The Beliefs Practicum Students Bring to Their Classes Regarding Language Teaching

Teifu Zhang

Abstract

In the literature of teacherʋ beliefʋ, it is assumed that 1) teachers' beliefs are critical in their impact on their teaching practices and professional development; 2) Changes in teachers' behavior, actions and practices stem from changes in teachers' beliefs; 3) understanding how teachers' beliefs construct or reshape as they learn to teach is essential to inform and strengthen teacher education programs. Under these assumptionsthere has been a great likelihood of student teachers receiving training in their teaching practicum. Importantly, general or specific beliefs have largely dawned when training through ELT teacher education programʋ. They bring those conscious or unconscious beliefs about language learning and teaching to their practicum classes. This study endeavourers to investigate beliefs about language teaching of ELT student teachers at the Assumption University of Thailand over the postgraduate teacher education program in the ELT field with a focus on their Teaching Practicum. It employed bothquantitative and qualitative instruments for data collection. All relevant data were collected and analysed from four sources: a questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations and teaching journals. This study found that student teachers hold extensive beliefs about language teaching, importantly those beliefs can be either reinforced or changed by the language teacher education program. A number of contextual constraints within the relationship between student teachers' beliefs and their

practices were identified and discussed. This study would do its share for a better understanding how student teachers' beliefs lead to good teachers and inspiring educators who pay close attention to students' beliefs and curriculum construction.

Keywords; teacher beliefs, English language education, Thailand,

ความเชื่อเกี่ยวกับการสอนภาษาที่ครูฝึกสอนนำมาสู่ห้องเรียน
บทคัดย่อ

จากวรรณกรรมเรื่องความเชื่อของครู มีความเชื่อว่า 1) ความเชื่อของครูมีความสำคัญและมีผลกระทบต่อการสอนและการพัฒนาทางอาชีพ 2) การเปลี่ยนแปลงพฤติกรรมการกระทำและการปฏิบัติตนของ ครูเกิดจากการเปลี่ยนแปลงในความเชื่อของครู 3) ความเข้าใจความเชื่อหรือการพัฒนาของครูในขณะที่ครูเหล่านี้เรียนรู้เรื่องการสอนเป็นสิ่งสำคัญในการจัดและเสริมสร้างโปรแกรมการศึกษาของครู ภายใต้สมมติฐานเหล่านี้ในเรื่องการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ (ELT) ในประเทศไทย เป็นโอกาสที่ดีของครูที่จะได้รับการฝึกอบรมเรื่องการฝึกสอน ที่สำคัญคือความเชื่อทั่วไปหรือความเชื่อเฉพาะ ส่วนใหญ่แล้วเกิดขึ้นจากการฝึกอบรมผ่านโปรแกรมการศึกษาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษของครู จะรู้ตัวหรือไม่ก็ตามครูเหล่านี้นำความเชื่อของตนเกี่ยวกับการเรียนรู้และการสอนภาษามาสู่การฝึกสอน งานวิจัยนี้เพื่อศึกษาความเชื่อเกี่ยวกับการเรียนการสอนภาษาของครูสอนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาที่มหาวิทยาลัยอัสสัมชัญในประเทศไทยในโปรแกรมการศึกษาระดับปริญญาโททางการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ โดยเน้นการฝึกสอน โดยใช้ทั้งเครื่องมือเชิงปริมาณและเชิงคุณภาพ ข้อมูลที่เกี่ยวข้องถูกเก็บรวบรวมทั้งหมดจากสี่แหล่งและวิเคราะห์ดังนี้: แบบสอบถาม การสัมภาษณ์ การสังเกตในชั้นเรียนและบันทึกการสอน ผลการศึกษาพบว่าครูฝึกสอนมีความเชื่อหลากหลายเกี่ยวกับการสอนภาษา ที่สำคัญคือความเชื่อสามารถถูกเสริมหรือเปลี่ยนแปลงได้โดยโปรแกรมการศึกษาเรื่องการสอนภาษา แต่ก็มีข้อจำกัด ตามบริบทในความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความเชื่อของครูฝึกสอนและการฝึกสอนซึ่งได้ระบุและวิภาคในการศึกษาครั้งนี้ เพื่อความเข้าใจที่ดีขึ้นเกี่ยวกับขอบเขตความเชื่อของครูฝึกสอนที่จะนำไปสู่การเป็นครูที่ดีและสร้างแรงบันดาลใจของครูภาษาอังกฤษในการให้ความสนใจเป็นพิเศษในเรื่องความเชื่อของครูและการจัดทำหลักสูตร

Introduction

In recent years, increased attention by linguistics researchers and educators on language teacher accountability and educational pedagogy has resulted in a heightened examination of teacher beliefs and teaching practices in ESL/EFL (S. Borg, 2003).In research literature, the definition of teacher's beliefs has been variously and extensively framed in terms of concepts such as teachers' personal theories, professional knowledge, attitudes, teaching principles and epistemological perspectives (Richardson, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Woods, 1996; Barcelos, 2003; Allen, 2002; Kagan, 1992). However, neither a unified terminology nor a consensus on the definition of teachers' beliefs has been established. To put it simply in this study, teacher' beliefs can be defined as the way to describe the relationship between actions, decisions, tasks or objects and a set of opinions or attitudes of the teacher toward those things (Eisenhart et al., 1988).

