

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature related to the present study are to be reviewed in this chapter. The first section explains the definition of teachers' pedagogical beliefs. Then, in the second section, the interrelationship between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices is discussed by means of Clark and Peterson's (1986) and Borg's (2003) frameworks. Finally, the last two sections review recent studies about language teachers' beliefs and practices on general second language teaching and reading instruction particularly.

2.1 Teachers' Pedagogical Beliefs

Beliefs are considered to be people's assumptions or conceptions which influence how they understand events and reality. According to Johnson (1999), beliefs are said to guide one's thoughts and behaviors. Nisbett and Ross (1980, as cited in Clark & Peterson, 1986) made clear distinctions between knowledge and beliefs, suggesting that knowledge was testable, conventional facts but beliefs were personal perceptions about certain behaviors or objects. Nespor (1987) in his study on teachers' beliefs even proposed beliefs were personal presumptions or truths about physical or social reality, but the presumptions may deviate from reality due to strong evaluative and affective components or previous episodic memory. In short, beliefs are related to evaluation, but knowledge comes from facts (Pajare, 1992). However, the differences among knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, perceptions or conceptions have been relatively unclear. Beliefs have been used with other terms like knowledge, images, assumptions, conceptions, cognitions or personal theories interchangeably and the distinctions are vague (Borg, 2003; Pajare, 1992; Tsui, 2003; Woods, 1996).

Teacher beliefs as the belief substructure are the assumptions or conceptions

teacher holds toward their instructional behaviors. Johnson (1999) considers teachers' beliefs to have "a filtering effect on everything that teachers think about, say and do in classrooms" (p.30). Woods (1996) proposed the network of beliefs, assumption, and knowledge (BAK) to explain the way teachers interpret their thoughts and classroom actions. Tsui (2003) defined teachers' beliefs as teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning, which influence their classroom practice. In Borg's study (2003) in second/foreign language teaching context, teachers' cognitions, including knowledge, thoughts or beliefs, all referred to teachers' principles toward topics relevant to language teaching. In sum, teachers' beliefs can be regarded as the perceptions, personal knowledge about teaching and learning that teachers hold to influence their classroom practice.

However, while most studies about teachers' belief on general language teaching have similar results to those studies in educational research, research about teachers' belief on specific curricular areas of language teaching, like reading instruction, may provide unique findings (Borg, 2003). Tsui (2003) made a distinction between general pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. While some pedagogical knowledge is general to all subject matters, the content of subject matter may influence the general pedagogical skills being used. That is, many studies have proposed teachers' beliefs in general, but the content of teaching reading may be unique in its pedagogical knowledge or beliefs. Just as Harste and Burke's conclusion, teachers are "theoretical in their instructional approach to reading" (p. 32, as cited in Davis, Konopak, & Readence, 1993). Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991) also agreed with Harste and Burke, stating that teachers' beliefs and practices in reading comprehension instruction are related. In conclusion, in the present study, teacher's pedagogical knowledge, assumptions or attitudes were all subsumed to teachers' pedagogical beliefs. Teachers' pedagogical beliefs about reading instruction

refer to teachers' pedagogical assumptions, knowledge or principles about teaching of reading, which in turn influence their classroom practice.

2.2 Relationship between Teacher's Beliefs and Practices

The interaction between teachers' beliefs of teaching and practices is a significant dimension to understand teachers' pedagogical beliefs (Tsui, 2003). Freeman (2000) proposed that "the knowledge that animates language teaching can and needs to be found within the activity of teaching itself" (p.1). The activity of teaching referred to "the teacher and learners as participants conduct[ing] their work together... in the context of classroom, institution, or community" (ibid). That is, teachers' beliefs and practices are dialectically interrelated and the contextual factors, like students or schools come into play as well.

