

**TEACHERS' BELIEFS SYSTEM OF TEACHING READING
AND THEIR CLASSROOM PRACTICES: WITH
REFERENCE TO HIGH SCHOOLS OF JIMMA AND EAST
WOLLEGA ZONES**

Tadesse Regassa*

Gemechis Teshome**

ABSTRACT

Teachers' belief system in teaching reading and their classroom practices has an impact on literacy achievement and willingness to engage with literacy-related activities. Research suggests numerous views to account for the influence on practice of teachers' beliefs. Teachers' beliefs affect not only their teaching, but also filter new input, suggesting significant implications for the implementation of educational innovations and teacher development. This research sets out to gain insight into teachers' beliefs of teaching reading and their classroom practices in EFL. A case study of 40 EFL teachers from eight high schools in two Oromia regions selected purposefully and conveniently. One of the data gathering instruments in this case study was a questionnaire that inquires the participants' beliefs of teaching reading related to the classroom practices and how these beliefs influence their classroom practices in teaching reading. In addition to the questionnaire, and an FGD with participants were held to examine their beliefs in detail. Finally, in order to see whether participants' beliefs matched with their actual practices in their classrooms or not, the sample courses of the

* Assistance Professor at Department of EDPM in Jimma University and PhD Student in India

** Lecturer at Department of English Language & Literature in Jimma University

participants and the students were observed and recorded for triangulation for the data. The classroom observations of the courses as well as the recordings of those courses were also examined by the researchers, and the findings were verified by another co-rater in order to increase the trustworthiness of the data. The analysis of responses of participants to the questionnaire, recorded classroom observations and interviews were presented qualitatively in the findings section. Results of the study showed that EFL teachers hold their own belief system of teaching reading; however their belief was incongruently implemented in the classroom. Finally, the study provides some recommendations to the subjects which could help to improve their everyday classroom practices to ongoing critical reflection.

Key Words: Teachers' Beliefs System, Beliefs, Teaching Reading, Classroom Practices, High Schools

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Research on teacher belief system and goals is common in educational research, as is it on teacher practice, but pursuing the relationship between them has only recently been considered as an important issue of language education. It has been established that teachers' beliefs' about English, teaching and learning have a significant influence on their instructional practices Calderhead (1996). Teachers' belief systems and practices are important for understanding and improving educational processes.

According to Borg (1998), a program which incorporates teachers' classroom behaviors and the rationale behind them are particularly influential. Teachers' practice is shaped by their beliefs about ELT and the role beliefs play in teaching, in our case teaching reading. More recently, teacher educators began to realize that educational courses based on the transmission of methods and approaches are expected to play significant role in foreign language teaching. In line with this, Woods (1995) comments that *the gap between (beliefs) theory and practice is getting wider and wider in education in general and language teaching in particular. This chief determinant of teacher behaviors in class is his or her theory-in-action commonly defined as the set of tacit beliefs and values about what constitutes effective foreign language teaching and learning.*

According to Nunan (1989), the correlation between beliefs and practice is a significant area of research and has increasingly attracted attention in recent years of reading professionals. He also concludes that even among teachers who were highly qualified and trained and had clear goals for reading classes, only few opportunities were created in for effective reading. This suggests that discrepancies exist between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom performances. In

referring to beliefs as a personal knowledge, Kagan (1992) argues that much of a teacher's professional knowledge can be more accurately regarded as belief. It is believed that as a teacher's experience in the profession increases, this knowledge grows richer and more coherent and forms a highly personalized belief system that constrains the teachers' perception, judgment, and behavior.

Different researches indicate that teachers are strongly influenced by their beliefs. It is undeniable that their beliefs in turn influence their teaching learning process in the classroom. Williams and Burden (1997:57) for example, point out that beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organize and define tasks and are better predictors of teachers' behavior in class. Teachers are expected to analyze their deep-rooted beliefs about how the languages are learned and interpretation is made will determine their classroom action more than any methodology employed.

Despite the fact that studying teacher beliefs prove to be most valuable, studies aimed at understanding the beliefs of teachers have been uneasy Clark and Peterson (1986) in Pajares (1992) agree that teachers' theories and beliefs represent a rich store of knowledge, and argue that teachers make sense of their world and respond to it by forming a complex system of personal and professional knowledge.

