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KOLITA 9: Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya 9: Tingkat Internasional

Bibliografi

Pengarang: [s.n]
Topik: LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGES
Bahasa: ▬ (ID)   ISBN: 978-602-8474-18-4
Penerbit: Pusat Kajian Bahasa dan Budaya Unika Atma Jaya, Jakarta ⓘ   **Tempat Terbit:** Jakarta   **Tahun Terbit:** 2011
Jenis: Journal
Dilihat: 124 kali

Ketersediaan

※ **Perpustakaan PKBB Unika Atma Jaya**
  • Nomor panggil: 405 KLA 9, 406 KLA 9

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ENGLISH TEACHER'S BELIEF S AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THEIR STUDENTS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SHAPING OF THEIR IDENTITY AS PROFESSIONAL 🇬🇧

Oleh: Basalama, Nonny 📖
Jenis: Artikel dari Proceeding
Dalam koleksi: Kongres Internasional Masyarakat Linguistik Indonesia (KIMLI) 2011: Bahasa dan pembangunan karakter bangsa, Bandung, 9-11 Oktober 2011, halaman 385-388.
Fulltext: 385-388.pdf 230,11KB; (0 download)
Dilihat: 2 kali

Ketersediaan

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ENGLISH TEACHER'S BELIEF S AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THEIR STUDENTS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SHAPING OF THEIR IDENTITY AS PROFESSIONAL

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INTRODUCTION

The implementation of curriculum English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia has been widely discussed as discouraging and has generally not been successful(Darjowidjoyo 1997 and Jayadi 2004). Whilst there have been several curricula which have been reformed and implemented in Senior High Schools, in the past through to the present, Nur (2004) stated that most students in fact still face difficulties both in their speaking and writing ability (see also Basalama and Borland 2009 for this discussion).

There are many barriers that the Indonesian government has to overcome in its attempts to teach English effectively in high schools. However, one aspect of ELT that emerges as needing greater attention is teacher's beliefs and attitudes towards their learning context. Drawing on some theories of teachers and their identity development (e.g Buzelli and Johnston 2002; Varghese 2005; and Duff and Uchida 1997) , this paper in particular focuses to analyze closely at English teachers in terms of their beliefs and attitudes towards their students, and how it impacts to the shaping of their professional identity.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Several theoretical perspectives have helped me to understand teachers 'beliefs and their identity development. The teacher, their identity and teaching are three factors that are interrelated. Varghese et al (2005) suggest that teachers' engagement in language teaching and learning cannot be separated from an understanding of who they are as teachers including their multiple layers of identities, "the professional, cultural, political, and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them" as Buzzelli and Johnston (2002) have distinguished these two types of identity; assigned identity, the identity given or imposed by others, and claimed identity, the identity claimed and/or understood by the teachers regarding themselves. In understanding teachers and their beliefs and attitudes of their students, the concept of Jenkins (2005:539) has been useful who stating that "experience may have a major effect on the formation of teachers' attitudes". A person's experience can also affect everything from quantity and type of knowledge attained to beliefs and attitudes. To avoid confusion, in this study I will not differentiate teachers' beliefs from teachers' attitudes, teachers' views, teachers' knowledge or even perceptions but will use the terms interchangeably to refer to teachers' conceptualizations of themselves, their practice and their learning environment including their beliefs and attitudes to their students.

METHODOLOGY

As part of a larger doctoral research project, data for this qualitative study was collected from in-depth interviews with 20 high school English teachers from six urban and rural high schools in Gorontalo Province, Indonesia. Data was analyzed following steps and guidelines suggested by Seidman (1998) and Miles and Huberman (1984). Classroom observation data is incorporated into the analysis to provide a practical contextualization of the teachers' attitudes and beliefs. In any case, it is critical that the identities of the respondents remain anonymous, therefore pseudonyms were used to describe each respondent. Data was transcribed in the original languages of recording in order to preserve the original meaning as far as possible, and then reduced and displayed in relation to the broad sections of interest before being closely scrutinized, marked and tagged to identify emerging themes that could be

related back to the teachers' profiles. Conclusions were then drawn from the data, which could be compared and contrasted with current theory regarding teacher beliefs, attitudes and the teachers' identity development. Relevant sections of the interviews were translated into English by the researcher for inclusion as examples to illustrate themes in the analysis and discussion.

Empowered Versus Defeatist Views of Students

Through the data analysis, two broad categories of teachers' views emerged; 'the defeatist view' which reflects an attitude where a teacher finds barriers to action and 'the empowered view' which reflects an attitude where a teacher finds ways to help their students to learn. A defeatist view appears to have a firm belief that there are obstacles to students unfettered learning, none of which are under the teacher's control. The obstacles may include: students' English skills are low, students' attitudes are not positive and impair the potential for learning for various reasons, resources are inadequate in Gorontalo, cultural values encourage satisfaction with one's lot, and peer pressure that discourages showing off is a disincentive. There were twelve teachers (Amir, Nola, Ani, Deni, Widi, Emi, Hendro, Yeni, Harun, Maryam, Lian, and Muna)who I classify as teachers with 'the defeatist view' and here is the example of expressed belief by the defeatist view teacher stating that the students arrive in their classes with a low capacity in English and this makes it hard for the teacher to bring them up to the expectations of the curriculum, as Ani says:

> The students' capacity in English here is low so we feel it is very difficult. I give
> them tasks but they do not always do the tasks and the result is just disappointing
> (Ani, Interview, November 30, 2005).

