

Understanding Novice Teachers' Beliefs in Primary English Education

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Abstract. This study examined the beliefs of novice English teachers regarding English language teaching in primary schools in North Sumatra, Indonesia, with a focus on how those beliefs shape instructional practice and professional development. A qualitative research design was employed. Three novice primary school English teachers were selected through purposive sampling and data were gathered via semi-structured interviews over a two-week period. Data were analysed using a six-step thematic analysis procedure. Four themes emerged: (1) teachers hold strong beliefs that early English instruction is foundational for future language development. (2) intrinsic motivation rooted in personal language-learning histories shapes their commitment to teaching. (3) despite curriculum constraints, teachers adapt materials and employ interactive strategies such as games, songs, and real-life contextualisation, to address students' vocabulary gaps. (4) teachers differentiate their approaches by grade level, drawing on scaffolding and repetition to support retention. The findings suggest that novice teachers' beliefs directly inform their pedagogical decisions. Supporting these teachers through flexible curriculum policy and structured professional development programmes may enhance instructional quality in primary English education.

Keyword: Teacher Beliefs; Novice Teachers'; English Language Teaching; Primary Education; Professional Development

Received: 08-02-2026

Revised: 01-03-2026

Accepted: 30-03-2026

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers occupy a central role in shaping the quality of classroom instruction. Borg (2003, p. 81) conceptualises teaching as a complex cognitive activity in which educators act as “active, thinking decision-makers” who draw on an interconnected network of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs that are simultaneously practice-oriented, personal, and context-sensitive. This perspective situates teacher beliefs not as peripheral attitudes but as the cognitive infrastructure that mediates every instructional decision. Hampton (1994) similarly argues that a teacher’s “personal

constructs" influence the resources and activities they select, effectively making the classroom a materialisation of those constructs.

The beliefs held by teachers regarding curriculum implementation, teaching methodology, student engagement, and education policy have attracted growing scholarly attention. Understanding these beliefs is especially important in foreign language education contexts, where the gap between policy expectations and classroom realities is frequently wide. In the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Education and Culture Policy (No. 0487/14/1992, Chapter VIII) and the National Education System Law (No. 060/U/1993) permit English to be integrated into the primary school curriculum as a local content subject. This policy creates a demand for qualified teachers who are both methodologically prepared and personally committed to early English instruction.

Research on teacher cognition in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting has examined how professional beliefs correlate with self-efficacy and student outcomes. Wang et al. (2023) found that strong professional beliefs and high self-efficacy positively influence teachers' capacity to affect student achievement. Morris (2019) and Zonoubi et al. (2017) similarly conclude that teachers with robust professional confidence may be better positioned to improve learning outcomes. Continuous professional development (CPD) has been identified as a key lever for reinforcing these beliefs; however, Long et al. (2021) caution that teachers who are not fully aware of CPD's intrinsic value may not realise its full benefits. Huang and Papakosmas (2014) demonstrated in a large-scale Chinese study that structured CPD programmes, such as the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) preparation training, can significantly strengthen teachers' professional beliefs and pedagogical skills.

Despite this body of literature, a notable gap remains at the intersection of teacher cognition and early childhood language education. Most existing studies focus on secondary or tertiary EFL contexts, leaving the beliefs of novice English teachers working at the primary school level comparatively underexplored. This gap is particularly significant in the three primary school at North Sumatra region of Indonesia, where primary English instruction faces contextual challenges including limited resources, mixed-ability classrooms, and students with restricted vocabulary foundations. Novice teachers in this setting those with two or fewer years of experience are especially vulnerable to the tension between their pre-service beliefs and the realities of classroom practice, yet their perspectives have received little systematic investigation.

This study therefore aims to examine the beliefs of novice English teachers in primary schools in three primary school in North Sumatra, focusing on four interrelated dimensions: teaching motivation, understanding of student characteristics, perspectives on instructional materials, and classroom strategies for professional growth. Grounded in these dimensions, the following research question guided the inquiry: What beliefs do novice English teachers hold regarding English language teaching in primary schools, and how do those beliefs inform their instructional practices?

