher

Rank	Category	<i>f</i>	%
1	Teacher's Personality	11	28.2
2	Teaching Skills	9	23.1
3	English Proficiency	9	23.1
4	Student-centered Concerns	6	15.4
5	Physical Readiness	4	10.2

Table 2

The Ranking of Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs about a Successful Elementary School English Teacher

Rank	Category	<i>f</i>	%
1	Teacher's Personality	21	34.4
2	Student-centered Concerns	15	24.6
3	Teaching Skills	13	21.3
4	English Proficiency	12	19.7
5	Physical Readiness	00	00.0

As indicated by the two tables above, the most commonly

reported beliefs from both teacher groups center on the role of the teacher's personality. They also share somewhat similar percentages in terms of beliefs for the categories of teaching skills and English proficiency. However, the two groups of teachers differ quite sharply in their beliefs about student-centered concerns. A higher percentage of pre-service teachers (24.6%) than in-service teachers (15.4 %) believe that teachers should build a rapport with their students. One possible explanation for this difference may be that, owing to pre-service teachers' initial excitement and enthusiasm about beginning their teaching career, they would usually care more about students' perceptions regarding their performance, and possibly try harder to impress the students.

One further interesting finding from this comparison lies in the category of physical readiness. Apparently, in-service teachers (10.2%) were more concerned about this issue, while none of the pre-service teachers mentioned this. This may lead to the hypothesis that as teachers increase their teaching experience, they are more likely to recognize the fact that teaching children English at the elementary school level is indeed a highly demanding job, both mentally and physically. Pre-service teachers may not yet be consciously aware of the importance of their physical readiness to face the challenges of this profession. They would do well to heed the words of Harmer (2001), who suggested that all English teachers should care for their physical well-being in order to counteract stress and possible burnout, so that they can survive, learn, grow, and achieve a balance between mind and body.

CONCLUSION

English teachers usually have certain beliefs about how to teach English. These beliefs are based on their earlier learning experiences, teacher training courses taken at school, and their cultural backgrounds. It is generally agreed that teaching is greatly affected by the belief systems of its practitioners. However, teachers' beliefs need to be explored before teachers can critically reflect on their teaching practices or facilitate changes to teach more effectively.

The results of this study reveal that elementary school English teachers in Taiwan, both in-service and pre-service ones, share a similar and consistent set of beliefs. Most of them have common beliefs about: (1) the nature of children's English development, which is in accord with the research literature on foreign language learning, (2) English teaching methods and techniques employed in the classroom, which are basically in tune with the teaching principles of CLT, and (3) a strong sense of self-efficacy as English teachers in terms of doing their work, which may have a positive impact on their performance based on the research findings of educational psychology. Moreover, from their open-ended responses, successful elementary school English teachers are generally thought to have such key characteristics as: (1) a pleasant personality and an optimistic attitude towards teaching, (2) ability to effectively use various classroom teaching and management skills, and (3) a good command of the English language.

Considering that the majority of Taiwanese teachers share a common native language, educational experience and cultural heritage, the above research findings are perhaps not very surprising.

Also, school teachers often exchange their perspectives about English teaching in discussions with their colleagues. Teachers' beliefs may greatly influence and be influenced by those of their peers.

Nevertheless, a few mismatches between in-service and pre-service teachers are worth noting. The two groups of participants did vary on certain aspects, especially in the areas of: (1) the optimum age for children to start learning English, (2) when to correct students' errors, and (3) ways to assess students' learning. What is more, based on the participants' own written statements, the two groups of teachers also differ considerably in the importance they attribute to: (1) fostering harmonious relationships with their students and (2) taking care of their own physical fitness to face the challenging job. Differences in their beliefs may result from their years of teaching experience, and training received currently or in the past.

Implications

In recent years, it has become more crucial to view teachers as active thinkers in the language teaching process (Richards, 1998). This study attempts to make a contribution to English teacher education in Taiwan by highlighting the role of beliefs in the teaching process, and thus responses to each item in the questionnaire serve as important descriptions of teachers' views about English teaching. It is also hoped that the above research findings will encourage more language researchers and educators to learn more about teachers' beliefs. Researchers may use the results from this study to become better aware of elementary school English teachers' specific beliefs, and then help teachers expand their repertoire of teaching principles

and strategies. Moreover, questionnaires of teachers' beliefs like the one used in this study may help teachers to bring their own beliefs about children and English teaching to a level of conscious awareness, which will further allow them to compare beliefs with those of other teachers and with their own classroom teaching practices. Other activities such as journal writing, peer discussion, or viewing videotapes of their teaching also can serve as modes of reflection for teachers to monitor their own beliefs and practices (Richards, 1998).

