Teachers’ Beliefs and Teaching Practices in Teaching Phonics to Lower Primary Learners

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Abstract. In English language education, it is essential for young students to demonstrate proficiency in macro skills. Phonics scaffolding leads to more proficient macro skills but the mastery of phonics is frequently overlooked in the process of acquiring language proficiency, as educators frequently emphasize practicality rather than the technical and fundamental aspects of the language. Relevant research has demonstrated the significance of phonological awareness in English language instruction. However, current studies that focus on teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices’ relationship in phonological instruction is limited. Hence, this research aims to examine teachers’ beliefs and practices in teaching phonics to young learners. The research employed a survey design by distributing questionnaires to 150 lower primary teachers at suburban schools in Gua Musang, Kelantan, Malaysia. The findings indicated that there is a positive correlation between the teachers’ beliefs and their teaching practices, which demonstrates that teachers’ beliefs and teaching practises influence young students’ phonics mastery. The significance of this study lies in its contribution of progressive and relevant approaches to the teaching and learning of English phonics.

Keywords: teaching phonics; English language teaching; teachers’ beliefs; teaching practices

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1. Introduction

The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025 Policy (Ministry of Education, 2013) introduced phonics as a new mechanism to teach early reading in English as a second language (L2) to improve its literacy. These policy changes are significant since there is insufficient data to indicate that teaching L2 learners to read using the phonics method is considered the most effective method (Bowers, 2020). Malaysia’s English language curriculum, that had long embraced the whole-language approach to reading and literacy development, then was superseded by this new method. Administration and teachers have employed various strategies and tools to facilitate the L2 acquisition of students (Stalin & Tan, 2020). However, the preponderance of research on the phonics approach to English reading instruction has been conducted in environments where English is the native tongue (Wise & Bradbury, 2022).

This study intends to examine the influence the existing practices and beliefs of Malaysian English teachers have on the instruction of reading English, as well as the extent they have integrated phonics into English instruction, considering the implementation of this new syllabus. Current research demonstrates that the explicit systematic phonics strategy supports young readers (Piasta & Hudson, 2022; Sanden et al., 2022; Castles et al., 2018). This study establishes the argument that pupils require a technique to decipher those written symbols since the English language’s spelling is so complex. This technique is dependent on the language they are learning and, for English, they must understand how letters correspond to sounds.

Phonics integration into the new curriculum will be extremely difficult because Malaysia’s English-reading pedagogy has never been exposed to the phonics approach previously (Noor et al., 2022). Some teachers have not really emphasized the phonics approach among the students, as these teachers have not utilized a commercial phonics program and their assumption is that children learn letters and sounds unintentionally (Campbell, 2020). The disregard of phonics teaching especially could be seen in the low proficiency in reading among the students (Clemens et al., 2021). The teachers believe that teaching phonics are not important in the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, it affects the teaching practices of the English language in Malaysian classroom (Nicholson & McIntosh, 2020).

There has been very limited researches performed on teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices in teaching English language, especially in the area of teaching phonics. Since the teachers are the ones who put policy into practice, it is critical to take their duties and perspectives into account if curriculum reform is to be successful. Teachers possess unique pedagogical perspectives and have devised their distinctive approaches based on their experiences (Borg, 2019; Zhong & Kang, 2021).

There is scant research on language teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices in Malaysian education, and when it does exist, it merely briefly describes what it entails and does not really address its underlying causes. Relevant research has
demonstrated the significance of phonological awareness (PA) in English language instruction. However, current studies that focuses on teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices’ relationship in phonological instruction are limited. Similarly, Graham et al. (2014) claimed that in the area of second language teaching, there is a lack of research on teachers’ beliefs. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices in teaching of phonics to national primary school pupils.