Previous studies have recognized the influence of beliefs in learning to teach and teaching (Woods, 1996; S. Borg, 2003) and suggested that there has been a complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices. Moreover, teacher education program should provide the opportunity for student teachers to reflect on their beliefs so as to constantly develop their profession (Richards, et al., 1999). Taking account of the EFL context in Thailand, in much the same way, many studies report similar findings that Thai EFL student teachers' instructional practices are significantly influenced by their beliefs about language teaching and learning (Vibulphol, 2004). If beliefs can produce a significant impact on teachers' learning to teach and teaching, it is worthwhile to discover and understand what actual student teachers believe about language teaching and learning, how their beliefs are formed and how these beliefs influence their teaching practices; As Richardson (1996) points out, it is important

to know and understand the student teachers' beliefs and changes in the process of learning to teach.

Background

One of the stimulations for this study is the researcher's personal experience of studying in an MA-ELT program in Bangkok. The researcher's bilingual cultural background, language learning experience and personal interest in ESL/EFL teaching became a source of inspiration for his present study as an ELT graduate student. Another impetus can be attributable to the increasing importance of English language in Thailand due to global economic changes and the development of ASEAN. There has been a growing demand for more registered English teachers to meet the demands for English language education. The researcher's desire for becoming an effective ESL/EFL teacher found expression in his teaching practicum.

In the sphere of English teaching and learning in Thailand, the researcher uses the term of ELT to embody both of ESL and EFL in this study. The particular context of the present study is a two-year ELT program at Assumption University preparing postgraduates as ELT teachers primarily in the Asian context. Unlike other local similar teacher education programs, the instruction of the M.A ELT program is completely given in English and provides student teachers with a seven-week practicum. One of the purposes of entering MA-ELT program is very clear: students would lay the foundation of being good ELT teachers by studying and training in a professional teacher education program. The Constitutional and National Educational Act (ONEC, 1999) has long been implemented by the Thai government with much emphasis on the student-cantered approach. In this case, local schools, educators and teachers have become serious in creating student-centred curriculum and instruction (Vanichakorn, 2003).

This reform implies that the constructivist views of language learning and teaching are very influential. It assumes that student teachers should be able to conceptualize and structure their teaching practicum in accordance with the doctrines of constructivism. The question of whether my participants consciously had such beliefs based on constructivist views thus was centred in my research. In other words, as for teacher education programs, the leading question underlying my research is whether M.A ELT program results in significant beliefs developments, and if so, whether these developments towards the constructivist approach influence the classroom behaviors of participants and their approach to teaching in general.

Research questions

The following research questions are to be answered in the course of this study:

1. To what extend do student teachers hold a shared set of beliefs about language learning and teaching and where their beliefs derive from?
2. To what extent do ELT student teachers' beliefs change as they participate in the language teacher education program?
3. What experiences in/out of Teaching Practicum class reinforce or change their perceptions and beliefs in ways that confirm, confuse or reshape those beliefs?

Theoretical framework

It is generally acknowledged that teachers' beliefs can significantly influence the process of learning to teach, the way they teach and teacher professional development (M. Borg, 2001). In the field of English language education, much research has explored two main areas, which are parallel with mainstream educational pedagogy: the interactive relationship between ESL/EFL teachers' beliefs and their

teaching practices, and the influences of teacher education programs on their beliefs. S. Borg (2003) concludes that there have been plenty of studies to address four basic research questions (see table 1) from different pedagogical and cultural backgrounds in the literature.

What do teachers have their beliefs about?

How do teachers develop their beliefs?

What is the interactive relationship between teachers' beliefs and their learning process?

What is the interactive relationship between teacher's beliefs and their practices?

Table 1 Main research questions

Among those studies, some point out that changes in teachers' teaching practices often follow the changes in their beliefs (Richards et al. 1999; Golomebeck, 1998) and there has been either consistency or inconsistency within the relationship between those beliefs and practices (Johson, 1992; Garden, 1996; Phipps and S. Borg, 2009). In actual teaching, not only certain contextual factors may result in such inconsistency, but also student teachers may hold their subconscious perceptions based on previous learning experience to form their behaviors, which means they may not be able to consciously and critically know when their beliefs are established and how to articulate them. Although it is complex and difficult to elicit their beliefs (Donghue, 2003), it is important to understand teachers' beliefs because they are closely linked to teaching effectiveness. In the last 30 years, constructivist views of teaching and learning had led to a redefinition of good teaching or effective teaching. One of the features of effective teaching is "much more learned-centered than they were in the past" (Killen, 2009).

Influenced by this transformation, the literature since the last decade has offered different definitions of a good teacher. One definition was "someone who can increase student knowledge, but it goes beyond this in defining an effective teacher" (Clark, 1993, cited in Shahini and Daftarifard, 2011). This definition was not only partially set in the light of the traditional definition of good teachers, but also was influenced by constructivism. Furthermore, Lowman (1997) provided a teaching effectiveness model which was more concerned about the role of teacher in guiding and motivating students. He indicates that effective teaching then could result in effective learning as long as students were positively engaged.