Furthermore, research on language teachers' belief suggests that teachers tend to develop their knowledge and understanding in the course of their reflective practice Borg (2003). A number of areas have been identified as those through which teachers develop their language teaching principles, such as their belief systems or personal theories that teacher held regarding the nature of the broader educational process, the nature of language, how it is taught and learned Breen et

al (2001). It is understood that professional education which shapes trainee teachers' belief and ignores the teachers' earlier beliefs may be less effective at forming the later beliefs. Regarding this, Richards and Lockhart (1994), agree that beliefs are built up gradually over time. There is a debate on belief that it consists of both subjective and objective dimensions and help as background to teachers' decision making and classroom action. Beliefs strongly influence both perception and behavior. Pajares (1992) claims that their filtering, effect "ultimately screens, redefines, distorts or reshapes subsequent thinking and information."

This paper, then, is designed to assess EFL teachers' belief system of teaching reading and how far this belief is implemented in practice in the classroom. This is in the belief that how further the selected EFL teachers and students of Grade 9 & 10 contribute effective way of teaching reading for academic purposes.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

It has long been recognized that teachers' belief system has a paramount significance to language teaching. The interest of focusing on teachers' belief of teaching reading and to what extent these belief systems influence classroom practice is emanated from little research carried out onto teachers' belief of teaching reading and whether they implement their beliefs in action and the present researchers' experience is concerned. Many teachers have agreed that there is incongruence between their belief and what actual they do in classroom. This may be partly due to the textbook factor, background knowledge and students' interest, misunderstanding of pedagogical implications of teaching practices or may be also lack of trainings on the specific areas.

One of the local researcher on belief system is Berhanu (2008), designed to investigate beliefs and actual classroom practices of three EFL instructors of Bonga College of Teacher Education with regard to grammar instruction. The finding suggests that instructors' belief system of grammar teaching were not often reflected in their classroom practices. The other one is Abiy (2000), who studied on the relationship between teachers expressed beliefs and classroom practice about oral error correction on 1st year students of Ethiopian university colleges. His finding revealed that there is incongruence between what teachers' think, they do and what they actually do. It is also reported that this mismatch has an adverse effect on the teaching learning process.

On top of these, researches on areas of belief systems and their actual practice was internationally carried out by Gardener (1996) and the result of the finding shows that there is no such significant difference between what they think and they do. The other available work on the area of belief system is Chou's (2008) in China who finally, come up with the instructors' belief of teaching reading theory do mismatch with what they reflect in the classroom due to various factors, such as background and interest of learners.

The present researchers are interested to study EFL teachers' belief of teaching reading and their classroom practices to fill a gap focusing on Grade 9 and 10. In the first place, investigating teachers in beliefs point of view is an important issue that really uses as an 'engine' in education in general and language teaching in particular. Next to that, research done in the area of teachers' belief system of teaching reading and classroom practice appears in the country to be scanty. Lastly, it is significant to deal with the differences and relationships of the present study with that of the previous and to depict the gap the present researchers are going to fill.

Thus, it is realized that both are similar in that the previous researchers and the present researchers intend to fill the gap of what is thought in theory with what is actually happening in the classroom. They have made an effort to crosscheck whether teachers are implementing what they have in mind or doing the vice versa. The main difference that the present researchers have come up with is that: The study might add some new knowledge and unfamiliar information since it is new finding. Its research design and organization is qualitative and quantitative case. The previous findings setting is on college and universities whereas, the present research is in preparatory level.

Hence, this study attempted to answer the following basic questions:

- How do teachers perceive the teaching of reading in classrooms?
- Is there any significant difference between teachers' belief and their actual practice in classroom?
- What are the major hindering factors of teachers' belief of teaching reading in classroom practices?

Part Two: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Descriptive research methodology was employed where a mixed approach of data collection was engaged.

3.2. Sampling Technique

Multi stage sampling was employed to select the region, zones, woredas, schools and individual respondents. Accordingly Oromya region, Jimma and East Wollega zones, four schools from each zones and respondents were selected purposefully from schools since the focus was on EFL

teachers. Hence, the schools from Jimma zone were Jimma Community high School, Mantina high School, Aggaro high School, and Sokoru high School, whereas Arjo high School, Digga high School, Darge high School and Nekemte high schools were from East Wollega. These schools were selected because of the number of teachers engaged in teaching EFL in the schools, working areas convenience for the researchers and less number of researches conducted there.

3.3. Data Collecting Instruments

Forty close-ended and five open-ended questions were administered and all of them were intended to assess beliefs and classroom practices of teachers. Each respondents of the questionnaire were distributed about 15 pages of items. Researchers conducted FGD with five EFL teachers in each high school were selected in the FGD. Moreover classroom observation was used to study teachers' and students' behaviors. How far they are implementing what they think is known via this type of instrumentation.