In addition, the findings of this study may support the need for elementary school English teacher preparation programs in Taiwan. Teacher trainers may draw insights from the findings to better design their training programs to address the needs of teacher-trainees. For example, teacher trainees should be required to study first and second language acquisition to improve their understanding of the effects of age on English acquisition. A course on multiple assessments should be mandatory for pre-service teachers so that they may understand and administer more alternative assessments in the classroom. By paying more research attention to elementary school English teacher training as well as providing teachers with opportunities to reflect on their beliefs for positive change in their professional life (Pennington, 1990), we can be assured of a gradual improvement in the quality of elementary school English education.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Study

Despite the research findings and implications described above, this study is not without limitations. The first limitation concerns the use of a questionnaire as the means of investigating teachers' beliefs. Questionnaires only measure beliefs in theoretical aspects without

referring to teachers' actual teaching behaviors in the classroom, and thus do not provide a complete picture of the complicated factors involved in the teaching process and educational context. Thus, an open-ended question was added in an attempt to enhance the validity of this study. The second limitation is rooted in the relatively small and unequal sample size of the two groups of English teachers participating in this study: the generalizability of these teachers' beliefs to other populations with different educational settings or backgrounds may be limited.

It may be of interest for future researchers to explore the sources, development, or changes in teachers' beliefs, or how teachers teach children English based on their own beliefs. For studying constructs such as beliefs, Kalaja (1995) proposed employing discourse analytic methods to analyze naturalistic discourse data obtained from the subjects. Additional research in this area could also adopt qualitative interviews and observations to elicit more open-ended responses from the teachers. These types of additional information may provide us with more insights into the role of teachers' beliefs in their English teaching.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84, 191-215.
- Brown, D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. (4th ed.). White Plains, New York: Longman.

- Brown, D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2nd ed.). White Plains, New York: Longman.
- Brown, J. D., & Rodgers, T. (2002). *Doing second language research*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Celce-Murcia, M. (Ed.). (2001). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed.). Boston, Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle.
- Cook, V. (1996). *Second language learning and language teaching* (2nd ed.). New York: Arnold.
- Doff, A. (1988). *Teach English: A training course for teachers*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Donaghue, H. (2003). An instrument to elicit teachers' beliefs and assumptions. *ELT Journal*, 57, 344-351.
- Harmer, J. (2001) *The practice of English language teaching* (3rd ed.). Harlow, Essex, U.K.: Pearson Education.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1987). Surveying student beliefs about language learning. In A. L. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning*, (pp.119-129), Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Hsieh, H-J. & Chang, S-J. (2002). Elementary school English teachers' beliefs about EFL learning. *Selected Papers from the Eleventh International Symposium on English Teaching/ Fourth Pan-Asian Conference* (Vol. 2, pp. 116-124). Taipei, Taiwan: Crane Publishing Co.
- Hsu, Y-k. (2003). Researching multiple assessment: Evidence from EFL elementary school classrooms. *English Teaching & Learning*, 28 (1), 29-60.

- Johnson, K. E. (1992a). Learning to teach: instructional actions and decisions of preservice ESL teachers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26, 507-535.
- Johnson, K. E. (1992b). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices during literacy instruction for non-native speakers of English. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 24, 83-108.
- Kalaja, P. (1995). Student beliefs (or metacognitive knowledge) about SLA reconsidered. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 5, 191-204.
- Kern, R. (1995). Students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 28 (1), 71-85.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Lenneberg, E. (1967). *Biological foundations of language*. New York: Wiley and Sons.
- Liao, P. & Chiang, M. (2003). The study of students' and teachers' beliefs about English learning. *Proceedings of the 2003 International Conference on English Teaching and Learning in the Republic of China* (pp. 65-76). Taipei, Taiwan: Crane Publishing Co.
- Ministry of Education (2001). 國民中小學英語教學活動設計及評量指引 [Elementary and junior high English teaching activities and assessments]. Taipei: Ministry of Education.
- Moon, J. (2000). *Children learning English*. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann.
- Muijs, D., & Reynolds, D. (2001). Teachers' beliefs and behaviors: What really matters? *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 37 (2), 3-15.