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design by used interview to collecting the data and use thematic analysis to analysis the data which involving three English novice teachers at the primary school level, especially in the North Sumatra area and this research was conducted for approximately 2 weeks. The three English novice teachers were selected as sample participants while selecting this sample using Purposive or Judgment Sampling techniques where purposive or judgemental sampling is a strategy in which certain people or events are selected on purpose to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other options (Maxwell, 2012). The inclusion criteria for this study were: (1) holding a Bachelor's degree in English Education; (2) currently teaching English at a primary school level in North Sumatra; and (3) having two or fewer years of teaching experience, consistent with the operational definition of "novice teacher" adopted in this study. Three teachers satisfied these criteria and agreed to participate. Furthermore, the

purpose of the sampling is to find out the educational background of the teacher's teaching experience to abstract their views or beliefs in the teaching and learning process. The three participants have a Bachelor's degree in English Education from different universities and they are currently teaching in primary schools. Although their teaching experience is relatively limited at 0-2 years, they have diverse training backgrounds and varying levels of English proficiency. So, the following table 1 shows the demographics of the three participants:

Table 1 The demographic information of the participants

No.	Participant	Gender	School types	Training Background	English Proficiency Level	English Test Scores
1.	(P1)	Female	Public	Teacher Training at the school she teach	A2	577
2.	(P2)	Male	Public	KKG (Kelompok Kerja Guru)	A1	450
3.	(P3)	Female	Privat	Workshop ELTT (English Language Teacher Training) and EPDP (English Proficiency Development Program)	B1	500

Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the participants, highlighting their gender, school types, training background, English proficiency level, and English test scores.

The three participants consisted of two female teachers and one male teacher. Participant 1 (P1) is a female teacher who teaches in one of the public primary schools in Langkat, North Sumatra. P2 has a teaching training background where she joined teacher training at the school she teaches. She has a level of proficiency at the A2 level. Furthermore, she has tested English language proficiency in one of the English language proficiency test programmes, namely the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), by achieving a score of 577.

Participant 2 (P2) is a male teacher who teaches in a public primary school in Medan, North Sumatra. P2 has a background of teaching training in the Teacher Working Group (KKG) programme and has a proficiency level at the A1 level. He has also tested English proficiency in one of the English proficiency test programmes, namely the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), by achieving a score of 450.

And last, participant 3 (P3) is a female teacher who teaches in a private primary school in Medan, North Sumatra. Same like the P1, P3 has a background in teaching training where is she follow the workshop namely Workshop ELTT (English Language Teacher Training) and also teaching training program namely EPDP (English Proficiency Development Program). She has a proficiency level at the B1 level and has tested her English proficiency in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) programme, achieving a score of 550.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted over a two-week period. Semi-structured interviewing was chosen because it provides a flexible framework that allows the researcher to pursue emerging ideas while ensuring that all participants address the same core themes (Bryman, 2016). An interview guide was developed based on the study's conceptual framework, covering five thematic domains: (1) teaching motivation and purpose; (2) perceptions of student characteristics; (3) views on instructional materials and curriculum; (4) classroom strategies and approaches; and (5) professional development and challenges. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, was audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent, and was subsequently transcribed verbatim using the web-based transcription tool Transkrip.id. All transcripts were reviewed by the researcher for accuracy before analysis commenced.

Data were analyzed through thematic analysis which conducted following the six-step framework proposed by Naeem and Ozuem (2023), which involves: (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing and refining themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the final analysis with a conceptual model. In the initial phase, the researcher read each transcript multiple times to achieve immersion in the data. Relevant segments were then coded inductively, after which codes were grouped into candidate themes that cut across participants' responses.

