

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There are four major items discussed in this chapter. The first is the background of the problem of this study, which briefly generates the bases to conduct the study and the rationale of the study that contains part of the general theoretical framework used as the tools in analyzing the data. The second is the presentation of the research questions that have guided the study. The third discusses the significance of the study, and the last provides an overview of the organization of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the Problems

The conduct of this study was motivated in major part by series of small studies, which I carried out when I took EFL methodology, issues on EFL methodology, and curriculum developments courses at graduate program at Indonesia University of Education. Contributing ideas to this study was also my reading of many research based papers as well as theoretical articles published in journals about teachers and their teaching conceptions and activities. From these courses and readings, I gained a relatively clear picture that teachers are indeed the most powerful person in a classroom setting. For example, Yero (2002) said that the power to change education—for better or worse—is and always has been in the hands of teachers. It is the human – and the humane- qualities of teachers that will ultimately determine the quality of instruction offered to learners (Maley, 2004).

Furthermore, many other researchers have claimed that no matter what kind of language approach or method is being implemented, teachers remain the ones who take control on most of the values involved in the classroom by making a series of decisions (Pounds, 1966; Edge, 1999; Pajares, 1992; Murphy, 1999; Freeman and Johnson, 1998 as cited in Hongboontri and Boonyaparakob, 2004; Richards and Lockhart, 1995). These instructional decisions stem directly from the teachers' beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning, which play a central role in their teaching (e.g. their conceptions about the subject matter that they teach, how students learn, how to facilitate students' learning, as well as how they conceptualize their work). These beliefs are brought by teachers into their teaching context, guide and affect their pedagogical decisions and practices as well as their development throughout their professional lives (Pajares, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Anderson and

Holt Reynolds, 1995; Fang, 1996; Murphy, 1999; Ballone and Czerniak, 2001; Wilson et al., 2002; Minchew, 2004; Richards et al., 2006). Individual teachers, according to Yero (2002), through their conscious or unconscious participation (or lack thereof), have the power to make or break reform efforts. They shape the curriculum according to their own beliefs, teach their own personal values through the implicit curriculum, and operate their classrooms in accordance with their own particular definitions of teaching and learning.

Therefore, because teachers hold beliefs regarding professional practices, which influence their actions, a careful study about the role of teachers' beliefs is necessary. By investigating teachers' beliefs about their teaching, which makes the beliefs verbalized explicitly, it is possible for both the teachers and the educational reformers to identify some of teachers' misconceptions (if any) about their actions that might lead to unproductive teaching, and work out the problems afterward. As asserted by Ballone and Czerniak (2001, citing Cuban 1990), the result of this kind of examination would enable the teachers and reformers in education to identify and resolve the problems and the past failures in educational reform.

Nevertheless, while research on teachers' instructional activities have long been around in the field of teaching, research on teachers' beliefs as major contributing factor to their decisions during the activities is still limited. In fact, although it has been realized by many researchers for the past decades that beliefs are the best indicators of the decisions made by individuals in the course of their lifetime (Pounds, 1966, and Rokeach, 1968 as cited in Murphy, 1999), Borg (2003a) reported that a review of published research into teacher cognition in language teaching lists only 64 studies since 1976 with 47 of these appearing since 1996.

Likewise, the lack of research on teachers' beliefs is even more pronounced in Indonesia. My personal experience can attest to this. That is, based on my library search on thesis results documented in English Department of the Postgraduate level of Indonesia University of Education, as the foremost educational university, only few of them directly investigate teachers' beliefs about English teaching and learning. Therefore, the present study is one among few, which should contribute to development of a fuller understanding about this matter.

1.2 Research Questions

According to Richards and Lockhart (1995) teachers' belief systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs the teachers hold in relation to the content and process of

teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it. Therefore, in order to achieve its major purpose in finding out what English teachers' belief about English teaching and learning is, some specific questions corresponding to each components proposed by Richards and Lockhart (1995) were developed to guide the process of data collection, as follows:

- a) What is the teachers' belief about English?
- b) What is their belief about learning English?
- c) What is their belief about teaching English?
- d) What is their belief about their job?