- Nunan, D. (1999). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Ormrod, J. E. (1999). *Human learning* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House.
- Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62, 307-332.
- Pennington, M. C. (1990). A professional development focus for the language teaching practicum. In J. C. Richards & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second language teacher education* (pp. 132-151). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Piaget, J. (1972). *The principles of genetic epistemology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Richards, J. C. (1998). *Beyond training*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1996). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., Tung, P., & Ng, P. (1992). The culture of the English language teacher: A Hong Kong example. *RELC Journal*, 23 (1), 81-103.
- Schraw, G., & Moshman, D. (1995). Metacognitive theories. *Educational Psychology Review*, 7 (4), 351-371.
- Schunk, D. H. (1989). Self-efficacy and cognitive skill learning. In C. Ames & R. Ames (Eds.), *Research on Motivation in Education*:

Goals and cognition (Vol. 3, pp. 13-44). San Diego, California: Academic Press.

Selby, G. (1999). Assessing reflection in the pre-service practicum. In H. Trappes-Lomax & I. McGrath (Eds.), *Theory in language teacher education* (pp. 133-145). Harlow, Essex, U.K.: Longman.

Smith, D. B. (1996). Teacher decision making in the adult ESL classroom. In D. Freeman & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *Teacher learning in language teaching* (pp. 197-216). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Trappes-Lomax, H., & McGrath, I. (Eds.). (1999). *Theory in language teacher education*. Harlow, Essex, U.K.: Longman

Vale, D., & Feunteun, A. (2003). *Teaching children English*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Walsh, T. M., & Diller, K. C. (1981). Neurolinguistic considerations on the optimum age for second language learning. In K. C. Diller (Ed.), *Individual differences and universals in language learning aptitude* (pp. 3-29). Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.

White, C. (1999). Expectations and emergent beliefs of self-instructed language learners. *System*, 27, 443-457.

William, M., & Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Yang, N-D. (2000). What do prospective teachers think about teaching English to children? *Selected Papers from the Ninth International Symposium on English Teaching* (pp.556-565). Taipei, Taiwan: Crane Publishing Co.

Young, D. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal*, 75, 426-438.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Posen Liao is an assistant professor in the Department of Applied Linguistics and Foreign Languages at National Taipei University. His current research interests include academic writing, second language acquisition, and translation studies.

APPENDIX

Means and Standard Deviations for the Questionnaire

Item Description	Teachers	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Children acquire English easily when they are doing activities.	In-service	4.67	.48
	Pre-service	4.24	.72
2. Male and female students develop English proficiency at different rates and respond to instruction differently.	In-service	3.57	1.08
	Pre-service	3.68	1.00
3. Children have obvious individual variations in their cognitive development process.	In-service	4.57	.60
	Pre-service	4.21	.83
4. Teaching English in elementary school is (or will be) easy.	In-service	1.90	1.04
	Pre-service	2.18	.88
5. Children should be given opportunities to move around in the English classroom.	In-service	4.38	.50
	Pre-service	4.31	.69
6. Children are willing to build up a close relationship with their English teacher.	In-service	4.05	.74
	Pre-service	4.05	.75
7. If parents care about their children's English performance, these children will perform better.	In-service	4.52	.51
	Pre-service	4.26	.86
8. It is important to teach elementary school children English listening and speaking skills.	In-service	4.38	.67
	Pre-service	4.13	.94
9. Multiple assessments should be implemented to evaluate students' English performance in the classroom.	In-service	4.81	.40
	Pre-service	4.56	.57
10. Paper-and-pencil tests should still be widely used in the English classroom.	In-service	2.71	1.10
	Pre-service	3.27	1.15