Data were validation to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings; three validation strategies were employed. First, member checking was conducted by returning a summary of the emerging themes and representative quotations to each participant, who confirmed that the interpretations accurately reflected their intended meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, peer review was carried out by sharing the coded data and preliminary themes with a colleague experienced in qualitative EFL research, whose feedback was used to refine theme boundaries and resolve interpretive ambiguities. Third, thick description was employed in presenting the findings, providing sufficient contextual detail to enable readers to assess the transferability of the conclusions to comparable settings (Creswell, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Beliefs About Teaching Purpose and Teaching Motivation

Foundation Building for Language Skills

These findings revealed that teachers strongly believed that English instruction in primary school functions as an important foundation for students' future language development. The participants perceived English not only as a school subject but also as a necessary skill for academic advancement and global communication. Their beliefs were influenced by the increasing role of English in technology, education, and international interaction. Teachers emphasized that students need to master basic English skills from an early age because these foundational competencies would support their learning at higher educational levels. As the participants stated:

"Because English is an international language If for example we don't know English, how do we want to be able to compete in the international arena" -P1

"I always emphasise to my children that English is indeed important to learn, because one day it will be full English in this world I guess. So if you can't speak English, you will be left behind" -P2

These beliefs significantly influenced teachers' classroom practices. Because the participants considered English as a foundational subject, they focused heavily on teaching basic vocabulary, pronunciation, and simple sentence structures. Teachers attempted to create learning environments that emphasized gradual understanding and repeated exposure to language input. Their instructional practices reflected the belief that students must first develop confidence and familiarity with English before progressing to more advanced language use. As a result, teachers prioritized foundational learning activities that were appropriate for young learners' cognitive levels.

This finding supports Borg's (2003) theory of teacher cognition, which explains that teachers' beliefs strongly influence instructional decisions and classroom practices. The participants' beliefs about the importance of English learning shaped the way they selected materials, organized activities, and interacted with students. Furthermore, the finding aligns with previous studies discussed in the introduction, which suggested that teachers' beliefs influence students' learning experiences and instructional quality in EFL classrooms.

Intrinsic Motivation

Teachers' personal experiences and academic journeys significantly shape their beliefs about the purpose of teaching English. Many expressed a deep-rooted passion for the language that originated from their childhood or was nurtured through positive educational experiences as stated by P1, P2, P3. For example, one teacher which is P1 mentioned being inspired by exceptional English teachers during their schooling years, which instilled a lifelong interest in the subject. And also P2 has experienced which can accept the appropriate learning in his interest subject encourages him to provide good teaching. This intrinsic motivation underpins their commitment to imparting the same enthusiasm to their students.

"I like English because from elementary school I have been taking English lessons" -P1

"I was in high school like I was on fire to learn English but at that time no one could give it, that's why I did as much as possible so that I could provide good teaching. " -P2

These beliefs influenced classroom practices by encouraging teachers to create more supportive and engaging learning environments. Teachers attempted to avoid monotonous instruction and instead incorporated interactive activities that could increase students' interest and confidence. Their practices reflected efforts to transfer positive learning experiences into their own classrooms while improving aspects they previously found ineffective. This indicates that teachers' beliefs were translated into practical instructional strategies aimed at fostering students' motivation and enjoyment during English learning.

This finding is consistent with Borg's (2003) perspective that teacher cognition is influenced by teachers' prior educational experiences and personal histories as learners. The findings also align with Huang and Papakosmas (2014), who argued that teachers' beliefs and instructional practices are shaped through educational experiences and professional development. However, this study specifically highlights how novice teachers' emotional experiences as learners influence their commitment and instructional behavior in primary school EFL contexts.

Addressing Vocabulary Gaps

A common concern among teachers is the significant gap in students' vocabulary levels. Teachers view this as a critical barrier to effective communication and language mastery. They prioritize building a robust vocabulary foundation to help students develop the skills necessary to express themselves in English, both orally and in writing. Addressing these gaps is seen as a way to equip students with the tools they need to succeed academically and socially. This highlights a statement from P1 where English in the children at the school he teaches is still lacking which motivates P1 to teach English.

