



## WHAT TEACHERS' BELIEFS ON TEACHING? AN EXPLORING STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** Belief plays an important role in many aspects of teaching, it influences the way of teachers to make decisions and actions in the classroom. What teachers believe about teaching-learning becomes central to determining their actual behavior towards students and education in general. This study aims to find the beliefs of teachers about their profession. The data were collected by in-depth interview of three different subject teachers at SMA 6 Lhokseumawe. The study found that teachers' beliefs cannot always take into practice. Teachers believe that they are the key stakeholder for bringing better education, unfortunately, context and situation like educational system is a big dilemma for teachers to put their beliefs into classroom practice. The result of this study also revealed that all of the teachers are committed to their profession; two participants confessed that they never dreamt of being a teacher but they decided to be a teacher because of some reasons. Besides, all participants have committed not to shift their profession someday.

**Keywords:** *Beliefs, Teacher, Teaching, High school*

### INTRODUCTION

School reform is quite an undertaking (Thjis and Van den Berg, 2002; Healey and De-Stefano, 1997). Indonesia, Aceh in particular, has begun to develop school reform for years which places teachers as a central issue to push better education. To take this issue into account, one of the programs provided recently by the government is concerned on empowering teachers' capacity like teachers' professional development program (MNE, 2010; Lim *et al.*, 2014). To bear in mind that, teachers are the key person of classroom teaching-learning activities; much of the work has been emphasizing on how the classroom teaching-learning is undertaking. Teachers are required to do their work, plan and conduct their teaching based on curriculum framework, make assessment and reporting about their work. Teachers' craft knowledge is really demanding; the knowledge of teachers use in everyday classroom teaching activities developed by their reflection of daily practices, to achieve an effective teaching (Cooper and McIntyre, 1998). However, the way teachers do their abundant tasks in the classroom is highly relied on their beliefs (Mansour, 2009). Consequently, it is important to study how teachers' beliefs influence their teaching practices, so teachers will be aware of their tasks in the classroom.

In view of the relevant literature, there has been much research done on teachers' beliefs in order to explore the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices (Shinde and Karekatti, 2012). In the case of Aceh, there has been not much research so far concerning on teachers' beliefs. Regardless, Aceh is ongoing to develop an innovative



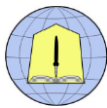
education, though teachers' belief is not being concerned with the innovative education. The main purpose of present study is, therefore, to explore teachers' beliefs about teaching and how it relates to their teaching practices by reviewing some relevant literature and interviewing three different background teachers at the same senior high school in Aceh, Lhokseumawe. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following questions: (1) How do the teachers perceive themselves as a teacher? And what are teachers' beliefs about choosing to teach as the profession? (2) How is the teaching practice of the teachers? (3) What beliefs do the teachers hold regarding their teaching and learning? (4) Is there any relationship between teachers' beliefs of their teaching method with students' achievement?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1990s, research on teaching has emphasized on the study of beliefs and knowledge that influence teaching practices (Shinde and Karekatti, 2012). "Belief" is an intangible word which is complex to define and describe. Teachers' belief is, hence, difficult to evaluate and measure. In the present paper, I will explain some statements from researchers and theorists to help us understand. According to Pajares's definition (cited in Rashidi and Moghadam, 2014), belief refer to what an individual concludes about the tasks, and he chooses his cognitive skill to plan and to make a decision about those tasks, therefore an individual's belief will affect his action or performance. In addition, Mansour (2009) described beliefs as theories which can guide teachers into practices. The Oxford Dictionary (2007) defined belief as "conviction". Tarman (1973) used the word belief, in analyzing prospective teachers' beliefs, as an individual's conviction or view about teaching and learning; it is about conscious or unconscious, an intention assumed as what one acts.

A teacher's precede belief about teaching is derived from his/her experience like educational background or formal knowledge. Their beliefs relied on how they instruct themselves (self-instruction) based on their social, cultural, and educational background, their own experience, their teaching ability and students (Xu, 2012) Teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are to be the first important consideration to education that will improve the thought of an individual teacher, influencing teachers' motivation to implement new teaching approaches (Xu, 2012; Shinde and Karekatti, 2012; Al-Amoush *et al.*, 2001; Tarman, 1973). Beliefs will directly impact on how teachers decide and determine their teaching practices in the classroom. They can shift their performance and teaching methods or strategies according to different levels of students' abilities (Xu, 2012).

