

English Teachers' Beliefs Towards the Implementation of Genre-Based Approach

A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian English curriculum pays a great attention to the development of students' skills in English. However, there has been a significant concern that this skill has not been well-achieved. Recently, the government's positive intention to improve students' skills is stated in the program of *Sekolah Penggerak* in which the Systemic Functional Linguistics-Genre Based Approach (SFL-GBA) is implemented as the approach in teaching English at the school level. Since teachers' belief contributes to the effectiveness of the teaching practice, this qualitative case study investigates the initial beliefs of English teachers before and during attending a set of SFL-GBA workshop. The data of this study were gathered using a survey and observations. The result of this study shows that the majority of the teachers have already known about SFL-GBA, and believe it as an integral approach in teaching English. However, the study also reveals that they have some emerging beliefs that hinder the successful implementation of SFL-GBA in their teaching. Those beliefs are categorized in four aspects: grammar conception, teaching strategy, assessing strategy, and text provision. The data of this study will be beneficial for the next larger scale of research to further investigate teachers' beliefs.

Keywords: *Genre-based approach, Sekolah Penggerak, Systemic Functional Linguistics, teachers' beliefs*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government has been putting effort into developing students' skills, especially in English. It can be seen from the programs implemented from years to years in which English always gets serious attention. In this case, SFL-GBA has been implemented as an approach in several phases of curriculum development in Indonesia. In 2004, it was implemented as an approach in the 2004 Curriculum (Kasihani, 2000 as cited in Emilia, 2011). This curriculum allowed the students to learn English in a text-based way and they were encouraged to write various types of text in English (Kasihani, 2000 as cited in Emilia, 2011). Kasihani further also stated that SFL-GBA was also used as one of the suggested approaches in *Kurikulum 2006*, which was also known as *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP)*. In this curriculum movement, teachers had the privilege to make innovations to their teaching practice in order to fulfil the goals of the curriculum.

Recently, motivated by a crucial problem about Indonesian students' competency, the government proposes a breakthrough program called *Sekolah*

Penggerak. This program is developed under the principle to transform the Indonesia schools to improve the learning quality in schools. As the first stage, The Ministry of Education and Culture (2021) states that some schools are selected through a particular mechanism. Those selected schools then join the program, get the information about it, and implement this program. They also have to evaluate the implementation of this program periodically. In the future, those selected schools are expected to make an impact on other schools for carrying out similar quality improvement (The Ministry of Education & Culture 2021). In order to fulfil the demand of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program, and to put its principles into practice, the government provides an official document about the learning outcomes for every subject taught in school, from early childhood to secondary school level (see Agency for R&D and Book Affair, 2021)

In terms of English subjects, it is stated clearly in the document that GBA is the approach used in teaching English in this program. The learning activity using GBA is specially designed to deliver the experience in using English texts to understand and implement factual,

conceptual, and procedural knowledge based on the students' curiosity about science, technology, arts, and culture related to visible phenomena and events (Agency for R&D and Book Affair, 2021). The implementation of GBA, in which text is the basis of the learning process corresponds to what Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) argue "when people speak or write, they produce text; and text is what listeners and readers engage with and interpret." (p. 3) Under this principle, SFL-GBA is proposed as a relevant approach to assist the teacher in achieving the goal of the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program.

Beliefs are articulated as a proposition that is held consciously or unconsciously by an individual and is evaluative because it is accepted as true (Borg, 2001), it supplies "the basis of action" (p. 371), and "serves as a guide to thought and behavior" (p.186). Beliefs play a significant role in a lot of aspects of teaching. In correspond to this, the successful implementation of GBA at the school level is highly related to the teachers' belief in it. The reason for this, according to Borg (2003), is because teachers' beliefs have a strong impact on the effectiveness of their teaching practice. Additionally, it is fundamental to look at teachers' reasonable beliefs if our determination and plan are to change their practices Fenstermacher (1979, as cited in Mo, 2020). Regarding this, beliefs are seen to be a pivotal element in teacher learning and have turned into an influential focus for research (Borg, 2011).

Related to the importance of beliefs, a number of studies have been conducted in this field. Large scales surveys in this field were conducted by Peacock (2001) who conducted a longitudinal study into changes in the beliefs of L2 learning of 146 trainee ESL teachers. Richards et al. (1992) also conducted research that identifies the beliefs and attitudes of Hong Kong English Teachers towards the teaching of English. In a more similar vein, Shi et al. (2018) conducted research focusing on constraints preventing Chinese EFL teachers from putting their belief of genre pedagogy into practice. The result reveals several contributors such as teachers' prior instructional knowledge, general attitudes to educational changes, self-confidence, and contextual factors such as class size, knowledge of students and assessment. Besides the raising concerns on the study of teachers' beliefs, it is important to investigate how the teachers' beliefs towards the implementation of SFL-GBA in Indonesian context. Thus, this study is conducted as one of the contributing studies in that area.

