



UHAMKA PRESS

p-ISSN: 2477-3859 e-ISSN: 2477-3581  
**JURNAL INOVASI PENDIDIKAN DASAR**  
The Journal of Innovation in Elementary Education  
<http://jipd.uhamka.ac.id/index.php/jipd>



Volume 2 • Number 2 • June 2017 • 45 - 52

## Teachers' Prior Knowledge Influence in Promoting English Learning Strategies in Primary School Classroom Practices

Suciana Wijirahayu<sup>1,✉</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English Education Department, Graduate School, University of Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA, Indonesia

Received: March 6, 2017

Accepted: May 2, 2017

Published: June 1, 2017

### Abstract

This case study is about the primary school teachers' prior knowledge that influence their beliefs about English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning Strategies reflected in their actual classroom practices. There were two senior Indonesian teachers who has more than 10 years teaching experience participated in this research. One of the teacher was teaching in state primary school and the other was teaching in an international primary school in Jakarta. The result of the analysis from participants' responses to the questionnaire, video-recorded classroom observations and interviews were presented qualitatively in the findings section. The results showed that primary teachers' beliefs about EFL Learning strategies were uniquely reflected in their classroom practices suitable to their experience in acquiring and applying Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) in learning English.

**Keywords:** EFL, teacher's prior knowledge, primary school teacher's beliefs, LLS, classroom practices

## ***Peran Pengetahuan Awal Guru dalam Mempromosikan Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar***

### Abstrak

Studi kasus ini mengkaji tentang pengetahuan awal guru sekolah dasar yang mempengaruhi keyakinan mereka tentang strategi belajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (*English as a Foreign Language*, disingkat EFL) dan tercermin dalam praktik di kelas mereka yang sebenarnya. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah dua guru senior yang memiliki pengalaman mengajar lebih dari 10 tahun. Salah satu guru mengajar di sekolah dasar negeri dan yang lainnya mengajar di sebuah sekolah dasar swasta internasional di Jakarta. Hasil analisis dari tanggapan partisipan terhadap kuesioner, rekaman video observasi kelas dan wawancara disajikan secara kualitatif di bagian temuan. Temuan penelitian mengindikasikan bahwa keyakinan guru sekolah dasar tentang strategi pembelajaran EFL secara unik tercermin dalam praktik kelas mereka sesuai dengan pengalaman mereka dalam memperoleh dan menerapkan *Language Learning Strategies* (LLS) dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

**Kata kunci:** EFL, pengetahuan awal guru, keyakinan guru sekolah dasar, LLS, praktik di kelas

✉ Corresponding Author:

Affiliation Address: Jalan Warung Buncit Raya No. 17, Pancoran, Jakarta Selatan  
E-mail: [sucianawijirahayu@gmail.com](mailto:sucianawijirahayu@gmail.com)

## INTRODUCTION

Some other researches proved that there is a relation between beliefs and language learning strategies. A significant correlation between student teachers' beliefs about the nature of language learning and social strategies in language learning has also been reported by [Wijirahayu \(2009\)](#). Learning a language involves other people, and appropriate social strategies are very important in this process. Three sets of social strategies, each set comprising two specific strategies are included here: Asking Questions, Cooperating with Other, and Empathizing with Others ([Oxford, 1989: 145](#)). Similar finding was reported by [Suwaranak \(2012\)](#) that a significant correlation between students' beliefs about English language learning and their use of learning strategies indicate that the beliefs to some extent related to strategy use.

A study of the effective foreign language teaching: a matter of Iranian students' and teachers' beliefs, recommended from the finding that teachers should include discussion about the nature of language learning as a regular part of their instruction to confront students' erroneous beliefs with new information. A similar case about LLSs used by Iranian Postgraduate Students, [Kafipour, Noordin and Pazeshkian \(2011\)](#) reported the teachers should encourage the learners to actively employ all the strategies in their learning process. [Wijirahayu \(2013\)](#) studied pre-service teachers' beliefs in utilizing film and role-play in EFL classroom practices and found that the selected film related to the chosen themes by the pre-service teachers combined with collaborative learning and performed in scenes role-play increased their beliefs about language learning and LLS.