Clark and Peterson (1986) devised models of teacher thoughts and actions to explain the interrelationship between teachers' thought processes and their actions or observable effects. In Clark and Peterson's model, two domains of teaching process are discussed: (1) The domain of teachers' actions and observable effects includes teachers' classroom behavior, students' classroom behavior and student achievement, which are observable phenomena with reciprocal causality. (2) The other domain, teachers' thought processes, emphasizes teacher planning (preactive and postactive thoughts), teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions and teacher's theories and beliefs, which are mostly unobservable but with cyclical causation as observable actions. Both domains have reciprocal interactions. Teachers' beliefs serve as "the rich store of knowledge" (p. 258) to affect their planning and interactive thoughts, which in turn influence teachers' classroom behavior and student achievement. Clark and Peterson also explained possible constraints of teachers' actions or beliefs in terms of physical settings, like school, community or curriculum. However, the model was

used to explain general teaching process and context, which may not be able to display the uniqueness of second language teachers' instructional practices or beliefs (Johnson, 1994).

Thus, Borg's framework (2003) of teachers' beliefs in the second or foreign language teaching context seemed more applicable. Since the purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between beliefs and practices, only part of Borg's model, that is the connections among teacher cognition, contextual factors, and classroom practice, would be discussed. As shown in Figure 1, teacher cognition or beliefs takes the central role in the progression of teaching while the contextual factors, classroom practice are involved to shape the process of teaching. The constraints of contextual factors may either modify the beliefs or lead to the incongruence between the beliefs and actions. Classroom practice, though it presents as the interaction of beliefs and contextual factors, may consciously and unconsciously reshape teacher beliefs.

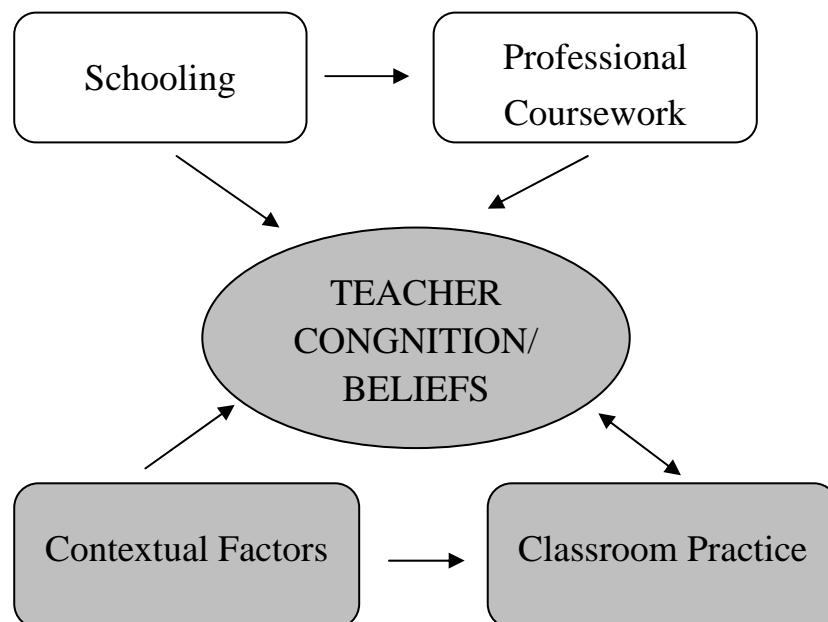


Figure 1. Borg's model of teacher cognition, schooling, professional education, and classroom practice (Figure taken from Borg, 2003, p.82).

Borg's model displays the dialogical nature of language teachers' beliefs and practice in Figure 1, but specific contextual factors may vary. The contextual factors include curriculum, syllabus design, students, parents, administration, state policies, and so on. As teachers respond to the teaching context where they work, new conceptions of teaching and learning may emerge. For example, Spada and Massey (1992) explained the differences between teachers' beliefs and actions observed in two novice teachers' classrooms in terms of students' discipline problems, while Crookes and Arakaki (1999) took teachers' working conditions as significant factors. That is, various contextual issues in the teaching context may have impacts on the realization of teachers' pedagogical beliefs. However, few studies provide detailed description of how these contextual issues interact with teachers' pedagogical beliefs. Moreover, Borg (2003) reviewed more than twenty studies in this area, but research under the context of non-native language teachers and prescribed syllabus in state-funded schools is relatively rare, which even more indicates the need for this study.

2.3 Research on Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Classroom

In addition to Borg's framework, the interrelationship between language teachers' beliefs and actions has been justified by many other studies. Related research is categorized in terms of contexts and topics as follows.