"I am interested in teaching vocabulary, which seems to be very difficult nowadays because their vocabulary is very lacking. " -P1

It is also supported by research in line with the findings of the P1 response that it has been shown that most children who graduated from kindergarten have a limited vocabulary, and this pattern continues into primary school (Biemiller, 2005; Hart & Risley, 1995). The gap in students' vocabulary knowledge motivates teachers to foster students' abilities from the basics by providing basic vocabulary knowledge according to their grade level. It has been suggested that exposure to new vocabulary is important for young children in order to acquire word knowledge. It is thought that exposure in different contexts supports the acquisition of different understandings of word meaning (McKeown, 1985). It is recommended that exposure

in the classroom is especially important for children who enter school with less word knowledge. It appears that learning new words through exposure works best with words that represent familiar concepts which stated by Kibby (1995) who align with the response of P3 who stated:

“We introduce very basic English terms such as father, mother and family. “ -P2

P3 response introduces basic vocabulary such as introducing vocabulary about family which fosters students' memories starting from the vocabulary of those closest to them or those who are familiar to them so that it is easier for students to remember as stated by Kibby.

2. Understanding Students' Characteristic

Primary school students can be considered as young learners, who, it should be noted, possess a distinct set of characteristics that differ from adult learners. They have already developed a capacity for imagination. They are able to comprehend the situation. While their affective aspect may be characterised by a love of discovery and creation, it is important to acknowledge the unique characteristics that define this age group. In his seminal work, Nunan (2011: 12-13) delineates several noteworthy characteristics of young learners, which include: They are imaginative, confident, risk-taking, playful, imitative, appreciative of children's learning outcomes, possess a short memory, and are highly curious. They are inclined to participate in any activity, irrespective of their understanding of the purpose or method. The characteristics of primary school students as young learners, aged between approximately 6 and 12 years, are typically marked by high levels of activity. Cameron (2001: 1) further elaborated that young learners in primary school are often more enthusiastic and excited about learning. They are motivated by a desire to satisfy their teachers rather than their peers. what was explained by Cameron was in line with the teachers' responses. as experienced by P1 and P2 that the students were enthusiastic and motivated.

“They are always enthusiastic when I give homework And they are the ones who remind me that I will enter their class on tomorrow.” -P1

“I think the motivation level of the students in my class to learn English is strong.” -P2

However, although they can be enthusiastic and strongly motivated, they sometimes easily lose interest and lack motivation when they encounter difficulties. as encountered by P3 in her classroom.

“Their motivation to learn English is still low ... I give them motivation to learn because their motivation is still low for English.” -P3

These beliefs influenced classroom practices through the use of repetitive vocabulary activities, visual aids, and contextual learning strategies. Teachers simplified language input and selected familiar topics to support students' comprehension and memory retention. Rather than introducing abstract concepts, teachers focused on concrete vocabulary closely related to students' daily experiences. Their instructional decisions reflected the belief that vocabulary learning should be meaningful, gradual, and appropriate for young learners' developmental levels. This finding supports previous studies by Biemiller (2005) and Hart and Risley (1995), which emphasized that vocabulary limitations remain a significant challenge for young learners. Furthermore, the finding aligns with McKeown (1985) and Kibby (1995), who suggested that vocabulary acquisition is more effective when students are exposed to familiar concepts in

meaningful contexts. The findings therefore demonstrate how teachers' beliefs about vocabulary learning directly shape classroom instruction and material selection.

