Novice ESL Teachers' Beliefs about English Language Learning and Teaching in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the findings of a small scale qualitative study to explore novice ESL teachers' belief regarding teaching English to primary school learners in Malaysia. Employing the qualitative research methodology (interview), the present study selects three novice ESL teachers in primary school as participants to uncover their beliefs about English language teaching and learning as well as factors responsible for shaping their beliefs. The findings of the study discover about novice ESL teachers' beliefs in classroom, ESL learners and ESL learning, ESL teaching, language focus, error and role of first language as well as the roles of teachers. The study also reveals that prior language learning experience, teacher education programme and teaching experience are among the contributive factors for shaping these teachers' beliefs.

Keywords: Teacher beliefs, ESL teacher, Novice teacher, English language learning teaching

1. Introduction

In recent decades, researchers in the field of second language acquisition have shown great concern in learners' individual characteristics that can influence the learners' success in language learning. One of the research focuses is beliefs about second language learning and teaching. Generally, beliefs are shaped by personal experiences and interactions in daily life as well as the interpretations of events individuals have engaged in (Al-Sharafi, 1998). These beliefs are transformed into attitudes, which in turn influence intentions, and finally intention serves as the foundation for decisions that lead to action (Bauch, 1984).

As for teachers, this concept of belief system provides direction to their instructional behaviours with their personal pedagogies reflecting their beliefs about language teaching and learning (Bauch, 1984; Graves, 2000; Huang, 1997). Borg (1999) suggests that teachers' thought processes and instructional decisions are influenced by their beliefs. These beliefs influence teachers' decisions in choosing tasks and activities, designing lessons, deciding teaching objectives as well as evaluating students' achievement (Rios, 1996). Thus, besides imparting knowledge to students, teachers also intentionally and unintentionally leave behind and compel their beliefs about language learning to the students. The understanding of novice teachers' beliefs about the process of teaching and learning is crucial as they form the core of their teaching behaviours which can be both effective and destructive. The study on novice teachers' beliefs is also useful as it highlights aspects to be improved in teacher development courses to enhance the educational system as a whole.

2. Theoretical Framework

Drawing on research in the philosophy of knowledge, a belief is a mental state which has as its content a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding it, despite of the fact that the individual may be aware that others may hold to different beliefs (Borg, 1999). Teachers' beliefs play an important role in many aspects of teaching. Teachers' beliefs is a term usually used to refer to teachers' pedagogic beliefs or those beliefs of relevance to an individual teaching. Calderhead (1996) argues that there are five main areas that are closely related and may well be interconnected in which teachers have been found to hold significant beliefs including beliefs about learners and learning, teaching, subjects or curriculum, learning to teach, and about the self and the nature of teaching. Harvey (1988) argues that, 'a belief system is a set of conceptual representations which signify to the