The studies focusing on instructional beliefs in general English teaching mostly took place in ESL contexts like United States or Canada. Mullock (2006) investigated four ESL teachers' patterns of pedagogical knowledge base in one of the private language schools in Canada. Based on the results of stimulated recall, the participating teachers emphasized most in their language management and knowledge of students, similar to the findings from Gabonton's study. However, the other

rankings of categories of teachers' pedagogical knowledge base and congruency between teachers' beliefs and actions were different from those in Gabonton's. Mullock explained the differences in terms of teacher and student samples, course objectives, and institutional contexts. Mantero (2007) surveyed ESL classroom teachers' beliefs and practices in one of the elementary schools in US. Most teachers in the school believed the significance of reading skills, but only three out of 17 teachers do develop teaching strategies directly related to reading. The incongruence between the teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching of reading skills was explained as the students' future examination pressure. In other words, understanding students' needs, like their pressure of passing examinations is critical in constructing teachers' pedagogical beliefs.

Studies in Taiwan and other EFL contexts have also tapped into language teachers' beliefs about English teaching. Watzke (2007) conducted a two-year study to document nine foreign language beginning teachers' changes of pedagogical content knowledge. Novice teachers went through a process of conflict or resolution to their knowledge base due to real classroom contexts. The teachers perceived control over students or instructional content as successful teaching which is antithetical to what they had learned and believed from the pre-service teaching programs. In Taiwan, B. L. Chen (2000) conducted questionnaires, interviews and class observation to understand junior high school teachers' beliefs toward communicative approaches. About 1000 teachers participated in the study. The participating teachers were mildly favorable toward communicative language teaching, but personal factors like age, years of teaching experience and contextual influences like time, parents or administration led to the discrepancy of expressed beliefs and classroom practices. Nien (2002) is interested in similar topics, but her investigation focused on one senior high school English teacher in Taiwan. Detailed classroom observations showed the

teacher agreed with the principles of communicative approaches, but the inconsistency may be due to students, fixed syllabus, restricted instructional hours and grammar-based examinations. Looking back to these previous studies, the researchers saw the influence of such contextual factors as students, curriculum, or students' examination focus; they tend to regard these factors as the constraints to hinder the realization of teachers' beliefs. However, these contextual factors happen in almost every teacher's working environment, it seems not easy to remove all the constraints.

In terms of pedagogical beliefs related to specific language aspects, research is relatively little and mostly centered on grammar instruction. Borg (1998) used qualitative methods, including class observation and interviews, to examine one EFL teacher's beliefs and practices in L2 teaching of grammar in EFL context. The teacher's beliefs were generally consistent with his practices in class but with a little discrepancy due to the personal teaching and learning experience and contextual factors like students' comprehension in class. External factors like principal or curriculum, however, did not interfere with his pedagogical system. Hsieh (2005) interviewed four junior high school EFL teachers about their orientations and practices in grammar teaching. Teachers' beliefs regarding grammar teaching materials, strategies, and questioning behaviors were mostly correlated with classroom practices. On the contrary, Farrell and Lim's study (2005) have contradictory results. They conducted pre-and post-interviews and class observation with two English teachers about grammar instruction in Singapore. The teacher participants preferred teacher-centered grammar instruction though they were aware of the usefulness of communicative and functional based activities. Limited instructional hours and teachers' personal preference were possible explanation. M. M. Wu (2006) investigated senior high school EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in writing instruction. The results of questionnaires and interviews indicated the

participants' beliefs about goals and approaches of teaching writing. Both product-oriented and process-oriented approaches were adopted in practices though curriculum, students, composition evaluation, test-oriented trend and background experiences were responsible for the discrepancy between beliefs and practices.

Considering the fact that various studies showed dialogical relations between pedagogical beliefs and classroom practices, one can see that contextual factors, particularly student issues are constantly mentioned. For example, students' comprehension in class is decisive in teachers' implementation of grammar teaching. Students' pressure to face the college entrance examination may transform teachers' pedagogical beliefs in teach writing, gradually shifting to the test types of the exam. It is clear that students played critical roles in the construction of teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. Moreover, as Larsen-Freeman (2000) proposed, a teacher's ambition is the "eagerness to teach better—to reach more students more effectively" (p.186). That is, teachers, when presenting their instruction, are expected to take students into consideration, but how students' needs interact with teachers' prior teaching beliefs is subject to further investigation.