This research is carried out:
1. To identify teachers’ beliefs in teaching phonics.
2. To identify teachers’ teaching practices in teaching phonics.
3. To analyze the correlation between teachers’ beliefs and their teaching practices in teaching phonics.
4. This research aims to answer the research questions:
   1. What are teachers’ beliefs in teaching phonics?
   2. What are teachers’ teaching practices in teaching phonics?
   3. Is there a correlation between teachers’ beliefs and their teaching practices?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Phonological Awareness (PA)
Language literacy is a key issue that requires the prior development of particular skills and knowledge that are acquired through difficult and complex processes, like explicit phonological-based instructions and reading interventions. These processes include the processing of cognitive information, deciphering words in spoken and written formats and understanding written documents. In order to accomplish this goal, PA is essential. Metalinguistic, morphological, and print awareness have all been recognized in earlier research as cognitive components that lead to literacy. However, PA has the greatest predictive value of any of these factors. In phonics, children learn to read with a focus on letter-sound relationship rather than only digraphs and diphthongs (Yopp & Yopp, 2013; Gillon, 2018). When children are processing advanced literacy tasks, a poor PA in language learning may cause literacy obstacles and impact children’s long-term outcomes (Lerner & Lonigan, 2016).

PA is a shared feature of phonological processing abilities—a term that has been interchangeably used to explain the PA process—and metalinguistic awareness. A person’s explicit and conscious capacity to break down sounds into distinct units and combine these units into a single word, as well as their understanding that verbal communication is made up of small structures (such as syllables and phonemes), are the sources of this multilevel linguistic ability (Gillon, 2018; Penaloza–Lopez et al., 2015; Yopp & Yopp, 2013; Bandini et al., 2013). In this form, PA can be divided into three categories: onset rime awareness, phoneme or phonemic awareness, and syllable awareness. Each of these categories can be developed differently and in a hierarchical order by language learners (Gillon, 2018). PA can be enhanced through an explicit and systematic regime of treatments (Huo & Wang, 2017) offered in phonological-based instruction (i.e.
phonics instruction and PA-based instruction) and reading interventions. In phonics, children are taught how to read with a specific focus on letter–sound correspondence instead of being limited to digraphs and diphthongs (Yopp & Yopp, 2013; Gillon, 2018).

Alarmingly, nowadays, high illiteracy rates are observed amongst young learners, in particular pronunciation-related literacy. Early literacy (EL) is an important aspect that determines the capacity of children to achieve language and academic learning through reading, writing, listening and speaking. Apart from serving as an indicator of children’s academic and communication successes, EL also encompasses the abilities and capabilities of learners to connect various linguistic components, including alphabets, PA, communication and symbolic representation (Rohde, 2015). According to Brown (2014), phonology, phonics and phonemic awareness are essential in EL. Other studies have also identified PA as one of the strongest precursors in language literacy (Saiegh-Haddad, 2019; Krenca et al., 2020; Farquharson et al., 2018). Conclusively, PA measures hold some predictive power over the later reading skills of children, whereas syllables and rimes only hold a low predictive power.

2.2 Teachers’ Beliefs and Teaching Practices
Research has shown that instructors’ beliefs are crucial since they shape their classroom behaviors and practices (Charles Spawa & Hassan, 2013; Aksoy, 2015; Kutálková, 2017; Farrell & Guz, 2019). In order to see positive changes in the classroom, it is vital to make teachers cognizant of their teaching beliefs regarding language learning (Utami, 2016). Teaching practices are among the most significant factors that are frequently linked to teaching beliefs. Analyzing teaching practice is considered a pivotal way in improving teaching and promoting student learning (Finkelstein et al., 2021).

A study investigating teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices of teaching English second language (ESL) was conducted by Collin and Samuel (2017). The participants firmly believed that teachers should demonstrate the most successful problem-solving methods and emphasize their role as facilitators in students’ learning. Participant teaching practices reflected these views and, hence, the participant’s teaching beliefs and practices matched.