However, in Indonesia, teachers of EFL are basically exposed by different setting of classrooms and instructions as well as instructors that influence the way they perceive the teaching of EFL itself. Since the teachers plays the key roles in their classroom, the research questions below were introduced.

1. What beliefs about EFL learning strategies did the primary school teachers in this study have in their language learning?
2. Which beliefs about EFL learning strategies of the teachers in this study were reflected in their classroom practices and how were the strategies applied in their classroom practices?

## METHODS

In this case study as an addition to the questionnaire, semi structured interviews with participants were used to examine their beliefs in detail. Finally, to find out whether participants' beliefs matched to their actual practices in their classrooms, the participants teaching practices were observed and video-recorded for triangulation for the data. Three sessions classroom observations of the courses as well as video recordings of those courses were also examined by the researcher. O'Malleys language learning strategies scheme was used to classify the transcript of classroom video recordings ([see more O'Malley & Chamot, 1990](#)).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Case 1: Teacher 1 (T1)

T1 illustrated that a kind of language learning strategies that could improve her English mastery is learning through a multimedia. She also had some other beliefs relating to language learning, and she said ways and how to share it. For instance, she always supported her students and also other teachers to practice their English. In addition, she thought that language learning strategy could help her because she could find a lot of resources from the multimedia.

### *T1's Classroom Practices and Observation*

Before starting her lesson, T1 opened the session by praying together. This was reflecting not only her beliefs as a moslem but also the integrated school goals shown in the atmosphere created around the classes in this famous state elementary school in Jakarta. No wonder, one of the graduates from this school is not only famous but also successful overseas and worldwide and keeping the whole strong memories with him shared when he was back to Jakarta.

Just after that she invited her students to sing an English song together she used various strategies in handling her students as a young learner of English. The song is supposed to gain the students' attention to the readiness and attract them to learn more to the new topics introduced. She delivered the material calmly. It worked for these second-grade elementary school students and understanding was built about the topic and material supported by a textbook and hand out.

As the main material was started to be delivered, T1 showed some pictures to her students, and started to ask them what the picture was. She introduced a material about modal, for instance 'can'. She asked the students to read the texts from the picture that were available. She also asked the students to repeat the words that she had pronounced. She gave a true correction when the students got false in comprehension. She also praised the students who produced correct answer. She focused on some drillings to her students to answer correctly.

The students were enthusiastic to join the lesson. In fact, it is a nature that young learners love colorful images or pictures around them as a media to facilitate them in capturing ideas or new topics especially in learning English as a foreign language. The images are one of ways to strengthen their memory and make it easier for them to remember and recall. When the class was almost over, she reminded the students to do the exercises from the textbook.

In teaching learning process T1 made use of in focus that was provided in her class. Other additional media was prepared suitable to the topics. Songs with pictures and video were played in display to introduce the lesson as well as to support the listening practices. By providing the display, she expected the students to easily act out the movements shown in the video. They followed and enjoyed the music, as well as imitated the words and new expression used in the song. Images from the display represented new words or expression that was delivered by the teacher. As a result, it was easier for the students to understand the topic. She also used flashcards and games in the exercises. It created relax situation. It is suitable for young learners who are naturally learning through playing. Therefore, again the students were more enthusiastic to join in and do some exercises happily. She was successful to show that English is fun, easy, and interesting to learn. It could be seen that most of the students did not have serious problems in learning English in the class. All of them were happy in their English learning process.

T1 shared some strategies in her teaching process and those related to her beliefs about language learning strategies that she employed. Some memory strategies that she used were applied by connecting the sound of a new English word with suitable images or picture of the word as a media to help her students to remember the new words. The strategies shared by T1 has something to do with her prior learning process as she also used rhymes and flashcard to remember new English words. Moreover, she also informed through questionnaire and interview answer that she physically acted out new English word and reviewed the English lessons often. It could be proved that those strategies were also shared in her classroom practices.