This study is conducted under the following research question: How is the teachers' initial belief toward the implementation of SFL-GBA?

2. METHOD

This This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach in investigating teachers' initial beliefs towards the implementation of GBA. It is an initial part of a larger study on a similar theme. Hamied (2017) argues that the concern of a qualitative study is with the "how" rather than with the outcomes of the research action. In this case, the researcher tries to examine events and meanings as they unfold and to understand the contingencies that influence the manner in which the events evolve (Hamied, 2017). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell 2015).

In order to conduct the research, the study was started by inviting teachers from several areas in West Java to join an online workshop about SFL-GBA. This 6 weeks-workshop was hosted by some experts in the related field. Meanwhile, the invited teachers are those who teach English in secondary schools. There were no specific requirements of the participant in joining this program. After that, the first data were gathered using an online survey. Bunting (2019)'s model of the investigation was adapted to construct several questions focusing on the teachers' educational and professional backgrounds. It also adapted Borg (2003)'s model as the guideline to investigate teachers' initial beliefs towards GBA. To investigate more about their beliefs, observations were conducted during the workshop. It captured not only the interaction between the trainer and the teachers but also the question-and-answer section that occurred throughout the workshop. The data gathered from those two instruments are then analyzed thematically in order to look for the pattern within the data.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Survey results

The analysis of the surveys indicates several things regarding teachers' initial beliefs before they join the workshop. Table 1 shows the data about teachers' educational and professional background (Bunting 2019).

Table 1. Teachers' educational and professional background

Education level	Qty	%	Teaching experience	Qty	%	Similar training experience	Qty	%
Bachelor	19	67,9	1-5 year	5	17,9	Yes	7	25
Master	9	32,1	6-10 year	4	14,3	No	18	64,3
			11-15 year	8	28,6	Maybe	3	10,7
			16-20 year	6	21,4			
			>21 year	5	17,9			
Total	28	100		28	100		28	100

As can be seen from the table, the majority of the teachers are experienced ones who have been teaching for years. Those teaching experiences have led them to the knowledge of SFL-GBA, which is elaborated further in Table 2. Some of the teachers have also attended similar training. It indicates that SFL-GBA is not a relatively new thing for teachers.

Meanwhile, Table 2 shows the result of the survey concerning teachers' initial beliefs toward the implementation of SFL-GBA (Borg, 2003). As discussed earlier, most of the teachers have already familiar with the concept of SFL-GBA, which is confirmed by the results of item 1 until 3. 75% of the teachers stated that they are knowledgeable about SFL-GBA and 67.9% of the teachers confirm that they have already understood the main concept of SFL-GBA. This section also reveals that 67.9% of the teachers have already learned SFL-GBA before (item 3). In a similar vein, items 4-7 also confirm the high involvement of SFL-GBA in the process of teaching such as in lesson planning.

Moreover, majority of the teachers stated that they have a good understanding about various text types (89.3%) and apply them in their teaching (89.2%). However, there are explicit evidence that a number of teachers (67.8%) believe that it is difficult for them to actually understand the concept of SFL GBA. The same conditions apply in terms of the teachers' understanding of the basic element in SFL-GBA: generic structure. 64.3% of the teachers argue that the principle of generic structure of texts is hard to understand. It is quite contradictory since the data that have shown up earlier in the previous section confirm positive results. In addition, inconsistencies found in the results of item 10-13 in terms of the importance of SFL-GBA and teachers' preference of using it in their teaching. Therefore, those inconsistencies need to be clarified further in the observations.

Table 2. Teachers' initial beliefs.

No	Items of survey	Agreement
1	Teachers' knowledge about SFL-GBA	75%
2	Teachers' understanding about SFL-GBA	67.9%
3	Teachers' learning experience of SFL-GBA	67.9%
4	Teachers implement SFL-GBA in their teaching	82.1%
5	Teachers' understanding of text types	89.3%
6	Teachers implement various text types in teaching	89.2%
7	Teachers compose their lesson plan based on SFL-GBA	71.5%
8	The concept of SFL GBA is hard to understand	67.8%
9	The generic structure of texts is hard to understand	64.3%
10	The grouping of various types of texts used in learning English makes it difficult for the teachers to teach.	28.6%
11	Teachers' preference in implementing SFL-GBA in teaching	96.4%
12	SFL-GBA is needed in teaching and learning both for students and the teachers	100%
13	SFL-GBA is not needed in teaching and learning both for students and the teachers	25%