11. I get along with children well in English class.	In-service	4.43	.68
	Pre-service	4.23	.68
12. To teach English in elementary school is a meaningful job.	In-service	4.14	.65
	Pre-service	4.32	.65
13. How children use their mother tongue would affect their capabilities to learn English.	In-service	3.90	1.04
	Pre-service	3.40	1.14
14. I believe that I am capable of teaching children English.	In-service	4.24	.77
	Pre-service	4.31	.54
15. The English immersion program is more effective to teach English than the bilingual program using both Chinese and English.	In-service	3.48	1.21
	Pre-service	3.15	1.20
16. Every child learns English with different learning styles in the classroom.	In-service	4.29	.64
	Pre-service	4.32	.55
17. Teaching English in the elementary school is (or will be) a lot of fun to me.	In-service	4.10	.77
	Pre-service	4.03	.56
18. I am confident of becoming a good elementary school English teacher.	In-service	4.24	.70
	Pre-service	4.26	.64
19. English pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar should be taught in an integrative manner, rather than separately.	In-service	3.52	1.17
	Pre-service	3.22	1.14
20. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English pronunciation without teacher's correction, it will be more difficult to correct them later on.	In-service	3.38	1.16
	Pre-service	3.92	1.03
21. Children do not need to memorize what they learn in English class.	In-service	3.33	1.06
	Pre-service	3.24	1.06

22. Children can learn English faster than adults do.	In-service	4.29	.64
	Pre-service	4.03	.82
23. The most important element in teaching children English is vocabulary.	In-service	2.20	.83
	Pre-service	2.23	.87
24. The earlier English is taught to children, the better the results.	In-service	3.29	1.19
	Pre-service	2.75	1.14
25. Interesting classes can speed up students' English learning process.	In-service	4.67	.48
	Pre-service	4.59	.55
26. Children can learn English better if they fully understand the content of the lesson.	In-service	4.33	.66
	Pre-service	4.08	.80
27. Singing and role-playing are appropriate English teaching activities.	In-service	4.48	.51
	Pre-service	4.47	.60
28. We need to teach children foreign cultures coupled with English language.	In-service	4.33	.58
	Pre-service	4.33	.68
29. Children learn English through interactions with other people.	In-service	4.43	.60
	Pre-service	4.32	.76
30. Children learn English better when they are using English to do activities.	In-service	4.62	.50
	Pre-service	4.53	.57
31. The most important element in teaching children English is pronunciation.	In-service	3.15	1.14
	Pre-service	3.44	1.01
32. It is not necessary to teach children English spelling and grammar in the early stage of instruction.	In-service	4.33	.91
	Pre-service	4.17	.73
33. The most important element in teaching children English is oral conversation.	In-service	4.10	.89
	Pre-service	3.78	.88
34. Every child can learn English well.	In-service	3.29	1.23
	Pre-service	3.39	1.00

35. To integrate games into English instruction can facilitate children's learning.	In-service	4.52	.51
	Pre-service	4.50	.62
36. It is important to use multimedia equipment (e.g. audio and video tapes, CD-ROMs) in teaching children English.	In-service	4.57	.51
	Pre-service	4.38	.71
37. It is best for children to learn English from as early as the first grade.	In-service	3.48	.87
	Pre-service	2.78	1.09
38. Children should learn English the same way as they learn Chinese.	In-service	2.71	1.10
	Pre-service	2.31	.98
39. It is important for elementary school children to read and write in English.	In-service	3.33	.91
	Pre-service	2.86	1.07
40. My English teaching capabilities are as good as those of native English teachers.	In-service	4.05	1.16
	Pre-service	3.97	.74

國小英語教師之教學信念

摘要

一般而言，教師的教學行為皆深受其教學信念所影響，而教師通常需先釐清其教學信念，才能反思其教學行為，進而增進其教學成效。國內目前有關英語教師對於兒童英語教學所具信念的研究尚在起步階段，為增進對此議題之理解，以及比較在職和職前教師在教學信念上的異同，本文調查並比較這兩組英語教師對於國小英語教學所具備之信念。共有 99 位教師參與此次研究，為有系統調查這些教師的想法，研究者設計一份國小英語教師之教學信念調查表(The Questionnaire of Elementary School English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs) 作為蒐集資料的工具。該調查表要求受測教師自我評估教學信念的三大面向：(1) 兒童英語發展的特質，(2) 英語教學方法和技巧，(3) 英語教師的自我效能概念；受測教師並回答一開放性問題：「一位成功的國小英語教師需具備何種條件？」資料分析的方法主要使用描述性統計、獨立 t 檢定、和內容分析。期望此研究之結果能有助國內國小英語教師了解自己的教學信念。

關鍵詞：教師信念 信念量表 國小英語教育