Alternatively, Karimi and Nazari (2017) examined instructors’ beliefs and listening teaching practices. They examined bachelor’s and master’s degree qualified teachers’ beliefs and practices. The study found that these teachers had similar listening and teaching beliefs but different teaching practices. In addition, there was also no correlation between their teaching beliefs and teaching practices. Then again, after the COVID-19 pandemic, children and young learners are particularly vulnerable to the psychological and physiological effects of the pandemic (Temban et al., 2021). Hence, teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices varied in techniques, with Mandasari and Aminatun (2022) focusing on digital media for English learning and Nikolopoulou and Kousoglou (2022) and Gao et al. (2022) concentrating on online instruction.
2.3 Teachers’ Beliefs and Teaching Practices in the Teaching of Reading/Phonics Approaches

Diverse areas of English language teaching have been the focus of research on language teachers’ beliefs. These included teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices in the instruction of various English language skills, including listening (Graham et al., 2014), speaking (Rahimi & Zhang, 2015), pronunciation (Baker, 2014) reading (Khalifa et al., 2020), writing (Crusan et al., 2016) and teaching of grammar (Benghezala, 2020).

Most research findings concern first language (L1) contexts, with less representation of reading research in second language (L2) contexts (Borg, 2006). Most L2 reading research focuses on language competence and language knowledge for reading development; the problems of L1 linguistic, strategic, and content knowledge transfer in L2 performance; and cultural and instructional factors that affect reading development. As a result, the reading research community devotes little attention to research on early reading and lower-level reading skills.

The majority of research on English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers’ cognitive abilities in reading focuses on reading comprehension (Atai & Fatahi-Majd, 2014; Kuzborska, 2011), reading strategies and skills (Bamanger & Gashan, 2014; Odo, 2017), and reading instruction (Ko, 2013). However, there has only been minimal research investigating EFL teachers’ beliefs on reading instruction methods and pedagogy or their understanding of word recognition level constructions.

There is a wide range of opinions among EFL teachers regarding the best reading methodology. When Lim and Torr (2007) studied the reading strategies used in their EFL teacher participants’ classrooms, they discovered that they adjusted these strategies depending on the lesson’s adequacy. They came to the conclusion that this might be because teachers in English classes are trying to teach students how to communicate and express themselves freely in the target language. In a study by Fuchs et al. (2019), 167 Israeli teachers revealed that although they acknowledged the phonics method was beneficial for young learners, they still focused more on reading fluency exercises. Vaisman and Kahn-Horwaitz (2019) reached the same conclusion, revealing that teachers recognized the importance of word recognition abilities but were reluctant to employ them effectively in the classroom due to inadequate word recognition level expertise. Instead, in order to strengthen proficient reading and spelling abilities, teachers emphasized the whole-language approach. It is clear from the research that instructors’ professed views and actual behaviors are frequently at odds, for the reasons listed.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach to answer the research questions as it assumed that cognition and behavior are highly predictable and explainable, and that it can help the researcher to identify the relationships that enable them to make probabilistic predictions and generalizations (Ary et al., 2010; Johnson & Christensen, 2017). This study employed a survey design to identify teachers’
beliefs and teaching practices in the teaching of phonics. The study was conducted at 39 primary schools in Gua Musang, Kelantan, Malaysia. The demographic is similar to suburban and rural teachers.

This study targeted lower primary English teachers as they are the only level that teaches phonics. The researcher used a systematic random sampling to choose the participants. The questionnaire was distributed to 150 chosen teachers. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to the respective schools’ English panels through the schools’ administrators after permission was granted by the State and District Education Department.

The research instrument used in this research was a questionnaire. It was divided into three sections. Section A is the respondents’ teaching beliefs and Section B is their teaching practices. The ‘Background Information’ section is the demographic data of the respondents. The printed questionnaire was distributed and collected within one month after being distributed; only 124 questionnaires were returned back.