Current ELT pedagogy has shifted from traditional teacher-centered instruction to a learner-centered classroom, which is parallel with the development of mainstream education in the modern era. With respect to Thailand's education context, "learning reform has been proposed in Thailand as it is clearly specified in the national educational act of 1999 that learning and teaching of all subjects at all levels shall be based on a learner-centered approach" (Prapaisit, 2004). It has been clear that the top-down educational reform has remarkably popularized constructivism as a basis for effective teaching and learning with an emphasis on a learn-centered approach. Thus, teachers including language teachers are expected to suitably implement a constructivist teaching approach in order to teach effectively.

In addition to believing in a student-centered approach, other characteristics of good ELT teachers in the Thailand context have been explored and identified. For example, ELT teachers need to be proficient in the target language (Vanichakorn, 2003). This also can be seen in a relevant study that investigated students' perception on the characteristics of effective teachers in Bangkok (Wichadee, 2010). The author added that communication skills should be considered as one key category of characteristics of effective

teachers. Moreover, Collins (1990) suggests that an effective teacher should be aware of accountability and commitment, and be able to reflect upon his or her own teaching practices. First and last, it is imperative to verify to what extent student teachers have beliefs about language teaching because what they believe about successful language teaching influences how they teach in the classroom in an effective way (Shavelson and Stern, 1981).

Another theme investigated by many studies is the impact of language teacher education programs on the development of student teachers' beliefs. Teacher education programs may attempt to shape student teachers' beliefs about what is appropriate in teaching and teachers' perceptions about their professional role in educational pedagogy (Buchmann, 1986). Many researchers found empirical evidence that teacher education programs can influence student teachers' beliefs in positive ways through a reflective approach (Wallace, 1990; Johnson, 1994; Mattheoudakis, 2007), while other studies argue that ESL/EFL instruction education courses lead to a very limited impact on "change" in beliefs of student teachers (Kagan, 1992; Peacock, 2001). Rather than re-examine and challenge those beliefs which are deeply rooted in previous learning experiences of L2, student teachers' beliefs tend to remain unchanged by ESL/EFL education programs. Moreover, it is possible that teacher education programs may not adequately prepare student teachers for the challenge they encounter in their practicum classes. While most ESL/EFL teacher education programs contain many theoretical courses, Markee (1997) points out that those courses are too theoretical for preparing student teachers to conduct their teaching practices.

Beliefs about language teaching help teachers recognize the roles of teachers in ELT education, and then to make full sense of what good teachers do and how to teach effectively. However, student teachers may be unable to construct or reconstruct beliefs that they

are not taught or that they are unaware of (Clark-Goff, 2008). In this case, they possibly misunderstand or underestimate the teaching context and hold misconceptions about language teaching. For example, the findings of Prapaisit's study (2004) show that three Thai teachers who tried to implement a constructivist classroom atmosphere, however, failed to conduct a constructivist teaching approach due mainly to lack of training and support for those teachers. Their classes were obviously teacher-centered. This has a strong implication for ELT teacher program: the exploration of how ELT teacher education programs affect student teachers' beliefs would shed more light on the development of ELT teacher education and on the teaching profession.

Method

The present study employs both quantitative and qualitative instruments to collect and analysis data. The mixed approaches are:

- A questionnaire for survey; and
- Interviews, classroom observations, and teaching journals
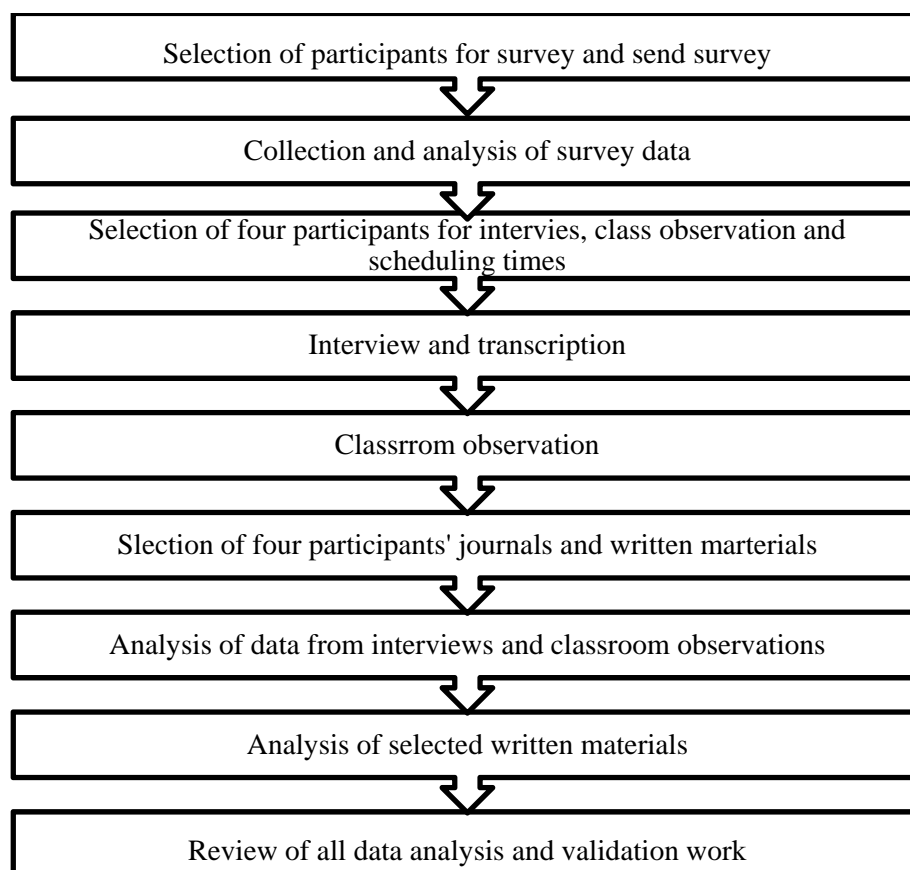-