On the other hand, Rashidi and Moghadam (2014) suggested that teacher' beliefs about education should be communicated with the students. Teachers and students have to define their own educational beliefs and apply them to bring up for their future teaching-learning practice. It will contribute to the quality of the improvement of teaching-learning goals based on what teachers and students experienced in the classroom. Even if much research has noticed that teachers' classroom practice is influenced by their beliefs, nevertheless, this issue is still debatable. For example, Mansour (2009) tried to review science teachers' beliefs and their practices by giving a clear explanation about the relationship between beliefs and practice, he concluded that beliefs are paradoxical, they are indirectly correlated but have strong effects on teaching practices; and not always their beliefs take into practices. Beliefs are accumulated depend on the context, the context in which they are developed and used.



However, research about the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their teaching styles conducted by Canto-Herrera and Salazar-Carballo (2010) indicated that there was a significant relationship between teaching style and teachers' beliefs ( $r=0.007$ ) in which teachers' beliefs was about constructivist teaching. Similarly, Lim *et al.* (2014) found that the change of pedagogical beliefs of Master teachers and school leaders from the traditional one to constructivist have encouraged them to learn and use new strategies in order to improve their students' achievement.

For the purpose of this present paper, the concept of belief is used to characterize a teacher's personal thought about teaching-learning processes, and how their beliefs influence the way they plan and make decisions about teaching.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The education system of Aceh is a part of the national system; with its special autonomy, Aceh has an authority to manage local education. Much work of the improvement for better education has been suggested and in recent years, Aceh has spent at least 30% of the budget on education. Aceh is the second highest per capita education expenditure in Indonesia, also the examination results shown that almost close to the national standard which mean the quality of education is increased (Shah and Lopes-Cardozo, 2014).

The current focus of education program in Aceh is to provide certified teachers in order to improve teachers' professional quality in teaching. Providing teachers with professional development program like in-service teachers' training is expected to help teachers mastering subject contents and teaching skills. For this reason, certified and well-trained teachers were the focal point of this study. In order to answer the research question of the study, the open and unstructured questions were conducted to different subject teachers in Aceh, Lhokseumawe.

### Setting and Sample

The sample used for this research was three teachers from Senior High School (SMA Negeri 6) Lhokseumawe who were randomly selected. Two were certified teachers (one is from the educational background, teaching chemistry coded as N.U; the second one is non-education, teaching math coded as M.Q) and the third one is a uncertified teacher but a well-trained teacher (her background is education, she teaches Bahasa Indonesia coded as M.W). All of them are civil servants. We chose this school for two reasons; first, I am a teacher at the school; second, I found there are many human resources at the school such as certified teachers, well-trained teachers, most of the teachers have bachelor degrees in education, some are non-educational background but well-trained in education, a few are masters in education. Unfortunately, the examination result of the school is lower than other senior high schools (SMA) in Lhokseumawe.

The instrument of the study was interview. The general strategy for the teachers' interview was to start with broad questions about their experiences, responses, methods, strategies and approaches used by the teachers in order get their beliefs about teaching. The data was analyzed by using the qualitative method. The qualitative method used was to find the influences of beliefs on teaching processes.

The interviews were transcribed in order to be able to underline significant part of the variable which would be analyzed. The findings from the interviews were summarized, it can be found in the result of analysis. The conclusion of interviews was drawn about how beliefs influence the teachers' practices.



## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The first research question was addressed to know the teachers' perception of their profession. What are their reasons choosing teachers' profession? How do they perceive themselves due to their profession?

In the first interview, the interviewees talked about their reasons for choosing the teacher profession. They posed different reasons about this question; one said she decided to be a teacher as her educational background was teacher training education, and there were no other choices, the second interviewee had a non-educational background but, she found teaching was interesting as she firstly taught at one of the private schools in Lhokseumawe. The third interviewee commented that she liked teaching, therefore, she decided to be a teacher.

Teacher 2:

*"My major was applied science in math (MIPA Matematika), after completing my studies at Syiah Kuala University, the only opportunity I saw was teaching. Then, I taught at one of the private schools in Lhokseumawe, and I found teaching was very good since my students were very enthusiast, motivated and the highest achiever students in Lhokseumawe, that condition changed my mind, I decided to follow one year formal educational training to be officially approved as a teacher (AKTA IV)... now I am a civil servant, and teaching at a public school which is so much different... teaching here has no challenges". (M.Q.)*

Another related question to this topic was about their future plan and expectation regarding their profession, will they change their profession someday? Do they enjoy teaching or not? Two of them agreed to say there were no choices about working opportunities, one said that she loved teaching, therefore, she took teaching as her profession.