The data obtained were analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software version 23. Descriptive analysis was used to answer research question 1 and 2. For the interpretation of mean score, this study adapted the interpretation by Nunally (1978) which uses four levels of interpretation. This type of data analysis was used to form an inference on the correlation between beliefs and teaching practices. The Pearson correlation is used to test for a relationship between two variables (Creswell, 2012). The value of Pearson correlation ($r = -1$ to $+1$) for this study employs the correlation classification by Davies (1971).

4. Findings and Discussions
This study was carried out in 39 primary schools in Gua Musang, Kelantan, Malaysia, and 124 teachers took part in the survey. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the 124 respondents of this study. As seen in Table 1, 103 of the respondents (83.1%) were female, while 21 respondents (16.9%) were male. Regarding ethnicity, 103 (83.1%) of them were Malay, 15 (12.1%) were Chinese and 2 (1.6%) were Indian. The rest of the 4 respondents (3.2%) were from other ethnic minorities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Respondents’ gender and ethnicity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic profile</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The results from the questionnaire were presented in frequency, mean score and standard deviation. For the interpretation of mean score, the interpretation by Nunally (1978) was employed, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Level of mean interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Level of Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.01 - 2.00</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.01 - 3.00</td>
<td>Medium Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.01 - 4.00</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.01 - 5.00</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis of the teachers’ beliefs in teaching of phonics. There are 19 items under this section, comprising language skills that are used during the teaching of phonics.

Table 3: Teachers’ beliefs in teaching of phonics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Learning to read should involve attending closely to the print on the page.</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>The beginning reader should be taught phonics skills.</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>If teachers spend more time teaching phonics, pupils would be able to work in more advanced skills at an earlier age.</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>Pupils should do more listening and less reading to the teacher while learning phonics.</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>The teaching of phonics is the responsibility of every English teacher.</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B6</td>
<td>Reading is the most important area among the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in teaching of phonics.</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B7</td>
<td>Reading skills are lacking in my pupils.</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B8</td>
<td>I have explicit preparation for the teaching of phonics.</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B9</td>
<td>Reading is a skill that can be taught.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10</td>
<td>Sight vocabulary learnt in isolation does transfer to text reading.</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B11</td>
<td>To enhance reading skills and attitudes, more time should be devoted to discuss meaning.</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B12</td>
<td>The main difficulty for learners in reading arises from lack of basic knowledge in sounding and blending the sounds.</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B13</td>
<td>More emphasis needs to be placed on the role of reading in the learning process of phonics.</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B14</td>
<td>Raising the quality of children’s reading skills affects their learning positively in all subject areas.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B15</td>
<td>The main difficulty for learners in reading arises from the lack of basic knowledge about the reading of phonics.</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For effective learning, literacy programs should be organized to allow for the specific study of separate skills such as comprehension, word recognition and phonics.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B16</td>
<td>For effective learning, literacy programs should be organized to allow for the specific study of separate skills such as comprehension, word recognition and phonics.</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B17</td>
<td>It is important to decode words in a lesson.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B18</td>
<td>It is important to separate words into sounds.</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B19</td>
<td>It is possible to teach learners how to read more effectively.</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In analyzing the teacher’s beliefs in teaching of phonics, item B2, ‘The beginning reader should be taught phonics skills’ (mean = 4.27, SD = 0.77) had the highest mean. This item had the respondents’ highest belief. In general, the respondents agreed that teaching phonics skills to students is necessary for teaching beginner readers. Other experts concurred that mastering phonics is crucial to acquiring a language because it is a fundamental skill (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Vandergrift & Baker, 2015). Early literacy (EL) measures students’ ability to connect alphabets, PA, communication, and symbolic representation (Rohde, 2015). Since phonology, phonics and phonemic awareness are essential in EL (Brown, 2014), it is vital for teachers to emphasize teaching of phonics methods in the classroom.