Figure 1 elaborates the research scheme.

| Selection of participants for survey and send survey |
| Collection and analysis of survey data |
| Selection of four participants for intervies, class observation and scheduling times |
| Interview and transcription |
| Classrrom observation |
| Slection of four participants' journals and written marterials |
| Analysis of data from interviews and classroom observations |
| Analysis of selected written materials |
| Review of all data analysis and validation work |

Figure 1 Research scheme of data collection and analysis

Participants

29 MA-ELT student teachers participated in the questionnaire. More than half of the participants were Thai, and the others came from China, the Philippines, Myanmar and Taiwan. Four participants were selected for interviews and classroom observations from the surveyed participants. The first criterion in selecting the participants for qualitative data collection was they had started or completed their teaching practicum. Participants' cultural background, gender, age and previous teaching experience were used as the second criterion in order to collect diverse data from various perspectives. There were other reasons to determine the final list of

participants. Most of the surveyed participants worked full-time, thus interviews were inconvenient for them. Four student teachers finally gave their consent to interviews and the classroom observation. In order to protect the privacy of selected participants, their names have not been used in this study. Participants were two female and two male student teachers.

Name	Gender	Age	Previous study	Teaching experience	Nationality	TP status
A	Male	27	BA in Linguistic	None	Taiwanese	Completed
B	Female	48	BA	None	Thai	Completed
C	Female	29	BA in Finance	None	Thai	Completed
D	Male	30	BA in Business	None	Thai	Completed

Table 2 Background information of four participants

MA-ELT program

The program is now of 2-year evening program of study, which leads to options of a Thesis or Non-Thesis study plan. The degree also acts as a teaching qualification and all graduates are able to teach English as a foreign language in the various stages of English education. Students are required to start their teaching practicum after completing prerequisite courses. Normally students start teaching practicum in the second year of their postgraduate study. During seven weeks, student teachers are placed in the Institute for English Language Education at HuaMak campus and are assigned a Basic English II class. This English subject is designed as a foundation to prepare Assumption University undergraduate students to undertake their main academic English program courses. In the period of practice, student teachers are expected to teach undergraduate students by following the prescribed curriculum of the IELE and do peer classroom observations, daily teaching journals and reflective teaching reports as part of their TP. Student

teachers plan and deliver their own lessons independently, and they are encouraged by the practicum coordinator to become reflective teachers and explore more applicable approaches to language teaching.

Data analysis

The first data collection to be used was a questionnaire (see Appendix 1). All items were structured in a Likert-scale, from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. 35 items in sections B were drawn the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) by Horwitz (1985). The 15 items in Section C were selected from the Teacher Beliefs Survey (Benjamin, 2003). Participants' responses to all items are numerically coded (i.e. strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither disagree nor agree = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5). The quantitative data was analyzed descriptively and Microsoft Excel is used to compute means in order to present a general tendency in all participants' feedback.

The data collected through interviews, observations and teaching practicum portfolio were broken down and reconstructed in the process of qualitative data analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used for in-depth exploration of participants' teaching beliefs in the study and were audio-recorded and transcribed. To validate the transcriptions, participants had been asked to check these transcripts and make clarifications. Thematic analysis was adapted to the interview data in order to identify similar patterns. Classroom observations were done after the interviews. Participants' teaching journals were also studied.

Findings

Research question 1: *To what extend do student teachers hold a shared set of beliefs about language learning and teaching and where their beliefs derive from?*

The findings of the survey indicate that student teachers tend to have certain beliefs about language learning and teaching. A majority of participants hold a shared set of beliefs in the following main five areas: the nature of language learning, ELT education, teaching goals, the role of teacher and student, and language teaching methods.

Reported beliefs about the nature of language learning
Regarding the nature of language itself, the majority of the M.A ELT student teachers reported believing that language is primarily an instrument for communication, though, oral language is more important than written language (item 8, M=3.25; item 10, M=3.13). In particular, errors made when using the target language was acceptable. Grammar was given considerable emphasis by the majority of participants (item 16, M=3.25). In relation to issues in English language acquisition, they reported that it would be easier to learn English from very early childhood (item 32, M=4.34). Although there was no strong consensus that it is best to learn English in native English speaking countries (item 7, M=3.13), many student teachers insisted on the importance of native-like accent for L2 learners (item 33, M=3.75). In addition, they strongly believed that cultural issues could influence learners' understanding of target language.