3.5. Data Organization and Analysis

Questionnaire, FGD and classroom observation were analyzed one by one. The questionnaire which consists of 40 items (closed-ended) and 5 (open-ended) shall be analyzed carefully. FGD and questionnaire were administered for the teachers to get rich data about the belief of teaching reading. This enables to obtain teachers' belief system of teaching reading and whether they do what they say or not.

Part Three: FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This part of the unit is intended to deal with mainly two things. Firstly, it is the analysis of the finding in the form of tables and bar charts and with important interpretation under each table.

The second part is simply putting the discussion of the result in simple and clear way.

4.1. Finding

Table 1: Teachers' Beliefs of Teaching Reading

Items No	Responses												Mean	Std. Deviat
	A		U		S		O		N		Total			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I teach reading through predicting new words	13	32.5	15	37.5	9	22.5	3	7.5			40	100	4.0000	1.00000
I believe in reading the text aloud for students	16	40.0	17	42.5	4	10	2	5	1	2.5	40	100	4.0000	.70711
I motivate learners to guess the meaning unfamiliar words	17	42.5	14	35.5	8	20	1	2.5			40	100	4.4000	.54772
I explain the content of the text in detail	16	40	20	50	2	5	2	5			40	100	4.0000	1.00000
I give emphasis to teach vocabulary in reading	9	22.5	14	35.5	9	22.5	3	7.5	5		40	100	4.2000	.83666
I teach reading as equally as other skill	19	47.5	8	20	5	12.5	8	20			40	100	4.0000	.70711
I believe in employing	20	20	12	30	8	20					40	100	4.0000	.70711
I integrate the information in the text	12	30	9	22.5	18	45	1	2.5			40	100	3.8000	1.30384
I read lessons as important as other skill	15	37.5	9	22.5	9	22.5	6	15	1		40	100	4.4000	.89443

As indicated in the above table, 9 items were prepared to investigate the beliefs of teachers in teaching reading in theoretical aspects. The items were intended to elicit information from the EFL teachers how often they believe in teaching reading skills. Consequently, as it is indicated on Table 1 the majority of the EFL teachers 14(35.5%) responded that they always or usually

believe in teaching reading in connection with nine items in the above table. Specifically, for item 1, 13(32.5%) respondents responded that they always believe in teaching reading through predicting new words; whereas 15 (37.5%) of the respondents usually believe in teaching to predict new words. Only item 2 was answered by one respondent saying he or she never believe in reading aloud, and two respondents never believe in giving emphasis to teach vocabulary.

Thus, this can show us that most of the EFL teachers believe in teaching more or less all the important elements to promote reading skills.

Table 2: Reasons for Teaching Reading

Items	Responses												Mea	Std.
	A		U		S		O		N		Total			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Teaching the structure in reading	6	15.0	19	47.5	12	30	3	7.5	-	-	40	100	3.7000	.82275
Teaching to develop students' reading fluency	1	2.5	24	60	14	35	1	2.5	-	-	40	100	3.6250	.58562
Teaching students pronunciation	1	2.5	12	30.0	18	45	6	15	3	7.5	40	100	3.0500	.93233
Teaching individuals reading profile	7	17.5	9	22.5	18	45	6	15	-	-	40	100	3.4250	.95776
Teaching grammar in reading	7	17.5	15	37.5	14	35	4	10	-	-	40	100	3.5250	1.10911
Teaching vocabulary in reading	5	12.5	26	65	1	2.5	8	20	-	-	40	100	3.7000	.93918
Teaching content of the text in reading	14	35.0	10	25	13	32.5	3	7.5	-	-	40	100	3.8000	1.15913

The main targets of items in table 2 were designed to gather information on reasons for teaching reading. Item 1 and 2 were designed whether teaching about structure and develop students' reading fluency is the reason of teaching reading. 25(62.5%) of the respondents responded that they usually/always teach that structure and similarly 25 (62.5%) of the respondents usually

teach reading to develop fluency. As seen in both items the majority of EFL teachers raise the reasons for teaching reading should be to promote language structure and student's reading fluency. Item 3 was intended to know if the respondents' reason in teaching reading is to teach pronunciation. 13 (32.5%) of the respondents usually consider pronunciation is the reason for teaching reading, whereas 24 (60%) of them sometimes consider as a reason. There are 3(7.5%) respondents who never consider teaching reading for pronunciation. As indicated in table two, respondents were requested if teaching grammar and vocabulary are the reasons for teaching reading. For the former 32 (55%) of the respondents usually teach reading considering grammar. In the latter 31 (77.5%) of the respondents consider that they usually teach reading for vocabulary.