Metacognitive strategies that T1 employed inside and outside class were thinking of an English word and using the word or phrase that means the same thing. In other words, she diverted the new words with other expression that has the same meaning. In her class, it was proved that the same strategies was introduced and applied when her students had

problems in understanding certain expression in English, she then, used other expressions to explain. Yet, once in a while, she also used Indonesian. In fact, all of the language learning strategies employed in the classroom by the teacher could not be separated from the beliefs she had. Therefore, [Borg \(2011\)](#) recommended to ensure that the teachers understand why they are being encouraged to examine their beliefs.

Imagery, repetition, directed attention and question for clarification were the language learning strategies that mostly used in T1 classroom practices. She started her class by ice breaking activity (a circle and singing some songs) planning in advance to attend in general to a learning task to ignore irrelevant distracter. She combined auditory representation and imagery (showing pictures) and TPR (Total Physical Respond) on the same time. Then she encouraged the student to apply repetition and inferencing from the picture. It was about expressing capability using modal: swimming, climbing painting, playing etc were introduced through pictures on the slide show.

T1 believed that a teacher especially English for young learner should be a motivator for her students to encourage them to speak English actively. She also realized that in EFL context, English was used as a medium of instruction only in English class therefore she used simple instruction that could be understood by the students and motivate them to learn more. She utilized a projector to show pictures, songs as well as expression in the whole three sessions on her classroom practices. [Shinde and Karekatti \(2011\)](#) reported their research regarding beliefs about medium of instruction to primary school children that pre-service expected to have training of how to make their talk effective and relevant in classrooms. T1 tried to refresh her students before she began the material by singing songs. Moreover, drilling were practiced intensively in her class to create more opportunity for the students to practice their English.

The last strategies she employed in the classroom was social strategy. In her learning experience process, she talks in English in her graduate classes, practices English with the other students and asked question in English. As an influence, she beliefs to use English as a medium of instruction in her class. In fact, for teachers especially in a country in which English is used as EFL context like Indonesia, teaching English, asking question and practicing English with the students is one of effective ways to maintain the language mastery. [Musthafa \(2010\)](#) purposed five pillars as essential requirements for teaching English in primary school in Indonesia. He further suggested: "As exposure to English in use is very limited outside of the classroom, teachers of English should use English all the time/or as much as possible during the session in the classroom. To support the idea of exposure to English use, print-rich environment should also be created in and around the classroom."

### **Case 2: Teacher 2 (T2)**

T2's class was an example of a theatrical class that provided sufficient space for all students to express their creativity and display the result of their workshop in the room. All side of the wall in that classroom were exposed colorfully by students works in form of drawings as well as writing mostly in English and little part in Chinese. A smart and creative teacher could use everything to make the class look alive and interesting and the students would feel at home and agreed that using English is fun. English teacher for young learner in this case was expected to be creative in providing interesting environment to support teaching learning process.

#### *T2's Classroom Practices and Observation*

The T2 class had already been set not only to develop students' cognitive potential but also building students' character. Once, he asked the students to reread the agreement on the walls related to values that have been agreed to be developed institutionally and that was "Fairness". When he started explaining the lesson, there was someone who was

singing in the class, that was one of his students. Wisely he addressed his student not to do singing in the class and invited to him to pay attention when he gave explanation about the lesson. The student responded directly and continued listening to his teacher without disturbing his friends in the class anymore.

T2 had an assistant teacher who usually helped him to guide the students to do assignments in the class. The class atmosphere were very communicative as they may asked the teachers to come to their seats anytime to help them by raising hand. The teachers always speak in English to keep the international nuances in their classes and that was one of agreement they made with the students in the beginning of the course. The agreements were written and stacked on the class wall. It reminded all the student as well as teachers to be committed.