Reported beliefs about ELT education
Student teachers' attitudes toward ELT education were positive. First, most of the participants positively perceived the general direction of the M.A ELT program's efforts toward constructivist theories of language teaching and learning. This finding supports the view that "reform movements in the context of Thailand have been geared towards constructivist perspectives in a great many ways" (Chorrojprasert, 2005: 44). Second, ELT education has been getting more involved in local society as they reported that learning

English is very important for local people (item 6, M=4.38). This also can be seen in their motivation for becoming ELT teachers. Third, the participants showed their confidence in practicum classes that as non-native speakers, they were not less competitive than native speakers in English to be ELT teachers in Thailand.

Reported beliefs about the teaching goals
Concerning the priority of teaching language skills, the majority of student teachers believed that spoken ability should be primarily taught and listening skills are more useful than translation skills (item 9, M=3.62), while they also emphasized the significance of written communication skills. The participants were very concerned over teaching fluency in the classroom (item 14, M=4.15). They reported believing in giving more opportunities to move to teach fluency despite agreeing on the necessity of accuracy (item 15, M=4.21). They believed that the main teaching goal is to engage L2 learners in oral communication fluently (item 13, M=4.13). As a consequence, they perceived that one initial teaching task was to inspire learners by creating a positive learning environment to keep them motivated to develop their communication skills. Besides, many student teachers perceived that exams had an obvious impact on their efforts to reach their teaching goals.

Beliefs about the role of teacher and student
Taking into consideration the role of ELT teacher, a considerable number of student teachers reported beliefs that the teacher can play an important role in L2 learner's motivation. They were very much aware of values of learner-centered teaching and learning, thereupon the teaching role in a student-centred classroom, at best, is a motivator or facilitator. In their opinions, language teaching should meet students' needs and pay attention to their interests (item 28, M=4.34; item 29, M=4.11). As Gary (1997) suggests, the characteristic of a constructivist classroom is that learners are actively involved while the teacher acts as a motivator to facilitate

the learning process. It seems to the researcher that most of the participants had sensed the constructivist teaching approach in the ELT classroom.

Beliefs about language teaching methods and techniques
Most of the student teachers agreed that it is important to learn and practice grammar (item 16, M=3.25) and vocabulary and to do this repeatedly in the process of learning (item 18, M=3.88), though the level of agreement with it was much lower than with other views associated with communication skills (item 23, M=4.25). Moreover, they reported not believing that having good grammar skills is necessarily related to speaking English well (item 19, M=2.50). Instead, they were convinced that practicing English in communicative activities such as pair or group work (item 25, M=4.03) and putting what students learn from classroom into practice in the real-life-like situations are more significant to havea good command in English ultimately (item 22, M=4.38).

In general, student teachers' beliefs were based on a communication-oriented approach with emphasis on student-centeredness, oral communication skills, fluency ability and the use of interactive activities. The participants frequently cited the grammar-focused method and a CLT method. In particular, most of the participants had been consciously aware of the utility of the implementation of a CLT approach that could make language teaching more effective and productive. They also highly agreed that L2 teachers are required to speak English fluently (item 31, M=4.34) when teaching and both the teacher and students should allowed use target language only (item 34, M=3.38).

In addition, student teachers' reported beliefs show that their attitudes to constructivist and behaviorist approaches of teaching and learning are rather complex. The majority of participants leaned toward accepting constructivist teaching, which is based on the

belief that learning occurs while students are motivated to be involved in language acquisition in a student-centered classroom (item 40, M=3.63), and students are given opportunities to participate in instructional decisions (item 44, M=3.75). In spite of believing in constructivist teaching, they widely agreed with some methods and techniques of a behaviorist approach to language teaching. In particular, they believed that the teacher needed to pay attention to students' observable behaviors (item 42, M=3.77) and teach students in a direct way. In addition, they also believed that a better learning outcome could be achieved when using a well-structured syllabus with skills broken down into small tasks (item 38, M=4.25; item 50, M=3.38).

Where their beliefs derive from

This study found three main sources from which ELT student teachers' beliefs were formed: previous language learning experience, teacher education, and teaching practices. The researcher found this result in general accords with other research as discussed in the literature review. The three sources in this present study can be interpreted as similar to one (experience with schooling and instruction) of three forms of experiences (the other two forms are personal experience and experience with formal knowledge) that took place in different stages of the teachers' professional development which can influence their beliefs (Goodson, 1992; Bullough& Baughman, 1993, as cited in Chorrojprasert, 2005). In particular, previous learning experience, teacher education and teaching practices are included in experience with schooling and instruction. Since most participants were student teachers without any teaching experience, previous experiences as teachers were not within the sources as found in this study.

Research question 2 : *To what extent do ELT student teachers' beliefs change as they participate in the language teacher education program?*

Regarding this research question, one of interview questions was the key to identify how student teachers' beliefs change over the M.A ELT program, i.e., "What have you learned from your MA course? What changes, if any, have even happened to you?" The evidence of change that emerged from the analysis of qualitative data indicates that this postgraduate ELT teacher program could significantly influence student teachers' beliefs in positive ways, and thus, changes occurred.