2.4 Research on Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices on Reading instruction

Aebersold and Field (1997) agreed cultural orientation and beliefs about the reading process is one of significant factors to influence second or foreign language reading. That is, if the teacher believes recognition of grammatical rules and vocabulary in the target language is important, he would teach accordingly. At the same time, the teacher who takes familiarity with background knowledge as the first priority would design more top-down based reading activities. Several studies on second or foreign language reading teachers' beliefs and practices will be reviewed in later sections.

In the second or foreign language teaching contexts, some research sought to investigate consistency or discrepancy between beliefs and practices of reading instruction. S. R. Wu (1999) interviewed eight EFL teachers in technology institutes in Taiwan about their knowledge and beliefs of reading instruction. The results showed that these teachers believed in the significance of serving learners' needs, motivation and striving for recognition from students and other colleagues. Also, Meijer, Verloop, and Beijard (1999) used semi-structured interviews and a concept-map to capture EFL high school teachers' pedagogical knowledge about reading comprehension. The results show that these teachers' practical knowledge was varied and that their pedagogical beliefs were mainly related to subject matter, student knowledge and learning. Meijer et.al's and Wu's studies provide detailed information about foreign language teachers' pedagogical beliefs on reading instruction, and the contextual factors are often taken into account, especially those related to students' needs. However, it is insufficient to understand how teachers' beliefs influence their instructional behavior in the classroom. Graden (1996) investigated six secondary high school foreign language teachers' beliefs about reading instruction with interviews and classroom observations. They believed in frequent opportunities for reading practices, the use of target language, and the interference of oral reading in reading comprehension. Nevertheless, the contextual issues, including students' poor performance, limited instructional hours and lack of appropriate materials made the teachers compromise their beliefs. C. F. Wu (2002) examined EFL student teachers' theoretical orientation about reading instruction and practices. In phase I, 57 student teachers took a questionnaire of reading instruction beliefs and a lesson plan choosing task. In phased II, six participants were chosen based on the results of phase I, representing each orientation— text-based (the bottom-up model), reader-based (the top-down model) and interactive orientation (the interactive model). Though in phase

I most student teachers preferred non-text-based orientation, participants in phase II all used text-based instructional practices in reading comprehension. Possible explanation was regarded as having to do with contextual factors, including the mentoring system, school-wide syllabus, examinations, and students' proficiency. Ku (2008) conducted a qualitative study to investigate senior high school English teachers' reading instructional beliefs and practices. In the first part of the study, a questionnaire about teachers' beliefs on reading instruction was administered to 17 senior high school EFL teachers and none of them prefers text-based (bottom-up) reading instruction. Two teachers, representing the reader-based and interactive models, were selected for further interviews and classroom observation. However, later classroom observations show that both teachers adopted text-based models to teach reading. The researcher explained the discrepancy in terms of students' different levels of proficiency, examination, teaching materials and syllabus as well as teachers themselves. According to Graden's, Wu's and Ku's studies, it can be concluded that a variety of contextual issues may lead to the inconsistency between teachers' pedagogical knowledge and practices. Among them, the issues related to students, such as students' limited linguistic proficiency or examination pressure are mentioned in almost every research; thus it is expected that the information about students are one of the most significant issues to affect teachers' in-class actions. However, few of the studies describe in detail how the teachers' pedagogical beliefs interact with these student issues. There is thus a need for the current study.

2.5 Summary

Teachers have their own pedagogical beliefs toward teaching and learning, yet the compromise or incongruence between beliefs and in-class instruction often occurs. Thus, the interaction between teachers' beliefs and practices is critical to understanding teachers' pedagogical beliefs (Tsui, 2003). Moreover, the studies reviewed above seem to suggest the complexity of students' involvement in teachers' beliefs and actions. No wonder Freeman (2000) would argue that to understand teachers' pedagogical knowledge, one could not exclude the students as significant participants. Thus, the present study, in addition to inquiring teachers' pedagogical beliefs on reading instruction, wishes to understand how exactly students are involved in the interaction between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and classroom practice.