3. Perspectives on Teaching Materials and Content

Curriculum Alignment

Teachers consistently align their teaching materials with the national curriculum and standardized textbooks, thereby ensuring that their instruction is in line with assessment criteria and educational policies. However, there is a shared sentiment that the designated materials often do not appropriately align with students' proficiency levels. For instance, content in the curriculum pertaining to topics such as asking and giving opinions is regarded as excessively advanced for young learners who encounter difficulties with fundamental tasks like spelling their names as experienced by P1

“Imagine they can't even spell their own name but they have to be able to ask and give opinion in English. Well as much as possible I taught it but because it was written in the curriculum, whether I wanted to or not, I have to taught it” -P1

These beliefs influenced classroom practices by encouraging teachers to simplify instructional materials and adjust learning targets according to students' abilities. Although teachers continued following curriculum requirements, they modified explanations, examples, and classroom activities to make lessons more understandable and accessible. Their practices reflected efforts to balance institutional expectations with students' actual learning needs. This finding aligns with curriculum theory proposed by C.S.A.I. (2018), which emphasizes that curriculum implementation should support students' knowledge and skill development appropriately. The findings also support Borg's (2003) argument that teachers actively interpret and adapt curriculum content based on their professional beliefs and classroom realities.

Adaptation to Student Needs

In recognition of the diverse abilities and challenges faced by students, teachers frequently adapt the curriculum to make it more accessible and relevant. This involves simplifying complex material, dividing lessons into easily comprehensible parts, and incorporating contexts that are familiar to students' daily lives. By customising content, teachers seek to foster a more inclusive learning environment where all students can participate and benefit. The response of the three teacher participants is that they will adjust the teaching materials that have been adjusted from the school to meet the needs of students. as response from P3 & P2 that:

“I relate the material to everyday life, I related it to their experiences, for example, like something that happened in their lives.” -P3

“I look for other teaching methods from social media or maybe from the internet to adjust the material or the needs and interests of students” -P2

These beliefs influenced classroom practices through the adaptation of teaching materials, simplification of instruction, and integration of familiar contexts into classroom activities. Teachers attempted to make lessons more meaningful and relatable so that students could understand language concepts more easily. Their practices reflected student-centered teaching approaches that prioritized accessibility and engagement. This finding supports Bransford et al. (2000), who argued that meaningful learning occurs when instruction is

connected to students' real-life experiences. The findings also align with student-centered learning theories emphasizing the importance of contextualized instruction in improving engagement and understanding.

Resourcefulness and Creativity

In response of the limited resources available in some schools, teachers have been known to demonstrate a high level of creativity. They have been known to supplement textbook-based learning with multimedia tools such as videos from YouTube, interactive games and songs, with a view to making lessons more engaging. For example, one teacher described using animated videos to teach the alphabet, with the result that students find it easier to recall information. This ability to innovate within limitations is a reflection of the teachers' dedication to improving learning outcomes.

"I used YouTube and adjust to what is in the curriculum" -P1

These beliefs influenced classroom practices through the integration of technology, games, and multimedia activities into lessons. Teachers attempted to create more engaging learning environments by combining textbook materials with visual and auditory learning tools. Their instructional strategies reflected beliefs that enjoyable and varied activities improve students' attention and memory retention. This finding aligns with Wu (2003) and Lin (2002), who described creative teaching as the use of flexible and innovative instructional strategies to support learning effectiveness. The findings also support Lou et al. (2012), who argued that teachers should select instructional approaches based on learning objectives, classroom needs, and available resources.

4. Instructional Strategies and Professional Growth

Interactive and Engaging Methods

To attract and maintain students' attention, teachers use a variety of interactive learning strategies. These include games such as whispering chains to practice vocabulary, singing songs to memorise new words, and role-playing activities to simulate real-life conversations. Teachers noted that such approaches not only made learning fun, but also improved retention by engaging multiple senses and encouraging active participation as the three teacher participants did in their classrooms where they used more interactive and engaging approaches. for example as stated by P1:

"They like to play games, for example singing, or interspersed with games, so they grasp it better Game Compared to like a textbook. " -P1

These beliefs influenced classroom practices through the frequent use of communicative and game-based activities. Teachers attempted to reduce boredom and increase motivation by involving students actively during lessons. Their instructional practices reflected the belief that young learners learn more effectively when multiple senses and active participation are involved in the learning process. This finding aligns with Freeman et al. (2014), who suggested that active learning strategies improve student engagement and retention. The findings are also consistent with Medina (2014), who emphasized that multisensory learning strengthens memory and comprehension. Furthermore, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) argued that enjoyable classroom activities positively influence students' emotional engagement and motivation.

