# BELIEFS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS AT ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM ON TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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**Abstract** The aim of this research is to describe the beliefs of pre-service teachers (PST) at an elementary teacher education (ETE) study program on Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). This research is a case study. The data was gathered by giving an open questionnaire to PST at ETE of a private universities in Yogyakarta. 95 questionnaires were gathered and then analyzed with a symbolic interactive model that started with data condensation, data display, and data conclusion/verification.

The results of the study showed that the PST at ETE has a positive perspective on TEYL because it is considered to support the future of the students. The PST at ETE also believes that students have different characteristics from adult learners in learning a foreign language. In addition, PST at ETE reveals that barriers in TEYL can be caused by factors from students, teachers, and school infrastructure. To optimize TEYL, PST at ETE considered the needs of training for elementary English teachers. The implication of this research is the need for a wider opportunity for PST at ETE to implement TEYL beliefs and theory, which have been learned through real teaching practicum in the classroom. For future researchers, they could examine the connectivity between the beliefs of PST at ETE on TEYL and its implementation in teaching and learning.

**Keywords**: *belief; pre-service teacher; elementary teacher education; TEYL*

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, mastering English is seen as increasingly important because it has a role to support study, career, and life styles (Enever and Moon, 2009; Ghatage, Inal, Kapur & Lee, 2000; garton, Copland & Burns, 2011; Nunan, 2003). In addition, there is a strong belief that the earlier someone learns a foreign language, the easier and better his language mastery will be (Brewster et al., 2003; Brown, 2007; Elis, 2003; Pinter, 2006). This has led to grow the interest in teaching English to young learners (TEYL), including in Indonesia.

Despite the growing interest in TEYL, its implementation is not easy to be executed. In previous research exposed that there are three main barriers to TEYL implementation in Indonesia. The first barriers is the absence of written guidance that regulates the learning techniques of English for elementary school in current national curriculum. This means that time allocation for teaching English is minimal and has different sillaby (Azmy, 2020; Mappiasse, Johari, & Sihes, 2014; Sutarsyah, 2017).

Second, the lack of supporting infrastructure for learning English is caused by a lack of motivation and support from stakeholders (Mappiasse, Johari, & Sihes, 2014). The barriers referred to are the absence of audiovisual learning material, which causes teachers to use the chalk and talk method (Faridi, 2011), large classes, which cause teachers to face difficulties in encouraging students to participate, monitoring their progress, and recognizing their respective characteristics (Sulistyowati, 2012).

The last barrier is the lack of elementary English teachers' competency (Azmy, 2020). From the results of their research, Suherdi and Kurniawan (2005) discovered that many elementary teachers lacked the competence to teach English effectively. This barrier has an impact on the implementation of teacher-centered and monotonous learning methods, making them less suitable for the characteristics of elementary students (Pertiwi et al., 2020). Furthermore, because they are more focused on grammar and syntax, teachers' English communication skills are less developed (Musthafa, 2001).The development of learning material is viewed as still being less relevant to the characteristics and needs of the students because it tends to rely on the text books and the students' worksheets (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Lestari, 2003).

Appeared barriers to TEYL implementation need to be studied as a basis for developing innovation and sustainability professionalism. In this case, this research on teachers' beliefs is needed because everything they do in the class could be reflected in their beliefs about those learning. In other words, teachers' beliefs may influence their teaching practices (Borg, 2003). The reffered influences according to Kuborzka (2011) include "...their goals, procedures, materials, classroom interaction patterns, their roles, their students, and the schools they work in." Therefore, the research on belief could give information for teachers on how to optimize the learning (Liao, 2007), adapt the actions to the characteristics of the students (Xu, 2012), and translate that into learning practice so as to influence their perceptions and judgments (Thomas, 2013).

There are several previous studies on teachers' beliefs about learning English in elementary schools. The first research conducted by Listyariani, Artini, and Padmadewi (2018) on English teachers at public elementary schools. According to the findings of this study, teachers have a positive attitude toward TEYL and activity-based learning. Teachers also expressed that there are some barriers, such as difficulties in teaching pronunciation, a lack of learning infrastructure, and a lack of time for lesson preparation.

The other research on teachres' beliefs was conducted by Kaniadewi (2022). The result of the research on 40 elementary English teachers showed that teachers have the belief that "the younger the better," so they agree to start learning in grade 1 because

students are in the "golden period." Moreover, teachers also believe in the importance of monolingual implementation, namely, only using the target language during the learning process. To support its implementation, teachers need to ensure sufficient language input and a fun and pressure-free class atmosphere.