Table 3: The Importance of Using Reading Strategies in Pre- rereading

Items	Responses										Mean
	4(N. Imp)		3(Les.Imp)		2(Imp)		1(M. Imp)		Total		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
order students to read & predict text	1	2.5	12	30	17	42.5	10	25	40	100	3.9250
sets a context before students begin	21	52.5	6	15	1	2.5	3	7.5	40	100	3.8000
sets a purpose of reading	11	27.5	7	17.5	9	22.5	2	5	40		3.5000
helps the students quickly look over the text	19	47.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	4	10	40	100	4.0000
provides students warm-up questions related to the text	12	30	6	15	6	15	7	17.5	40	100	3.2500
teaches vocabulary before students read the text	2	5	17	42.5	12	30	9	22.5	40	100	3.6500
asks to relate the text or the topic	9	22.5	5	12.5	1	2.5	16	40	40	100	3.2750
provides language preparation that might be needed	5	12.5	1	2.5	9	22.5	8	20	40	100	3.7750
draws students' attention on the new vocabulary	6	15	8	20	2	5	4	10	40	100	3.9000

activates the students' knowledge of the subject	2	5	2	5	7	17.5	12	30	40	100	4.0000
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Table 3 is mainly prepared to elicit information from the EFL teachers on the importance of applying reading techniques in the pre-reading stages. In the first item respondents were asked on the importance students' predicting the text. Accordingly, 27(67.5%) respondents answered it is important to teach reading to help the students in predicting the text. Respondents were asked whether setting a context is important technique in pre-reading. 27(77.5%) of the respondents answered that setting a context is less important in a pre-reading stage. On the other side 13 (22.5) of the respondents responded setting a context is important. With regard to the importance of setting a purpose for teaching, 22(55%) of the respondents replied that setting a purpose is important while 18(45%) of them answered setting a purpose for teaching reading is less important. Item 4 sought information on the importance of quickly looking over the text. So, 20 (50%) of the respondents replied helping the students to look quickly over the text is less important. With regard to the importance of teaching vocabulary, the majority of the respondents replied that teaching vocabulary is important.

Table 4: The Importance of Using Reading Strategies in while- rereading

Items	Responses											
	4(N. Imp)		3(Les.Imp.)		2(Imp)		1(M. Imp)		Total		Mean	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
helps learners to understand text structure & logical organization	1	2.5	10	25	9	22.5	8	20	40	100	3.5000	
helps students to understand the writer's purpose & intention	3	7.5	3	7.5	9	22.5	4	10	40	100	3.9250	

comprehends the content	4	10	3	7.5	6	15	18	45	40	100	3.6250
helps students to use inference & judging	2	5	2	5	22	55	11	27.5	40	100	4.0270
survey the general information	2	5	8	20	3	7.5	9	22.5	40	100	3.8250

Table 4 is designed to elicit on the importance of teaching reading techniques during reading stages. The table contains 5 items in which the respondents' responses were analyzed. Item 1 was designed to gather information from the respondents on the importance of helping learners to understand text structure and logical organization. Thus, 31(63%) of the respondents replied helping students to understand text structure is important. With regard to helping students to understand the writer's purpose and intention, 34(85%) of the respondents replied helping students to understand the writer's intention and purpose are important. To the contrary, 6(15%) of the respondents answered helping students for writer's intention and purpose is less important. The other item was designed to elicit how important comprehending the content. 24 (60%) of the respondents answered comprehending the content during teaching reading is important.

Table 5: The Importance of Using Reading Strategies in post- rereading

Items	Responses										
	4(N. Imp)		3(Les.Imp.)		2(Imp)		1(M. Imp)		Total		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Encourages students to draw conclusions from the text	2	5	9	22.5	7	17.5	5	12.5	40	100	3.6500
motivates students to discuss what they read	11	27.5	11	27.5	1	2.5	2	5	40	100	3.9000

asks students to comment on the text	1	2.5	3	7.5	14	35	11	27.5	40	100	3.7000
gives students a quiz about the text	3	7.5	2	5	5	12	15	37.5	40	100	3.9250
provides students follow up activities related to text	1	2.5	5	12	10	25	8	20	40	100	3.8250
assigns students to do tasks using information	1	2.5	1	2.5	12	30	16	40	40	100	3.8250
asks students to interpret the texts	4	10	6	15	11	27.5	19	47.5	40	100	4.1250
answers comprehension questions	15	37.5			14	35	11	27.5	40	100	3.9000
leads students to a deeper analysis	3	7.5	3	7.5	5	12	15	37.5	40	100	3.8500