Different Approaches Based on Grade Level

Teachers customise their teaching strategies based on the age and grade level of the students: Low Grade (1-3): For younger students, teachers tend to use a teacher-centred approach, with an emphasis on direct teaching and repetition. For example, they focus on teaching basic vocabulary using visual aids, flashcards and repeated practice to ensure mastery of basic concepts.

Higher Grade (4-6): As students get older and become more capable of learning independently, teachers shift to student-centred methods. These include group discussions, brainstorming sessions and activities that relate to real-life contexts. For example, students can work in groups to discuss familiar topics, fostering collaboration and critical thinking. as P1 & P3 in adjusting teaching strategies to students' grade levels

"For high grades 4, 5, 6, we can have our own discussions, but for grades 1, 2, 3, they can't yet They still have to be monitored too and followed by games." -P1

"I make groups this discussion group applies to grades 5-6 only, for grades 1 -2, I use a lot of vocabulary used the flashcard game" -P3

These beliefs influenced classroom practices through differentiated instruction and scaffolding strategies. Teachers adapted learning activities, classroom interaction, and instructional complexity according to students' developmental readiness. Their practices reflected awareness that effective teaching requires alignment between instructional approaches and students' cognitive abilities. This finding supports Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, which emphasizes the importance of scaffolding according to learners' developmental stages. The findings are also consistent with Piaget's (1973) theory that cognitive abilities develop progressively with age, influencing students' capacity for abstract thinking and independent learning.

Addressing Challenges with Tailored Support

Teachers often face challenges, such as students' low motivation or limited language proficiency. To address these, they utilize a range of strategies aimed at fostering confidence and interest. A common approach involves fostering a comfortable and supportive classroom environment where students feel encouraged to participate without fear of making mistakes. Additionally, teachers provide individualized attention to struggling students, offering personalized feedback and simplified explanations to help them overcome specific hurdles.

"To deal with difficulties, I will try to approach, I ask how the learning was, how happy was it today? Because if they already starting to feel comfortable with us and we know what causes him not to understand what we teach and there I give another strategy." -P2

These beliefs influenced classroom practices through individualized feedback, simplified explanations, and emotionally supportive classroom interaction. Teachers attempted to create safe learning environments where students felt comfortable making mistakes and participating actively. Their practices reflected beliefs that emotional support and personalized instruction contribute positively to learning outcomes. This finding aligns with Hattie and Timperley (2007), who argued that individualized feedback improves learning outcomes by addressing students' specific learning difficulties. The findings also support broader perspectives on supportive learning environments and student motivation in educational psychology research.

Use of Repetition and Reinforcement

Teachers highlighted the importance of repetition and reinforcement in helping students internalise new concepts. For example, after introducing new vocabulary, they often repeat the words through games, quizzes and daily reviews to ensure long-term retention. Visual aids, such as labelled pictures and flashcards, are also commonly used to reinforce learning.

"Special methods for them to remember English may be used songs or whisper games"
-P1

"I taught English to my children, such as using audio video, games singing or repeating pronunciation"-P2

"If special techniques help improve their memory, it's like next week I'll ask them again about this material. mostly for memory, it's like daily exams so that they will keep on learning." -P3