The other relevant study tried to compare beliefs between in-service and pre-service teachers on TEYL in Taiwan, which was conducted by Liao (2007). The research was conducted by administering a questionnaire that focused on three things: the nature of English language development in children, the learning method, and teachers' self-efficacy. The result of the research revealed that teachers still need to improve their beliefs about TEYL on a conscious level so it can improve their teaching practices. The other research conducted by Kocaman and Cansiz (2012) also compared beliefs among in-service and pre-service teachers. The result of the research showed that the two groups supported the implementation of communicative language teaching as a method considered to be the most suitable for TEYL.

The existing research so far about teachers' beliefs has been thorough. Nonetheless, there is insufficient research on the PST of the ETE study program's belief in TEYL. In reality, based on the literature study and previous research, PST from that study program is considered facing barriers in implementing TEYL in elementary schools. On the contrary, Zein (2016) claimed that even though students at teacher education for elementary schools are equipped with teaching methodology for children, class, teaching theories, educational philosophy, microteaching, and learning evaluation, the English input for students at teacher education for elementary schools is lacking, so the graduates are deemed less ideal to be an English teacher for elementary school. In line with that opinion, Borg (2006) also believed that without adequate English skills and references on pedagogical English teaching for young learners, the teacher's cognition is incomplete.

In the previous studies, it was mentioned the barriers in TEYL at elementary schools from the aspect of teachers' competence. First, most of elementary schools English teachers do not have qualifications as graduate from English education (Rahayu, 2016; Yuwono&Harbon, 2010). Second, English teachers who have graduated from an English study program do not receive special training as elementary school English teachers (Diyanti, Nurhayati, and Supriyanti, 2020; Supriyanti, 2012). Third, English teachers who are graduates of an English education study program do not receive special training as elementary school English teachers. Currently, English teacher education only prepares the students to be prospective junior and senior high school teachers because the national curriculum for English is only intended for junior and senior high schools (Yuwono & Harbon, 2010).

From the results of the previous research, it could be concluded that teachers have not been well-prepared to follow the new regulation for English language teaching in elementary schools. As a result, many schools that teach English to elementary school students do not have adequate teachers and infrastructure (Rachmajanti, 2008). Zein (2015) added that elementary and English teacher education also have not fully

prepared preservice teachers to teach English in the elementary schools. One of the reasons is the limitation of the credit semester system for TEYL subjects in the university (Supriyanti, 2012).

Based on the described problems, the aims of this research are to describe the beliefs of pre-service teachers (PST) in the Elementary Teacher Education (ETE) study program on TEYL. This research is expected to have benefits for related parties. For preservice teachers, beliefs could be used to predict teaching practices that would be carried later in the class (Othman & Kiely, 2016), and for teacher education study programs, they are expected to be used as evaluation materials to improve the quality of the learning process and graduates (Thomas, 2013).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Belief of Pre-Service Teachers

Experts believed that the teachers' beliefs influenced their teaching practices in the class. Teachers' beliefs are pedagogical beliefs that are relevant to one's teaching and reflect what one thinks, knows, and believes (Borg, 2001). Understanding teachers' beliefs could support teacher professionalism and the success of the new curriculum (Kuborzka, 2011). All teachers have their own beliefs and theories on teaching concepts, which are influenced by their previous experiences or individual characteristics (Pajares, 2015). In addition, the condition of socio-cultural, educational knowledge, experiences, ability to teach, and students also become the factors which influence the beliefs differences of each teacher (Xu, 2012).

There is previous research that also examines the beliefs of preservice teachers on TEYL. The first relevant research was conducted by Othman and Kiely (2016), which aimed to explore the beliefs of 70 preservice teachers in Malaysia on TEYL and its relation to real learning practices in the classroom. The result of the research showed that the learning practices of preservice teachers do not always reflect their beliefs about TEYL. Although there is a strong belief that TEYL should use a communicative approach, preservice teachers also use a structural approach when teaching grammar in the class. This is caused by time limitations and demands for written learning evaluations. Other relevant research was conducted by Karekatti and Shinde (2012) on 100 preservice teachers in India. The result of the research showed that most of the respondents felt that they had barriers in TEYL and received less training on how to teach English effectively in the class.