The major finding that student teachers' beliefs have changed in two areas parallels Buchmann's (1986) findings: firstly, beliefs about the ELT teacher's professional role have been changed; second, beliefs about language teaching theories and methods have been reshaped.

Concerning the characteristics of a good ELT teacher, rather than merely being effected by previous language learning experiences, participants mentioned that their perceptions of the teacher's role had been more influenced by M.A ELT courses, including the teacher's role needed to move from an instructor to a constructor, motivator and facilitator and ELT teachers should move away from a traditional teacher-centred classroom toward student-centered teaching, and a good ELT teacher should be able to speak English fluently, and focus on students' needs and interests as well as empower students to negotiate their participation in classroom. In addition, they discarded the perception that students should only learn what they were taught. Participant A made a typical statement related to his teaching goal:

It is important that I set my goal as being a teacher to get students to improve their English skills for a lifetime, any possibilities, I should try to make students motivated and interested in learning English. When students like to participate in well-prepared activities, the goal can be easily achieved. (interview, August 1, 2012)

Meanwhile, D used the term facilitator to describe the role of the ELT teacher: "As a facilitator, English teacher should foster interest among students because they may not have sustained motivations to learn English as a foreign language" (interview, July 9, 2012).

Another significant change can be seen in the responses on language teaching theories and methods. It is clear that participants changed from practically having nothing to do with various unexplored areas in the ELT fields when entering this ELT teacher education program at the very beginning to gradually establish and develop their perceptions and conceptions of ELT teaching regarding various aspects of theories and methods. As for student teachers' attitudes to contemporary teaching methods, they had become more positive to adapt different methods. Additional evidence for this finding comes in participants' reported beliefs in relation to a communication-oriented approach. Evidence can be seen in B's statement: "Basically, from my point view, what I have learnt in this course is that I should not cling to single methods of teaching, instead, I should use more methods, such as the CLT approach" (interview, July 11, 2012). Also, C demonstrated how the M.A ELT program had an impact on his perceptions of language teaching approaches: "The GSE faculty strongly promotes many language teaching approaches for language learning and teaching. I had no idea of how to teach English and I just knew about Grammar Translation Approach before the *Language Teaching Methodology* course set in.   Now I think I have better

understanding of different approaches and have more confidence to use them" (interview, July 23, 2012).

Regarding grammar teaching: although their previous grammar learning experience in secondary schools still affected their approach to teaching, they were now aware of trying to integrate grammar instruction in a CLT classroom rather than depending on the traditional grammar-focused approach. In addition, the results of this study suggest strongly that the M.A ELT program provided student teachers with opportunities to start to learn to teach in a reflective way and develop their knowledge of professional discourse. Much evidence can be found in participants' teaching journals and reflection reports over the practicum to support the finding that the M.A ELT program could change or reshape student teachers' pre-existing beliefs about language teaching in many different ways.

Research question 3: *What experiences in/out of teaching practicum class reinforce or change their perceptions and beliefs in ways that confirm, confuse or reshape those beliefs?*

In order to answer this research question, the qualitative approach in this study attempted to shed light on the first fundamental assumption (Johnson, 1994) as mentioned in the literature review, that teachers' beliefs influence what they say and do when teaching. Thus, in turn, changes in their practices stem from changes in their beliefs. This study found that student teachers' instructional practices were consistent with their reported beliefs as a whole, but at the same time, there is inconsistency within the relationship between their practices and beliefs. The results show that there were complicated factors that lead to those phenomena: individual reasons (personal previous language learning experiences and self-reflection) and objective reasons (contextual issues).

Firstly, some beliefs student teachers brought to practicum had been established before entering the M.A ELT program, as the early memory of language learning was locked deep in their subconscious mind. Those beliefs seemed to be reshaped or remain unchanged related to their prior schooling, which had made their individual language learning experiences positive or negative. Their beliefs derived from positive language learning experience had been reinforced over practicum. Those beliefs included: 1) the importance of the use of target language; 2) necessarily creating a positive learning environment; 3) the effect of some specific skills. The results of classroom observations and teaching journals indicate that the participants attempted to use English as the medium of instruction in their classes, and students were encouraged to speak English as much as possible. They also used music, poems, YouTube clips and role play activities to make classroom enjoyable. Reading skills and writing skills were often emphasized when practicing.

On the other hand, student teachers' teaching practices had been negatively influenced by overwhelming grammar instructions and exam-oriented education in secondary schools. Although most participants believed in the importance of teaching and learning grammar, they tended to avoid teaching grammar and correcting errors in classroom. When they gave grammar instruction in classroom, in fact, they appeared to stick with a grammar-focused approach and gave explicit grammar instructions. This was inconsistent with most of the participants' reported beliefs that grammar should be taught implicitly. In addition to this discrepancy, they tended to think highly of accuracy in grammar and writing, which could be seen from the spelling or grammatical errors in practices and homework which were amended carefully by the participants. Nor was it consistent in their reported beliefs about error correction. One possibility was that student teachers' beliefs about language teaching were significantly influenced by the fact

that while years of ESL/EFL learning enabled them to teach grammar skillfully and confidently.