Nevertheless, since the English language has approximately 44 phonemes (25 consonants and 16 vowels) represented by 26 letters, some English language learners are required to perform letter-sounds mapping tasks. This process poses several challenges given that some of these letters or clusters of letters do not precisely correspond to one another, given the differences in the linguistic features of the English language (e.g. phonology and orthography). For instance, consonant clusters or digraphs in English (e.g. ‘th’; /θ/ or ‘ch’; /tʃ/), are completely absent from other languages, such as Indonesian and Malay. This orthographic element in English is perceived by some English language learners (ELL) and most EFL learners as a tumultuous task due to pronunciation inconsistencies (Ambalegin & Arianto, 2019). Hence, teachers ought to implement suitable approaches to enhance the EL of young English language learners and examine the applicability of these treatments in the specific educational contexts of these learners.

The item that had the lowest belief among the teachers was item B8, ‘I have explicit preparation for the teaching of phonics’ (mean = 3.16, SD = 0.87). The teachers’ preparation for teaching phonics was a factor in how difficult it was for students to learn the skill, since teachers do not receive adequate phonics training. The teachers were more impacted by their periphery ideas and concentrated on phonics solely to follow the new curriculum, especially when they had to follow contextual demands (Fives & Buehl, 2012). In order to teach phonics concepts and abilities to beginning readers successfully, there are significant findings in the literature that point to gaps in instructors’ pedagogical topic knowledge. These results apply to teachers whose primary language is English, as well as the ESL/EFL context (Bae et al., 2019; Lee, 2014; Vaisman & Kahn-Horwaitz, 2019; Zhao et al., 2016).
Given that teachers “must have a solid grasp of both the complexities of English orthography and the language systems that print represents in order to teach pupils recognition of written words,” it can be inferred that this is a particular problem for teachers who must teach English as a second language. According to (Moats, 2009) teachers who lack this knowledge are “likely to promote guessing strategies” (e.g., “What might make sense here?”), “skip that and go on” strategies, the idea that precision is unimportant (“Nice try,” or “Accuracy doesn’t matter”), or “rote memorization of higher frequency words.” Table 4 shows the descriptive analysis of the teachers’ practices in teaching of phonics. There are 19 items under this section, comprising teacher’s practices that are commonly applied during the teaching of phonics.

Table 4: Teachers’ teaching practices in teaching of phonics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>I point out rhyming patterns when I read stories.</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>I provide additional opportunities for pupils to practice pronunciation (e.g. pair work) without explicitly teaching phonics.</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>I demonstrate the sounds letters make.</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>I focus on how well a pupil listens rather than his/her knowledge of reading skills and attitudes.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>I use cue cards and visual aids to teach blending sounds.</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Most phonics experience in my classroom involves the skill of listening and reading to acquire new information.</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>I read aloud to the children in the class.</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Pupils in my classroom learn the role of the listener and reader in the learning process.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>As pupils in my classroom develop phonics’ reading skills, my overall classroom activities emphasize their use in everyday situations.</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Auditory aids are used in my classroom when I teach phonics.</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>I create a classroom environment conducive for phonics reading activities.</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>I conduct lesson plans with activities that encourage the application of phonics.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13</td>
<td>I use teacher lecture-type explanation when teaching phonics.</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P14</td>
<td>I use learner-initiated activities when teaching phonics.</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>I use topics and activities selected by learners when teaching phonics.</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P16</td>
<td>I use activities among pupils when teaching phonics.</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P17</td>
<td>I use authentic audio materials in teaching phonics.</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>Medium High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://ijlter.org/index.php/ijlter
In analyzing teachers’ teaching practices in teaching of phonics, item P3, ‘I demonstrate the sounds letters make’ (mean = 4.02, SD = 0.72), scored the highest mean as the teaching practices being practiced by the teachers. This shows that teachers’ lessons are more teacher-centered than student-centered. This finding shows how teachers rigidly remain with traditional teacher-centered practice in teaching. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the teachers abandoned a student-centered approach entirely, as item P2, ‘I provide additional opportunities for pupils to practice pronunciation (e.g. pair work) without explicitly teaching phonics’ and item P14, ‘I use learner-initiated activities when teaching phonics’, also scored high. This indicates that teachers do practice a student-centered approach, even if the value is lower that item P3. Indirectly, it indicates that even though they were comfortable to teach by direct instruction, teachers still attempt to cater to the 21st century teaching style by incorporating some student-centered activities in their lesson.