Previous research examined the beliefs of preservice teachers in an English education study program, while the subjects of this study are ETE students. In addition, another difference appears in the basic theory used to analyze the data. This research is based on teacher belief theory, which includes English teachers' beliefs about English, learning, teaching, programs, and curriculum, as well as language teaching as a profession (Richards & Lockhart, 2007). English teachers' beliefs about English represent teachers' stereotyped impressions of English. Beliefs about learning are influenced by training, teaching experience, and personal experience as a language

learner. Beliefs about teaching are influenced by the experiences gained during teaching in the class. Beliefs about the program and curriculum are formed by the culture of the school where the teachers work. Beliefs about language teaching as a profession depend on working conditions, their personal goals and attitudes, and the career prospects available in their community.

Research on teachers' beliefs has some benefits. Breen (2012) mentioned that the reasons of importance for conducting research on teachers' beliefs are: (1) becomes the guidance for teachers in learning activities because it reflects reasons for every actions in the class; (2) becomes reflection materials as a basis for continuing teachers' professional development; (3) provides information related to policy and curriculum planning to develop educational innovations; (4) generates new principles that are relevant with current learning realities and could replace previous irrelevant principles.

### Teaching English to Young Learner (TEYL)

Basically, children and adults have different characteristics when it comes to learning languages. Children have high interest and curiosity on everything around them. Various knowledge and experiences could be gained from what they see, hear, and experience in their lives, not just limited to the explanations from their teachers in the classroom. Teachers also do not need to worry about the limited English vocabulary mastery of the children because they are able to understand it with the help of *learning media such as gesture, mime,* or intonation, which give different symbols to different vocabularies. Moreover, children are more interested and motivated to learn when the learning fits with their needs. The next most striking difference between children and adults is their level of boredom. Children get bored faster than adults (Harmer, 2002).

In line with Harmer, Slattery, and Willis (2001), they also saw the importance of using learning media in the form of pictures, songs, and games. In addition, the teachers have to pay attention to voice intonation, body language, and facial expressions, which make learning English more enjoyable for children. Scott and Lisbeth (1990) added that children should be physically active because this is one of their needs during the learning process. This can be done through learning variations so as to maximize the potential of the children. Teachers can also use role-playing techniques where students can use the language they learn in a drama. In this way, children will work with language holistically. Another important thing that teachers should pay attention to in English language learning for children is a fun and comfortable class atmosphere. One of the ways to create it is by creating classroom conditions that prioritize a sense of cooperation and togetherness rather than a sense of competition. Related to more complicated grammar, it is suggested that it is only taught to students with a higher level or higher level of English mastery or given when students inquiry about it. In this way, children will feel that they are getting what they need from the grammar explanations they receive. Teachers should also begin to develop intensive communication with students to evaluate what they do not understand through reflective learning so they can become students who are able to recognize and motivate themselves.

## METHOD

This qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena (Ockleford & Windrigde, 2009). The referred phenomenon is the PST of the ETE study program's belief in TEYL. In qualitative research, there are five research approaches: narrative research, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study (Creswell & Clark, 2007). From those five approaches, case study research focus is considered as the most suitable to answer the research questions of this research because it is quite effective and detailed in monitoring the policies, including about the classes or schools with the unique programs (Timmons&Cairns, 2010). The referred program is the presence of English subject for children for pre-service elementary school teachers which aims to provide fundamental understanding of TEYL.

This research was conducted in an elementary school education study program in Yogyakarta. The identity of the university and participants in this research are not mentioned because, according to Timmons and Cairns (2010), researchers on case study research must ensure the confidentiality of the participants. In this research, there are 95 open questionnaires, with five questions answered by the students. In the questionaires, no answer choices are provided, so students could answer the questions based on their experiences (Creswell, 2012).

The instrument was developed based on research guidelines on teachers' beliefs, including English teachers' beliefs about English, learning, teaching, programs, and curriculum, and language teaching as a profession (Richards & Lockhart, 2007). The data obtained is then interactively and continuously analyzed, starting from data condensation and display and continuing until data conclusion/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, open questionnaire has five item questions developed based on theory of teachers' beliefs (Richards & Lockhart, 2007) was administered to PST at ETE. The number of students who filled out the questionnaire was 95. However, by employing an open questionnaire, it is possible to extract more data items because students are given the flexibility to give more than one answer.