As it can be seen from Table 5, in item one respondent were asked to answer that it is important to encouraging learners to draw conclusions from the text they read. 29(72.5%) of the subjects replied that they encourage learners to draw conclusions from the text. The remaining 11 (27.5%) respondents answered that it is less important to encourage learners to draw conclusion from the text they read. With regard to motivating students for discussion on what they read on item 2, 22(55%) of the respondents answered that it is less important. The data obtained through FGD and Observation also explained that it is important to teach reading so as to develop learners reading fluency.

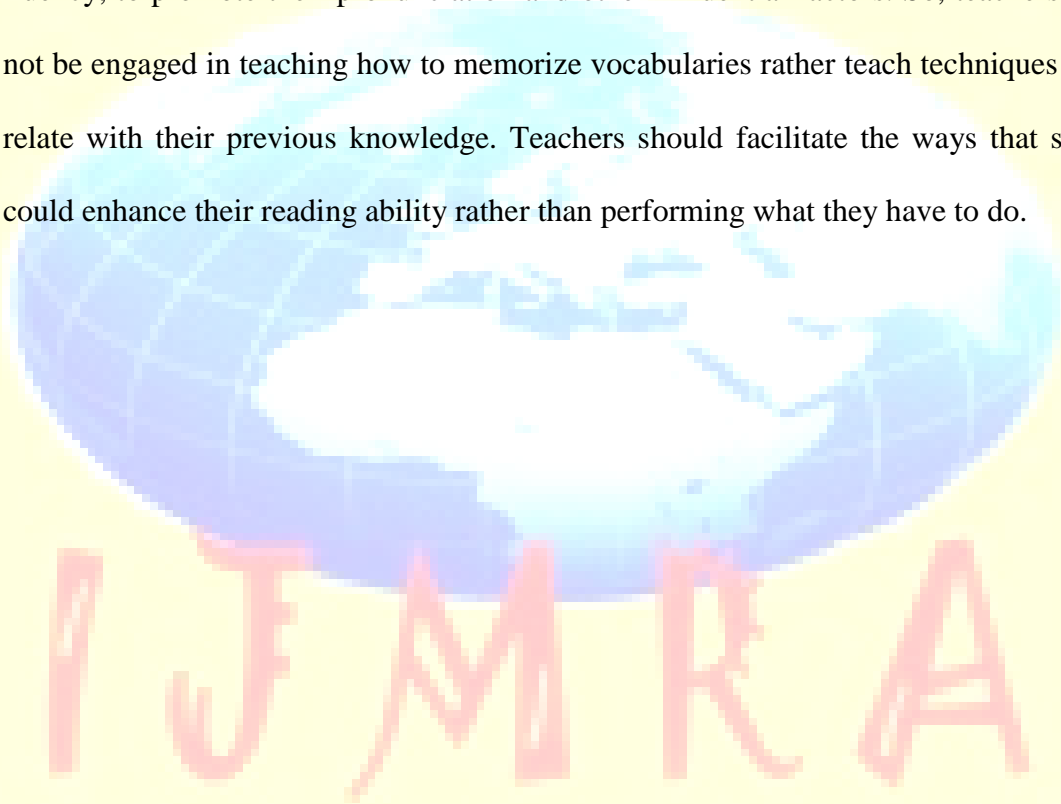
Part Four: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this study have shed significant light on the beliefs and practices of reading skill where teachers need urgent help to improve their performance in and out of the classroom. Beliefs are accepted to be difficult to measure though they were measured in this study through a survey supported with semi structured interview, observation and close ended questions. Thus, it is suggested that generalization is impossible and further studies can be conducted to infer teachers' beliefs from the ways in which they act rather than from what they say they believe.

5.2. Recommendations

- Our EFL teachers are more expected in carrying the responsibility of teaching reading than the learners. Thus, teachers should develop not only strong belief about reading but also its implementation. Since beliefs play such an important role not only in teaching reading but also in real life, they also play an important role in many aspects of EFL in particular.
- The main reasons of teaching reading are to expand learners' vocabulary, to foster their fluency, to promote their pronunciation and other influential factors. So, teachers should not be engaged in teaching how to memorize vocabularies rather teach techniques how to relate with their previous knowledge. Teachers should facilitate the ways that students could enhance their reading ability rather than performing what they have to do.



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