Teacher 3:

*".....I took teacher training education because of my father's suggestion as he is a teacher. He wants me to be a teacher. During the first year teaching, it was hard to deal with big tasks in the classroom with students...,yet, I have no choices to think about other professions... so I keep trying to do my teaching". (M.W.)*

On the other hand, the teachers were aware teaching is an arduous task, a teacher is a key person of educational reform.

Teacher 2:

*" I know that my task is to give good output for education; so far, I have no ideas what other tasks I should do instead of teaching...enjoy or not, I have to do teaching.... ". (M.Q.)*

Teacher 1:

*" we are a role model for our learners. I think to be a teacher is very interesting, I don't think about other tasks". (N.U.)*

The second research question aimed at getting information about how is their teaching going on? It is related to their classroom management, what plan and decision they come to in accordance to their classroom situation? The interviewee described the way they manage classrooms. They confessed that they have to deal with low-achiever students who were very tough to communicate. To manage the classroom should be started from the outside of the classroom.



Teacher 1:

*"...most of students are preferred to miss the class when the bell is ringing, you may see, I go around to find and chase my students to come into the classroom....they enjoy sitting in the canteen, or somewhere in the hidden places....sometimes I could not find them". (N.U.)*

Coming late to the classroom is the students' habit. When one comes late it will interrupt others' attention in learning.

Teacher 2:

*" it's really wasting time when I have to wait for students to come in....the time left for teaching-learning is little, to teach math in a short time is difficult...". (M.Q.)*

Time constraint is always a serious problem in teaching. Well prepared teachers, sometimes, cannot reach their teaching goals due to time clashing with the actual context in the classroom. Most teachers cannot reach the curriculum target at the end of the semester.

Teacher 3:

*" in Bahasa Indonesia, I have sixteen main goals to be attained in two semesters, but, always I only can achieve twelve or thirteen goals...it happens in social science classes since most of them are unmotivated to study". (M.W.)*

Teacher 1:

*" even if time is a problem, I tried to finish all lesson contents each semester, I teach chemistry, so I only teach science classes and only third grade where students are not really problems". (N.U.)*

The poor classroom management also appears in getting with materials. Teachers are bringing the lesson plan as what syllabi or curricula planned to be attained, whilst low students, in a short time, are required to master the material. It is, consequently, clashed between students' desired and teachers' expectation.

Teacher 2:

*"time is a problem, lazy and low students are also a problem when getting the content... at the end, I give them remedial, for most of them did not pass the examination, the remedy for many times...but still did not pass. at the end they should pass, that's our rules, I gave them the assignment to get the minimum score....". (M.Q.)*

The third research question referred to methodologies or strategies the teachers used in teaching, the interviewees reported about the methods using in teaching which was not varied. A possible method that they usually used was lecturing or sometimes a lecture with discussion method. They talked about their students were low in participation in learning; this situation made the teachers difficult to apply class discussion or small group discussion methods.

Teacher 3:

*"I teach third grade, as curriculum targeted the students have to read a lot, unfortunately, they are lazy to read, I have to read and explain to them, when asking them, "please read the story first, then we discuss and answer the question together" automatically they said "it's too long, we would not read this passage", it happens to almost of the classes, there is only one science class where students are actively participating, but only one class....". (M.W.)*

Teacher 2:

*"in learning math, of course, it is a scourge for students, I see they are very tired with math, a new curriculum for first science grade is 7 teaching hours a week, the method I use is the same*





*with other teachers I think, our students are not active students...so I always explain and work on exercises. I feel it is bored to apply the same strategy, yet, I could not do other strategies. I got many teaching training, so far, it's difficult to apply in our classroom."* (M.Q.)

Teacher 3:

*"of course, not many methods I can apply in my teaching, even if I used lecturing many times, I sometimes teach them in a group, as I said, students of the third grade of science classes are not too difficult to handle".* (N.U.)

The related point to this question is about counseling; the teachers sometimes consult and discuss their students' problem in learning. They get closer to students and discuss what the best way should find for them in learning. Teachers discuss and consult with teachers and counselors as well.

Teacher 2:

*"after teaching, I sometimes talk to my student, I am very open to them, I also call their parents to school if I found there is a serious problem. Some problems are solved and some are not., I think that is normal. I also discussed my teaching with my colleagues whether I teach in a good way or not".* (M.Q.)