T2 believed that it is easier for children to learn English as foreign language than adult. Therefore, he used normal speed and expressions in his class of young learner to familiarize the student to the real communication they should use as a global citizen. It was different from common elementary English teachers that usually simplify the expression as well as structure and slowed down the speed when they delive red their instructional design. He also believed that speaking is easier to learn rather than writing and reading. Therefore, when his topic is writing, he designed and scaffold by combining writing and drawing so that the student could learn step by step while they were enjoying the activity. As he believed that writing is not easy, T2 also prepared himself by being more patience and calm in guiding his students to express their ideas in written report. Luckily, the students had been trained well not to be hesitated to raise questions to him and his assistance to accomplish their assignment. Their enthusiasm created conducive atmosphere for all to develop communicative competence in young learner class.

Teaching English in international elementary school was challenging for T2 especially when the teachers are expected to prepare the students to use English as the main media of instruction. The students of in this International Elementary School used English in their academic life everyday. They are prepared to use English at least in three classes, English, math, and science. No wonder at second grade they could speak English and it means they could do it in less than a year because they got more chances to have sufficient exposure in their golden age.

T2 believed that Indonesian can speak English well. It is proved by his high interest and enthusiasm in teaching and learning English. He also believed that it is necessary to know about culture in order to speak English well. Language could not be separated from culture, therefore cross culture understanding is necessary to be introduced since a very beginning to prepare the students to differentiate the contexts.

In applying affective strategy in his learning experience, T2 encouraged himself to speak English even when he was afraid of making a mistake. Once he found unfamiliar English words then he made guesses. It was also applied in his classroom teaching practices. For example, when he said "Maximum 5 sentences" the students did not really understand about what he said, then he repeated the message by using other words "Four is okay. Three is okay and Five is okay. If I say maximum. Can you make more than five?". By using other words the students could understand the meaning. That is part of compensation strategies that T7 shared in his class.

In the beginning of his writing class, T2 drew mind mapping by drawing circles. There were four circles that he drawn on the whiteboard. The first circle was for "title of the story" and the others three circles were for the beginning of the story, the middle of the story, and the ending of the story. To make the exercise easier and more interesting, he asked his students to draw a simple picture describing the story on their paper. Moreover, the students were also able to write a story. Even, they could write a story in three paragraphs. How a wonderful they were. That was something unusual for a second grade students of elementary school in Indonesia. Again, the teachers' beliefs about language

learning strategies and the prior knowledge influence the way he applied and shared the strategies in the classroom practices (Wijirahayu, 2017).

### **General Similarities and Differences of T1 and T2 Classroom Practices**

As part of his beliefs about language learning strategies from his prior experience, T2 encouraged his students to prepare themselves starting from a very beginning as he considered the students to be more autonomous and ready to use English as a medium of instruction. He trained the students to do more complicated tasks by combining drawing and writing in composing more than one paragraph. On the other hand, T1 believed that a teacher especially English for young learner should be a motivator for her students to encourage them to speak English actively.

Although there were differences in the application in classroom practices as a medium of instruction, there were also similarities of the primary teachers in this study in believing about the nature of language learning that children learn language better than adults. Both of them believed in applying language learning strategies by providing the students environment and task that make it possible for the students to practice the language related to the contexts. Cain (2012) found that experiences in school, in home and as teachers in primary school impacted on teachers' ability to enact their beliefs about teaching and learning in the classroom.

However, the most important thing of applying language learning strategies in primary school would be beneficial if the students are able to enjoy the material and happy in learning English. Related to his research about teachers' beliefs about teaching English to elementary school children in Taiwan, Liao (2007) suggested an exploration on three major areas namely the nature of children English development, teaching method and techniques and self-efficacy as an English teacher.