In contrast, eight teachers (Lisa, Rima, Farida, Ariyanto, Ray, Yusuf, Arifin, and Nina) with' empowered view' group of teachers, however, has less focus on obstacles and more emphasis on finding ways to help the students learn despite any perceived barriers. They have quite positive constructions of their students' motivations and attitudes. They all described their students as highly motivated and enthusiastic in learning English, explained that they think students are actually keen to learn English, depending on how the teacher approaches their students. For example:

> We have to adjust to the learning and teaching conditions and teach the students in
> more fascinating and interesting ways in order to increase students' motivation in
> learning English. This is what teachers do! I believe that they actually want to study
> and to be capable in English! (Yusuf, Interview, December 8, 2005).

Overall this group of teachers demonstrated optimism toward their students and they have a positive attitude toward them. Also, they are aware that learning English for students is a challenge, both due to it being foreign, and to the complexity of English itself. Despite this awareness they do not cease to attempt to motivate their students' interest and facilitate their learning. Their recollections show that they are actively exercising agency in supporting and facilitating the students to learn. The question of how these all contribute to those group of teachers' identity development as professional further discussed below:

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes of their students and professional identity development

Through the discussion of the teachers' recollection regarding their beliefs and attitudes of their students and drawing the thread discussion of the whole thesis, it showed that the experiences of the teachers highlight how identity is not context-free but is closely related to factors such as learning investment trajectories, individual religious beliefs and values, and teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards their students.

Considering my Ph.D project as a whole work, the concepts of claimed and assigned teacher identities (Buzzelli and Johnston 2002) are used to analyze their professional formations as learners and as professionals, including their response to curriculum change. All twenty teachers interviewed share the same assigned identity as English teachers (the identity given and/or imposed by others, such as that given to the teachers due to their role as English teachers). However, they do not share a common claimed identity (that is, the identity claimed and/or understood by the teachers regarding

themselves, In the study there were distinguished two categories of claimed identity emerged: empowered and minimally engaged. The 'empowered' identity teachers (Lisa, Rima, Farida, Ariyanto, Ray, Yusuf, Arifin, and Nina) describe teacher who appear to have a strong sense of agency and demonstrates empowerment via a strong level of engagement in their practice while the 'minimally-engaged' identity teachers (Amir, Nola, Ani, Deni, Widi, Emi, Hendro, Yeni, Harun, Maryam, Lian, and Muna) describe teachers who appears to have a lack of engagement and professional motivation toward their practice. Although there is some fluidity from one teacher to the others, there are also some shared characteristics within each group of teachers including their beliefs and attitudes of their students (see table 2 & 3).

Table 2: Teachers with 'empowered' identities

Respondents' names	Shared components
Lisa, Rima, Farida, Ariyanto, Ray, Yusuf, Arifin, Nina	• Demonstrate sense of agency and empowerment in dealing with a range of challenges in their teaching context • Open minded attitudes to students • Empathetic to the limitations of their teaching context • High professional motivation • High self confidence • Student-centred view of the teaching process and adopt a teaching approach that fosters independent learning • Adopters of 2004 curriculum reform • Positive attitude towards learning English

Table 3: Teachers with 'minimally engaged' identities

Respondents' names	Shared components
Amir, Nola, Ani, Deni, Widi, Emi, Hendro, Harun, Yeni, Maryam, Lian, Muna	• Lack of motivation and sense of agency in their approach to work • View barriers as obstacles • Close minded attitudes to students • Close minded attitudes to curriculum reform • Often juxtapose Gorontalo to other parts of Indonesia, characterizing Gorontalo as being deficient or sub-standard • Non-adopters of 2004 curriculum reform • Though may have started with a positive attitude to English, final attitude appeared to be negative

The teachers with 'empowered' claimed identities are more likely to be emotionally engaged with their profession and have a strong sense of agency in dealing with the challenges they face as teachers of English. In their understanding, students are enthusiastic and highly driven to be engaged in English learning despite their limitations and it is the teacher's role to accommodate these needs. Being empathetic to the limitations within their learning environment, thus their claimed identities empower them and influence them positively in the ways they approach their practice. In contrast, teachers with minimally engaged identities are more likely to show that they perceive constraints in their teaching context as a barrier rather than a challenge include their beliefs and attitudes to the constraints and limitations that occur within their teaching context (discussed in other part of the project). The teachers hold defeatist views of their students, generally believing them to be lazy, uncooperative, disobedient in the classroom, and afraid of making mistakes. In their understanding they cannot do anything because the core of the problem is on the students' side. This view can

become a strong barrier in preventing these teachers from increasing their efforts and from attaining success.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the analysis of teachers' beliefs and attitudes of their students, some conclusions can be drawn. First, the way in which teachers view regarding their students are not the same across the twenty teachers. Secondly, despite some fluidity from one teacher to another in terms of the nature of their views of their students, teachers shared similar characteristics in their beliefs and attitude toward their students. In this study, two overarching categories revealed: teachers with 'empowered' identities who have empowered view of their students and teachers with 'minimally engaged' identities who represent a defeatist view of their students. This study offers insight into how a teacher's beliefs and attitudes of their student have contributed to the shaping of their identity as professionals and contributes to the growing understanding of why the repeated implementation of new curricula in teaching English as a foreign language has been unsuccessful and addresses the issue of teachers' beliefs and attitudes of their students and how this impact upon the ways they approach their practice, and hence contribute to the shaping of their identity as professional.

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