Teacher 1 & 2:

*"but, we have time problem, I teach 24 hour-teaching, it's full time from Monday-Saturday, to get a certified teacher, we are only asked to teach 24 hours, other activities outside of the classroom teaching at school are not acknowledged, this issue also makes me or other teachers are lazy to work overload... each teacher only thinks about his teaching time in the classroom.it seems teachers are unwilling to have overloaded working hours with students' problems".* (N.U. & M.Q.)

The last research question was to investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs and students' achievement. They way teachers teach usually effect on students' achievement. They confessed that when students were in high motivation in learning, it would lead to a good score. Unfortunately, they could not deal with their teaching method and classroom environment, it was rarely found they shifted their method of teaching. Teacher-centeredness is most favorable by the teachers in teaching.

Teacher 3:

*"I see, when I teach with big student participation, of course, it will influence on their score....".* (M.W.)

Teacher 1, 2, 3:

*"Yes, about student achievement may be the problem also with the teachers, I am now well trained with many methods of teaching, but I still find it is difficult to teach.... I never think to change my method in teaching, when I see my students get in touch with my way of teaching, I continue that way until the end of year.... I always teach as I a leader in classroom, I never negotiate in our classroom learning...(N.U.,M.Q., M.W.)*

Teacher 1:

*"Actually, students' achievement depends on their motivation. If they have low motivation, it influences their achievement. if I want my students to be good at the exam, I have to motivate the students more.....".* (N.U.)

Teacher 2:



*"I assumed that when I ask or negotiate about our tasks in the classroom, they will automatically agree to not learn anything....". (M.Q.)*

## Discussion

There is an evidence that can be found in the interview that teachers' beliefs about their profession are very ironic, they believe that they are the one who will bring for school reform, yet, still, they do not take their ideal work into account. They only think about fulfilling their target. They are aware that their students need more approach in order to improve their achievement. Again, the teachers have to confront with time, three of the teachers interviewed concluded that time constraint is the biggest problem for them. However, they argued that they have put a big effort into their teaching by finishing curriculum targets, shifting teaching methods, and solving students' problems.

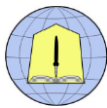
Also, the education system is in a dilemma, teachers attending to school are only teaching the lesson in the classroom, other extra works of the teachers, such as counseling and meet and visit students' family are not officially approved as their working-hour as a teacher. This issue is very crucial among teachers, then, it will effect on the teachers' ideal profession. This situation quietly influences on their way of managing a classroom, applying methods or strategies of teaching, approaching and assessing their students. Teachers' beliefs are strongly affected by the education system, what system does education have? Then, that system will instruct teachers' beliefs, as what Xu (2012) defined, beliefs are the way of one instructs himself (self-instruction) based on his social background.

In conclusion, what the teachers believe in teaching does not always take into practice, one influential factor which always follows is context or situation. Henceforth, Mansour (2009) concluded that teachers' beliefs are not always put into practice. The school context, where students are passive and low motivated, will change the teachers' beliefs. All of the teachers interviewed believe that they are well-trained, they know various methods of teaching and have much knowledge about teaching, but they cannot take their beliefs about knowing various methods into the real practice of teaching. This issue related to what Rashidi and Moghadam (2014) suggested that teachers and students should communicate about their beliefs of education, and they have to design their learning goals together in the classroom.

When teachers-learners are agreed on what they are doing in the classroom, it will give great impact on the students' motivation; and motivation will influence students' achievement. Consequently, the most important thing is educational planners or designers have to engage teachers in designing education or curriculum. Furthermore, the failure of education reforms is due to clashes between the curriculum and the orientation of teachers in classroom teaching. (Thjis and Van den Berg, 2002; Lim *et al.*, 2014).

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of data obtained from the interview, the teacher has different perceptions about their profession. Two participants of this study concluded that to be a teacher is due to their educational background as teacher training education and the teaching opportunity is also a reason for one participant to teach even though she is a non-educational background teacher. Also, the teachers commented on their teaching process, especially about classroom



management. The teachers have to deal with low-achiever students who were very tough to communicate. So, classroom management should be started from the outside of the classroom.

The poor classroom management, time constraint, and low-lower students are the big problems in their teaching practices. Related to methodologies and strategies applied in teaching, the teachers did not use various methods during their teaching, the only possible method that they usually used was lecturing. Discussion or group discussion method was difficult to be applied due to low students participation in learning. In addition, the way of teaching usually effect on students' achievement. It was a correlation between teaching method and students' motivation in learning when students were in high motivation in learning, it would lead to a good score. Unfortunately, the teachers were tedious with their teaching method and they could not deal with the classroom environment. A traditional way of teaching (teacher-centered) was dominantly applied by the teachers in teaching.

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