Table 3. The emerging theme of observation data

Aspects	Emerging themes
Grammar conception	Belief that the concept of grammar in SFL-GBA is the same as traditional grammar
Teaching strategy in SFL-GBA	Belief that teaching strategies suggested in SFL-GBA are difficult to follow Belief that teaching English should be in full English.
Assessing strategy in SFL-GBA	Belief that assessing students' writing is wearisome Belief relates to students group work
Text provision	Belief in certain text formulas to apply certain types of text

3.2. Observation results

Several aspects of teachers' belief that emerged from the workshop observation are classified into four aspects such as grammar conception, teaching strategy, assessing strategy, and text provision. Then, the discussion will reveal more details on the emerging themes of each aspect (See Table 3).

As a confirmation of the teachers' initial beliefs, observation of the teachers' workshop sections indicated that teachers implemented the traditional grammar method as opposed to the SFL-GBA's grammar conception. In particular, the observation revealed that the concept of grammar that the teachers had in mind is "syntactical-type of grammars" (Knapp and Watkins 2005). The role of traditional grammar is undoubtedly important since many of its components are relevant in implementing the functional grammar of English (Emilia 2014). However, the emerging need to learn a more functional grammar is immense (Emilia 2014) as it accommodates the students with the concept of meaning-making in language learning (Gunawan 2020). Teachers' traditional conception of grammar have also brought out the belief that they need to teach grammar separately from the text. SFL-GBA indeed suggests "explicit teaching" (Emilia 2005; Gibbons 2002), but it does not mean that we return to the traditional grammar teaching in which grammar is taught separately from the original use of language (Gibbons 2002).

In terms of teaching strategy, the observation also indicated, despite attempts at reform, teachers believe that teaching strategies suggested in SFL-GBA are difficult to follow. This fact is similar to the study conducted by Shi et al. (2017) in which teachers' prior instructional knowledge becomes one of the factors that hinder Chinese EFL teachers to put SFL-GBA into practice. Regarding this, Desimone (2009) argues that teachers as contextual mediators and moderators in professional development need to have a positive attitude and open-mindedness as their integral characteristics. Teachers also believe that using full English or in teaching is actually mandatory. As proposed by Emilia (2016), the use of Bahasa Indonesia is beneficial to assist students to understand what is being taught, especially

when the teacher explains a complex concept. Moreover, by implementing bilingualism in teaching, teachers can become “situationally attentive” (Emilia 2005) towards the complexity of students’ cultural and cognitive.

In the topic of assessment, teachers believe that assessing students’ writing is wearisome. It is related to what Desimone (2009) argues about the importance of open-mindedness and also related to the teacher's prior knowledge of students and the assessment system (Shi et al. 2018). The most probable reason for this is because it deals with choosing appropriate performance measures whether thinking skill has been improved (Nickerson et al., 1985 as cited in Emilia, 2005) requires a lot of attention. Regarding this belief, it is also stated that teachers tend to ask the students to work in a group simply because it will be easier for the teachers to assess the work. Group work is a helpful strategy especially in the stage of Joint Construction since it is the best strategy to expand one’s thinking (Chaffee, 2017). However, it is also problematic since teachers need to make sure that the group work will allow all the students to actively participate in the group tasks (Emilia 2005).

In the aspect of text provision, teachers believe that in teaching the students how to write a type of text or to provide students with texts examples they need to follow a certain formula. It is not totally false, as Emilia (2011) suggests, because the linkages between Knowledge of the Field, text, and grammar are very close so the students’ texts will depend on their understanding of those three aspects. However, Emilia (2011) further explains that the better a student writes, the more likely the resulting text is a combination of various genres. In addition, Knapp and Watkins (2005) also argues that the purpose of a genre, text, and grammar approach is to provide students with the skill to effectively and efficiently use the codes in writing. Therefore, it is important for the teachers to understand that the texts and genres are not formulaic (Emilia 2011).

4. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it is evident that majority of the teachers have already known about SFL-GBA which is proposed by the Indonesian government as the approach used in *Sekolah Penggerak* Program. They also believe that SFL-GBA plays an integral role in teaching English. This result emerges consistently from both surveys and observations. However, further investigation revealed that there are some fundamental beliefs that hinder teachers’ successful implementation of SFL-GBA in their teaching. These beliefs are classified into several aspects such as grammar conception, teaching strategy, assessing strategy, and text provision which becomes the reasons why teachers encounter trouble in implementing SFL-GBA in their class. Based on these initial result, further investigations are needed to explore more on what factors that influence their existing beliefs. It is also

challenging to investigate whether these existing beliefs change after they join the SFL-GBA workshop.

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