1.3 Significance of the Study

Understanding teachers' beliefs is essential to the improvement of teaching practices because these beliefs serve as bases for teachers' attitude and behavior in the classrooms. According to Murphy (1999), this understanding can serve as a necessary first step in bringing about positive changes in teaching and learning processes. Besides, as affirmed by Murphy (1999, citing Brousseau, Book and Byers 1988), this can also provide tremendous insights into every facet of the educational process, teacher education programs and instructional leaders. Moreover, as asserted by Yaumi (2006), doing research on teachers' beliefs plays a great importance on educational development. As quoted in her article, a survey conducted by Human Development Index found that around 60% teachers of Primary schools, 40% *teachers of Junior High Schools*, 43% teachers of Senior High Schools, and 34% teachers of Senior Vocational Schools have not met the standardized quality of our national education. Therefore, she said that doing research on teachers, especially their beliefs, is imperative.

In line with this, Kagan (1992) asserted that teachers' beliefs lie at the very heart of teaching. Generally, it is easy to understand his claim if we consider that teaching, as a purposeful activity, involves a series of decision-making during the pre, whilst, and post teaching activities, in order to achieve the chosen purposes. As a matter of fact, for example, the teachers in this study reported that they made conscious decisions when they make a preparation for their teaching, including thinking about teaching purposes, teaching materials and sources, teaching procedures, and types of assessments to be used. Indeed, much of a teacher's conscious decision-making occurs at the lesson planning stage, although it can also occur during and after the lesson (Edwards, 2004).

Furthermore, relevant theories suggest that teachers' decisions, as the most contributing factors of the successful of teaching processes, are led by the teachers' beliefs. As affirmed by Kennedy (1999) although decision making is also often subconscious, especially during the lessons, intuitive action is still based on underlying tacit knowledge and belief structures. Teachers' beliefs and values in this case serve as the background to much of their decision-making and actions (Richards and Lockhart, 1995). Therefore, doing research on teachers' beliefs is important, because it would give information about the reasons that underlie teachers' decisions concerning their teaching and how these particular decisions influence their subsequent activities.

In brief, this kind of study is beneficial both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, in the context of Indonesia where research about teachers is very limited, this study would be useful to give insight into what the teachers believe about English teaching and learning and how it impacts on their teaching activities. Practically, this study informs how a number of Indonesian teachers perceived the teaching of English and how their perceptions impact on their daily teaching activities in the classroom in the middle of contextual demands coming from different sources (e.g. curriculum imposed by the government and social expectations).

In addition, since there has been very limited data regarding teachers' belief about teaching and learning, I am certain the result of this research contributes to the professional sources in the teaching profession in Indonesia University of Education, especially in Post Graduate programs, and adds to the general professional literature. Furthermore, I hope the result of this study would enlighten many other studies concerning teachers' beliefs and other related topics.

1.4 Organization of Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. The present chapter, as shown above, (a) describes the background of the problem, (b) generating the rationale of the study that contains part of the general theoretical framework used as the tools in analyzing the data, (c) outlining the research questions, and (d) exploring the significance of the study. Also contained in this chapter is the organization of the thesis. Chapter Two discusses related theories and studies that are used to analyze the data. This chapter, hence, primarily presents theories and research findings related to teachers' beliefs.

Chapter Three provides detailed information about research methodology. Research sites and participants, research design, and data collection and analyses method are presented in this chapter.

Chapter Four provides the findings and discussions of the present study. The presentation are presented orderly in sequence under the umbrella of the issues being focused in this study: teachers' beliefs about English, teachers' beliefs about learning English, teachers' beliefs about teaching English, and teachers' beliefs about their job.

Chapter Five highlights the conclusions of the study and presents some suggestions for further study and teachers' professional development.