### **CONCLUSION**

Although there were differences in the application in classroom practices as a media of instruction, there were also similarities of the primary teachers in this study in believing about the nature of language learning that children learn language better than adult. Both of them believed in applying language learning strategies by providing the students environment and tasks that make it possible for the students to practice the language related to the contexts. Moreover, the finding shows that teachers beliefs were interrelated and strengthened by the experience of applying LLS in their classroom practices.

It can be concluded that, every teacher has different language learning strategies, beliefs and practiced those strategies in classroom in different ways. Imagery, repetition, directed attention and question for clarification were the language learning strategies that mostly used in T1 classroom practices. T1 believed that a teacher especially English for young learner should be a motivator for her students to encourage them to speak English actively. She also realized that in EFL context, English was used as a medium of instruction only in English class therefore she used simple instruction that could be understood by the students and motivate them to learn more. T2 in the contrary delivered the instruction in normal speed like he is talking to adult without simplifying the expression. Yet, he has his own reasoning of doing so. This was influenced by the environment in international school as well as related to his beliefs that language should be learnt naturally so that the students could use that in a real global situation.

From this case study, there are facts that even from primary schools EFL learners may acquire some language learning strategies that influence their beliefs about English and the learning process. Therefore, primary school teachers need to be aware of it. Not only good experience may influence the English acquisition but also bad experience as well. Yet, personality of the learners will also contribute to the way the learners react and the future

result of the learning process. Since every EFL learners in Indonesia might have different English teachers in every semester, the prior English learning experience may also vary for every teacher and could contribute for further research.

It could not be denied from foreign language point of view that confidence in using English could be built since primary school especially from the facts reported in international primary classes in T2 case. Yet, there are still controversies from nationality point of view. Nevertheless, ideas creating more confidence and autonomous learners in primary school English classes are possible through developing learning and teaching strategies. Action researches are beneficial to figure out which strategies would work for certain case suited to the institutional goal.

Weakness and strength from the case study that were learned from senior primary school teachers could be used as the base line. Some suggestions for primary teacher training institution are to build the awareness of the teacher to be about their beliefs about language learning and language learning strategies.

## REFERENCES

- Borg, S. (2011). The impact of in-service teacher education on language teachers' beliefs. *System*, 39(3), 370-380. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2011.07.009>
- Cain, M. (2012). Belief about Classroom Practice: A Study of Primary Teacher Trainees in Trinidad and Tobago. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, (2)3, 96-105.
- Kafipour, R., Noordin, N., & Pezeshkian, F. (2011). Effect of Motivation and Gender on the Choice of Language Learning Strategies by Iranian Postgraduate Students. *Pertanika: J. Soc. Sci. & Hum*, 19(1), 159-171.
- Musthafa, B. (2010). Teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesia: Essential Requirements. *Educationist*, IV(2), 120-125.
- Oxford, R. L. (1989). Use of language learning strategies: A synthesis of studies with implications for strategy training. *System*, 17(2), 235-247. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X\(89\)90036-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X(89)90036-5)
- O'Malley, J. M. & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shinde, M. B., & Karekatti, T. K. (2011). Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching English to Primary School Children. *International Journal of Instruction*, 5(1), 69-86.
- Suwanarak, K. (2012). *English Language learning beliefs, learning strategies and achievement of Masters students in Thailand*. TESOL, in Context. Special Edition S3: November 2012. Retrieved from [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/275\\_kasma\\_suwanarak.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/275_kasma_suwanarak.pdf)
- Wijirahayu, S. (2009). *The Relevance of Beliefs about Language Learning and Language Learning Strategy of University Students at UPI and UHAMKA*. A research funded by LPPM UHAMKA.
- Wijirahayu, S. (2013). Pre-service Teachers Beliefs' in Utilizing Film and Role-play in EFL Classroom Practices. *Proceeding International Conference on Computer in Education (ICCE) 2013*.
- Wijirahayu, S. (2017). *Strategi Belajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing dari Perspektif Keyakinan Guru*. Proceeding Konferensi Nasional Pascasarjana PTM ke-5 di Sidoarjo.

*This page is intentionally left blank*