It is worth noting that repetition and reinforcement remain fundamental techniques for promoting long-term retention in language learning. For instance, P1 uses engaging activities such as songs, whispering games, and vocabulary exercises to strengthen memory. Recent studies, such as those by Poldrack (2019), show that consistent practice, especially through repetitive tasks, enhances neural pathways that are key to retaining new information. P2, on the other hand, leverages modern technology by integrating multimedia tools like audiovisual aids, interactive games, and pronunciation exercises. Research by Baddeley (2020) indicates that multimedia learning, involving both visual and auditory elements, has been shown to facilitate deeper learning by stimulating different cognitive processes. P3 emphasizes the importance of review through weekly summaries, daily quizzes, and informal assessments to ensure continuous engagement and memory reinforcement. Studies by Cepeda et al. (2023) underscore the significance of spaced repetition in counteracting forgetting, as well as the value of revisiting concepts in varied contexts to enhance long-term retention. These findings seem to align with the current educational consensus that scaffolded learning, combined with engaging reinforcement strategies, can lead to significant improvements in student outcomes. By integrating games, consistent review, and multimedia tools, teachers can optimize opportunities for students to internalize and effectively apply new knowledge.

The Incorporation of Real-Life Connections

Teachers seek to facilitate comprehension of classroom content by establishing links between educational material and students' personal experiences. This pedagogical approach serves to contextualize learning, thereby illustrating the practical relevance of English in real-world scenarios. To illustrate, in the context of teaching food-related vocabulary, a teacher might encourage students to describe their preferred foods or engage in a discussion about their family's habits. Such connections not only enhance the relevance and memorability of the lesson for students but also contribute to a more meaningful and engaging learning experience.

"I use the method of relating the material to everyday life, for example we are discussing something. Later I relate it to the person's experience, for example like an incident in their life." -P3

It has been suggested that teachers enhance students' understanding by relating the subject matter to their personal experiences, which some say makes the material more

memorable and applicable in real-life situations. For example, when teaching food-related vocabulary, teachers have been known to encourage students to discuss their favorite foods or share family traditions. This approach is said to create a connection between the lesson and the students' own lives, increasing the relevance and retention of the material and fostering a more interesting and meaningful learning experience. As one P3 shared, that she relating the material to students' daily lives is a strategy that aligns with educational research. This research indicates that contextualizing learning by relating it to students' real-world experiences can improve understanding and encourage deeper learning. Experiential learning, as research indicates, helps students form stronger cognitive connections, increasing lesson effectiveness and the likelihood of long-term retention. These approaches underscore the importance of student-centered pedagogy that bridges academic content with hands-on experience, enhancing engagement and understanding (Bransford et al., 2000)..

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the beliefs of three novice English teachers in primary schools in North Sumatra, Indonesia, and examined how those beliefs informed their instructional practice. Four themes emerged from the thematic analysis. First, the teachers held a strong conviction that early English instruction is foundational for students' long-term academic and professional development, a belief that directly oriented their content priorities toward vocabulary and basic communicative competence. Second, their intrinsic motivation was shaped by personal language-learning histories, whether positive role models or the experience of inadequate instruction that they sought to remediate. Third, despite constraints imposed by the national curriculum, the teachers consistently adapted materials to match students' proficiency levels and contextualised content through real-life connections. Fourth, they employed interactive, multi-sensory strategies differentiated by grade level and combined with systematic repetition and individualised feedback to build engagement and support retention.

Taken together, these findings suggest that novice teachers' beliefs are not merely abstract attitudes but active cognitive frameworks that shape the moment-to-moment decisions of classroom practice. This has two implications for policy and practice. For curriculum designers, the findings underscore the importance of building meaningful flexibility into primary EFL syllabuses, so that teachers can align prescribed content with the demonstrated proficiency of their learners. For professional development providers, the findings indicate that CPD programmes should be structured to surface and interrogate novice teachers' existing beliefs alongside developing their methodological repertoire, since belief change is a necessary precondition for sustained pedagogical improvement (Borg, 2018; Crandall & Christison, 2016).

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The sample comprised only three participants drawn from a single province, which restricts the transferability of the findings. Data collection relied exclusively on self-reported interview responses, without classroom observation or document analysis to triangulate the relationship between stated beliefs and observed practice. Future research should expand the participant base across regions, incorporate observational methods, and investigate the role of institutional and administrative support in shaping novice teachers' belief systems. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for tracking how teachers' beliefs evolve as they accumulate classroom experience.

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