The first item mentioned in the questionnaire is about PST at ETE perspective on English language. Therefore, the objective of the given questions is to explore the perspective of the students on the reasons for holding English class in elementary schools. The number of collected data were 257.

Table 1. Reasons for Organizing TEYL

| No | Item data | Percentage |
|----|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Supporting the study and mastery of science and technology | 36 % |
| 2 | Supporting the career and economic demands in globalization | 30 % |

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|---|---|---|
| | era | |
| 3 | Parents' enthusiasm | 17 % |
| 4 | The Younger The Better | 13 % |
| 5 | Opening opportunity to know other cultures and languages | 4 % |
| Total | | 100 % |

Based on the data gathered, the PST at ETE believes that implementing TEYL provides numerous benefits to students. The result of this research is in line with the research conducted by Octaviani and Fauzan (2017), which discovered that many elementary school teachers in Indonesia agree that learning English is important for children and beneficial for their future. The obtained benefits are better English mastery, parental demands, and global economy (Octaviani & Fauzan, 2017). In addition, the result of research conducted by Djalal (2017) shows the same result, which supports their study because English will be a compulsory subject at the next educational level. The opening of opportunities to know other cultures was also mentioned by Pinter (2006), apart from other benefits, which include developing basic communication skills, improving motivation to learn languages, and developing children's cognitive abilities.

The data obtained also shows that the majority of PST at ETE believe that children have different characteristics from adult learners. The 289 item data gathered below show the PST of ETE's belief on the characteristics of children learning a foreign language.

Table 2. Characteristcis of the Children in Learning Foreign Language

| No | Item data | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Having short concentration and attention | 25 % |
| 2 | Enjoying physically active activities | 21 % |
| 3 | Favouring fictional and imajinatif related | 21 % |
| 4 | Favouring games | 19 % |
| 5 | Having limitation in abstract thinking and memorizing | 10 % |
| 6 | Having limitation in reading and writing skills | 4 % |
| Total | | 100 % |

The characteristics which many mentioned by PTS of ETE are children can only have concentrate and focus for short time, enjoying learning activities that require them to physically active, favouring fictional or imaginative things related, and games (Musthafa, 2000; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Besides that, PTS of ETE also believes that children have limitations in their ability to think abstractly, so it is less suitable if teachers apply techniques to recite new vocabulary and grammar patterns (Musthafa, 2000). Reading and writing skills of the students are also believed to be still developing, so teachers need to understand that children still have limitations in those skills at the elementary school level (Pinter, 2006).

PST of ETE's beliefs regarding barriers and strategies in teaching English are presented on table 3 and 4. This may be influenced by their experiences as language

learners and their teaching practices. The obtained data on table 3 is 295 and 198 items in table 4.

Table 3. Barriers in TEYL Optimalization

| No | Item data | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Students have limitation in English vocabulary mastery | 24 % |
| 2 | Students are less exposed of English language in daily life | 20 % |
| 3 | Teachers give less opportunity for the students to actively communicate in English during the lesson | 6 % |
| 4 | Schools have less adequate English learning facilities | 11 % |
| 5 | Presence of differences in the spelling of English vocabularies between writing and pronounciation | 19 % |
| 6 | Large number of students for each class (big class) | 6 % |
| 7 | Teachers less understand that students and adult learn English in different ways | 3 % |
| 8 | Teachers rely only on text book and students worksheet during the teaching | 11 % |
| Total | | 100 % |

Based on these data, the PST at ETE believes that the barriers to TEYL optimalization come from factors involving the students, teachers, and school infrastructure. Belief in those barriers is also mentioned by Songbatumis (2017), including a lack of vocabulary, limited resources, limited accessibility, and crowded classes. Moreover, the limited exposure to English both in daily activities and during the learning process in the classroom is also seen as a major barrier (Mustafa, 2000; Pinter, 2011; Songbatumis, 2017). Another barrier that is also believed to be the reason for the difficulty in TEYL optimalization is the different spelling of the vocabularies between writing and pronunciation (Mustafa, 2000). Teachers' failure to recognize that children have different characteristics than adult learners when learning a foreign language is also viewed as a barrier for language learners. This can affect the inaccuracy of the teaching methodologies implemented by the teachers (Mustafa, 2000; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990; Songbatumis, 2017), such as relying only on text books and student worksheets (Alwasilah, 2013).