Secondly, this study found that student teachers' practices were shaped by certain "contextual realities" (Johnson, 1996). Much evidence of how teaching context could constrain what student teachers taught and acted was found in classroom observations and teaching journals. S. Borg (2003:94) suggests that "such factors may also hinder language teachers' ability to adopt practices which reflect their beliefs". In this study, a number of factors were identified, which included students' motivation, difficulties in classroom management, a lack of genuine English atmosphere, students' poor English skills, class size, examination stress and a rigid textbook. In particular, some of those factors became constraints on student teachers' implementation of CLT. Over practicum, they allowed students to use LI in communication because the participants realized that it was very difficult for students to learn English in English due to their low English proficiency. In this case, their beliefs about the importance of the use of target language had been shifted somehow. More than this, the participants felt they were struggling with classroom management. They often had to spend much time managing classroom discipline so that they had to depart from their lesson plan. Thus, they started to doubt the actual effect of a well-prepared lesson plan.

Regarding grammar instruction, there was no evidence of using implicit activities to teach grammar in a communicative way. Particularly, the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) approach was completely thrown away, though student teachers had learnt its theories and application in the *Grammar, Meaning, and Discourse* course. Behind this absence, in fact, there seemed to be a lack of structural activities such as communicative activities embracing grammar skills in textbooks to support student teachers' grammar instruction. As a result, they still tended to rely on a traditional

grammar-focused approach to teach what they were taught in the past. Moreover, student teachers' beliefs about student-centeredness had been reinforced, which could be shown in their commonly stated reasons for instructional decisions. Their modified lesson plans and selection of communicative activities depended on whether those efforts or changes were able to motivate students to be engaged in learning.

Thirdly, Barnes (1992:17) points out that "to achieve change, teachers need to discover that their existing frame for understanding what happens in their classes is only one of several possible frames", while Geddis (1996: 251) adds that the frame, including both the conceptual (what teachers think) and action (what teachers do), should be the focus of reflection if teachers are to learn from experiences. In line with the literature, some reasons for student teachers changing or nor changing their beliefs could be found when their reflection-on-action occurred. For example, most student teachers experienced exam-oriented education previously, but surprisingly they placed a considerable emphasis on exam preparation during the exams. It would seem that student teachers made a compromise decision between their beliefs about teaching goals and the washback of language examination because they tried to help students solve problems that they might struggle with in exams. Moreover, it should be noted that some student teachers were eclectic as they changed to adopt a mixture of teaching methods rather than CLT approach or grammar-focused approach. By exploring the implementation of different methods through self-reflection, those changes seemed to be in the interest of students' language learning. In this case, they may need more time to cultivate positive attitudes towards flexible language teaching approaches. Practicum is not an independent teaching experience, so student teachers could obtain feedback and suggestions from their practicum supervisor. Those external influences also resulted in changes when

student teachers reflected upon how their teaching could be improved.

Limitations

The major limitation in this study is that it only focused on studying student teachers' beliefs and those students who have been trained in the M.A ELT program at Assumption University of Thailand. Hence, the findings may have direct relevance uniquely to the postgraduate ELT teacher program at Assumption University. Also, students who were taught in participants' classes are at the Basic English level; therefore, some findings might not present the actual learning situation of undergraduate students in other levels. Overall, it is limited to one university.

This study is mainly based on qualitative instruments for data collection. The researcher has also trained in the M.A ELT program. The researcher's own experiences, attitudes and beliefs may result in some bias that he might bring to collect and interpret data. The data collected from the interviews and classroom observations might be influenced by interaction between participants and the researcher. Also, some responses and answers might be triggered by the researcher's conscious and unconscious judgment during the interviews. In addition, some descriptions shown in participants' journals and reports might not confirm their actual reflection on teaching practices because they might please their practicum supervisor for a good grade. Yet, the researcher was aware of these limitations before starting this study and also accepted them as inherent in the situation being researched.

Another limitation is the number of participants. The questionnaire was sent by bulk email. Only 62% of respondent answered and returned it. Similarly, there were only four participants in the final list for qualitative study. Some of the potential participants had

already left Bangkok or found it very inconvenient to make an appointment. The findings, though, might be more significant and accurate if there had been more participation.

Recommendations for further study

According to the findings of this study, the researcher suggests the following. By a better understanding of what student teachers believed about language teaching and how those beliefs are formed and what variables affect those beliefs, it would be beneficial for further study to explore the relationship between beliefs construction and the development of quality teaching. An exploration of beliefs and positive change would furnish more insights into the mission of training good ELT teachers in the local context. Also, a cross-culture study focusing on the relationship between student teachers' beliefs and practices is recommended in other ELT teacher education programs within ASEAN countries. Then results from the various studies may be used to build a more comprehensive picture of what is happening in the ASEAN context.

Further study would benefit from an in-depth investigation of teaching practicum that leads to change in student teachers' beliefs. Since a change occurs when student teachers become reflective by bottom-up thinking, further study is recommended to focus on examining to what extent student teachers' reflection-on-action results in change. This study found a collision of disparate learning experiences including previous learning and present course training that might alter student teachers' beliefs. Furthermore, professors, supervisors and lecturers are highly valuable in inspiring positive change in student teachers' beliefs.

This study found that student teachers strongly believed in the importance of grammar for Thai students but they also were confused about teaching method. Moreover, some constraints in the

teaching context might hinder participants' ability to adopt a CLT approach in classes. Therefore, further study is recommended to pay close attention to current problematic issues regarding the integration of the CLT approach into practicum.

The final recommendation is that since, by exploring the relationship between student teachers' beliefs and their practices, this study found that the M.A ELT program had positive impact on belief change in student teachers, the researcher suggests that this kind of study should be encouraged to be replicated in other ELT teacher education programs in different colleges and universities in Thailand in order to strengthen the findings in this study.

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Appendix

Section A: Please respond to the following questions either by putting X or writing a numeral in an appropriate slot.

1. Gender: male _____ female _____
2. Age: _____
3. Nationality: _____
3. How many years have you been learning English? _____ years
4. Have you ever been an English teacher? _____ If yes, how many years?_____

Section B: Please read each statement sentence and then decide if you: strongly disagree 1, disagree 2, neither agree or disagree 3, agree 4, and strongly agree 5. As you respond to this survey, write a number from 1-5 on the column beside each item to indicate how much you disagree or agree with the statement. There are right or wrong answers. Your own thoughts or opinions are appreciated.

	1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Strongly	Disagree	Neither	Agree	
	Disagree		Disagree		Agree
	Nor Agree				

Example I immediately tell students the meaning of a word when they do not know about it.	4
1. When I was a secondary school student, learning English was mostly grammar-focused.	
2. My previous school English teachers put much emphasis on grammatical knowledge.	

3. My previous school English teachers mostly spoke Thai (or your home language) in class.

4. When I was studying in my secondary school, learning English was mostly communication focused.

5. My previous English teachers often designed activities to have us interact in English with peers.

6. Learning English is important for Thai (or your home country people).

7. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country such as England, the United States, or Australia.

8. Speaking skills are more useful than reading skills in learning English.

9. Listening comprehension skills are more useful than translation skills in learning English.

10. Spoken communication skills (e.g., speaking, listening) are more important than written communication skills (e.g., reading, writing)

11. The goal of English teaching should be preparing students to read passages in English and translate them into their native language effectively.

12. In the classroom, accuracy should be emphasized.

13. The goal of English teaching should be preparing students to communicate with foreigners in English.

14. In the classroom, fluency should be emphasized.

15. Fluency needs to be more emphasized than accuracy in the classroom.

16. Practicing grammar patterns is an important part of English learning.

17. Memorizing new vocabulary words is an important part of English learning.

18. In learning English, it is important for learners to repeat and practice a lot.

19. The more English grammar rules a student learns, the better she is at speaking English.

20. The more words a student memorizes, the better she is at speaking English.

21. Teachers need to follow the textbook.

22. It is important to practice English in real-life-like situations.

23. Practicing English in communicative activities is essential to eventual mastery of English.

24. Students can improve their English by speaking English with their classmates in the classroom.

25. Pair and small group activities are important for students to improve their English.

26. English language education must focus on what teachers think students have to learn.

27. Teachers need to have a firm control over the entire classroom.

28. English language education must meet students' needs.

29. Teachers need to pay attention to students' interests.

30. A smaller size class is better for EFL teaching than a larger size one.

31. Teachers need to be fluent in spoken English in order to teach effectively.

32. It is easier for children than adults to learn English.

33. It is important to speak English with a native-like accent.

34. In English class, students and teacher must use English only.

35. The current system of English proficiency assessment (such as IELTS, TEFOL, National English Exams) has a great influence on teaching English in the classroom.

Section C: Please read each statement sentence and then decide if you: strongly disagree 1, disagree 2, neither agree or disagree 3, agree 4, and strongly agree 5. As you respond to this survey, write a number from 1-5 on the column beside each item to indicate how much you disagree or agree with the statement. There are right or wrong answers. Your own thoughts or opinions are appreciated.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Disagree	Neither	Agree	
Strongly				
Disagree		Disagree		Agree
Nor Agree				

36. Language is primarily what is spoken and secondarily what is written.

37. I believe that expanding on students' ideas in an effective way to build my curriculum.

38. I believe students learn best when there is well structured syllabus.

39. I adjust my lesson plan based on results of students' homework.

40. I encourage students to solve internal problems independently when doing group work.

41. I generally use the teacher's guide to lead class discussion of a story or text.

42. I prefer to assess students informally through observations and performances.

43. It is important for teachers to reward students for doing very well in assignments.

44. Language skills are learned more effectively if they are presented orally first, then in written form.

45. Grammar mistakes and spelling errors should be avoided because they lead to bad learning habits.

46. The meanings of words can be learned only in a linguistic and cultural context.

47. Mistakes provide the opportunity for insight into students' previous knowledge, so students are allowed to make mistakes in learning.

48. The background and culture of students are important for teachers to teach language because they

have impact on students' understanding of language rather than their mother tongue.	
49. I make it a priority in my classroom to give students time to work together when I am not directing them.	
50. To be sure that I teach students all necessary content and skills, I follow a textbook.	