Table 4. Strategies in Teaching English

| No | Item data | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Giving instructions in English | 26 % |
| 2 | Using various learning materials | 18 % |
| 3 | Creating diversity of learning activites | 32 % |
| 4 | Forming group and pair works | 17 % |
| 5 | Supporting students to communicate in English | 7 % |
| Total | | 100 % |

The strategy widely expressed by PST at ETE because of the less exposure of English on children in daily activities is by employing English instruction. This is one of the important things for an English teacher in an elementary school to do (Pinter, 2006).

To facilitate the characteristics of the children in learning a foreign language, PST at ETE believe that a strategy using various learning materials and activities needs to be implemented by the teachers. These strategies could be implemented by employing language games (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990), rhymes, songs, some basic vocabularies, and cautiously practicing dialogues (Pinter, 2011), and learning materials, either traditional, including handouts, books, newspapers, charts, magazines, slides, real objects, flashcards, videotape or film, television, and radio, or modern, including computers, interactive video conferencing, and the internet (Gagne, Briggs, and Wager, 1992 in Rahmi, 2014). Another strategy believed by PST at ETE that can support communication skill of the students is forming group or pair works, also always encourage students willing to try to communicate in English (Harmer, 2004).

To be able to optimize the English learning in the elementary schools, PST at ETE believes that trainings are still required. The 142 data in the following indicate the type of training required by PST of ETE.

Table 5. Needed Trainings for TEYL Teachers

| No | Item data | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | English training for active communication | 26 % |
| 2 | Training for classroom language, vocabularies, and simple grammar | 22 % |
| 3 | Workshop on development of English learning materials for elementary schools | 16 % |
| 4 | TEYL Microteaching | 36 % |
| Total | | 100 % |

Based on those data, PST at ETE realize the importance of an elementary school English teacher to be able to actively communicate in the class. This is done to optimize the students' exposure to English. This is also regarded as necessary by Curtain & Dahlberg (2000), who argue that if teachers cannot use the target language to give instruction in the class, they will not be able to surround learners with the language, even though it is an important component of an effective language learning environment. Musthafa (2001) also acknowledged the urgency of one of the dimensions of language learning that students need examples of how to use the target language.

PST at ETE also mentioned that they believed in the importance of workshops on developing English learning media for elementary schools. These workshops are needed for teachers to create learning objectives that suit the needs of the students, so they can choose appropriate learning methodologies, materials, and assessment (Luke, as cited in Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000). Furthermore, this activity aims to help teachers select relevant topics and contexts based on the characteristics of their students in order to create effective language learning (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2000). Microteaching, in addition to learning media, is regarded as important by the PST at ETE to add experience in dealing with real-world practice in the classroom. Through this activity, it is expected that PST can better understand that every child learns in a different way, so teachers are

not injudicious in generalizing students instead of developing various learning activities (Paul, 2003).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the data gathered from 95 PSTs of ETE, it could be concluded that PSTs of ETE have positive impacts on the implementation of English learning at the elementary school level. This is caused by TEYL being considered for the future of the students, including supporting their studies and careers in the globalization era. Apart from that, encouragement from parents, the belief that the younger the better, and the chance to know other cultures are also listed as reasons for the importance of TEYL today. The PST at ETE also believes that children have different characteristics from adult learners when it comes to learning a foreign language, such as not being able to concentrate and focus for long periods, loving games and physical activities, having a limited imagination, and having limitations in thinking about abstract, reading, and writing.

The PST at ETE also reveals that obstacles in TEYL are caused by factors involving students, teachers, and school infrastructures. The obstacles come from the students' lack of vocabulary mastery and exposure to English. Lack of the competence of the teachers is considered causing learning barriers, such as giving less opportunity for students to communicate in English in class, less understanding English teaching methodology for children, and relying solely on textbook and students' worksheet. Obstacles in school infrastructure cause a lack of supporting learning facilities and make large classes less conducive. Strategies that can be used by elementary English teachers to overcome those obstacles include prioritizing the target language in terms of giving instructions and motivating the students to use it, choosing various media and learning activities, and habituating themselves to working in groups and in pairs.

To optimize TEYL, PST at ETE considers the need for training for elementary English teachers covering training on actively English usage, including training on classroom language, vocabularies, and simple grammar. The implication of this research is the need for a wider opportunity for PSTs of ETE to implement TEYL beliefs and theories that they have learned in real teaching practicum in the classroom. This can be a suggestion for future researchers to examine the connectivity between the PST of ETE's belief in TEYL and its implementation in teaching English in elementary schools.

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