On the lowest end, item P15, ‘I use topics and activities selected by learners when teaching phonics’ (mean = 3.09, SD = 0.94), was the lowest scoring teaching practice adopted by teachers. This indicates that teachers do not frequently inquire about the students’ favored activities while teaching phonics. If the students were given the opportunity to express their choices, this would indirectly allow them to be confident in learning. Given that the teachers were there to assist them, they would not be afraid to learn. This is also related to the affective-filter hypothesis by Krashen — that pupils learn better when they are less nervous or, put in another way, they are in low affective filter.

The findings of this research are equivalent with Xu’s (2016) findings. According to Xu (2016), weak foundation and limited understanding to the content cause pupils to feel nervous and demotivated. Low levels of motivation and high levels of anxiety can cause a very negative impact on pupils’ L2 acquisition. As motivation and anxiety are the affective variables mentioned by Krashen, teachers have to be aware of their pedagogy and materials so as to avoid the affective variables hindering pupils’ learning.

An inferential analysis was then done to identify the relationship between two variables and to investigate the differences based on a factor given. In this research, the teachers’ beliefs are the independent variable and their teaching practices is the dependent variable. Before inferential analysis can be done, the normality test of the data needed to be established to decide which type of t-test could be used (Creswell, 2012). Normal data are processed differently using parametric statistic, while abnormal data are processed using non-parametric statistic (Cohen et al., 2018). There are seven ways to determine the normality of data: looking at the histogram curve; through stem-and-leaf plot; variables that have nearly the same value of mode, mean and median; skewness and kurtosis value; Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z test; and Q-Q graphic plot (Ghazali & Sufean, 2020).
In this research, the normality of the data was tested through histogram, skewness and kurtosis value and Q-Q graphic plot. First of all, a set of data has a normal distribution when the curve of the histogram is in the perfect shape of a bell or, in other words, a bell curve.

Figure 1: Teachers’ beliefs

Figure 2: Teachers’ teaching practices

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According to Figure 1 and Figure 2, both histograms have a bell curve and, therefore, this fulfils the normality criteria where the histogram of a normal data has a bell curve. Next, the normality of data can be determined by observing the skewness and kurtosis value. The value must be between -1.7 and +1.7 for it to be considered as normal (Ghazali & Sufean, 2018).

Table 5: Variables’ value of skewness and kurtosis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>-0.405</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Practices</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>-0.150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 showed the skewness and kurtosis values for belief (-0.405, -0.054) and teaching practices (0.145, -0.150). The skewness and kurtosis values for both variables are between -1.7 and 1.7. Thus, the data distribution is normal. Lastly, this research uses the Q-Q graphic plot to test the normality of the data. In a Q-Q plot, if most of the data dots are on or very near the straight line, then the data can be considered as having a normal distribution (Ghazali & Sufean, 2018).

Figure 3: Q-Q graphic plot for beliefs
Figure 4: Q-Q graphic plot for teaching practices

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show how the dots are either on the straight line or are located very near the straight line. Through the dots of these Q-Q plots, it can be concluded that the data distribution is normal. All three tests come to the result of data having a normal distribution. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data for this research has a normal distribution. Hence, parametric statistic can be used for inferential analysis.

In an attempt to answer this research question 3, ‘Is there a correlation between teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ teaching practices?’, a hypothesis was formed:

**Ho1** There is no positive correlation between teachers’ beliefs and their teaching practices.

The findings in Table 3 and Table 4 and obtained from the survey were analyzed using the Pearson Correlation. Table 6 shows the relationship of the two variables mentioned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Practices</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correlation</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.507</strong></td>
<td><strong>.000</strong></td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

The result shows that a signification correlation exists between the teachers’ beliefs and their teaching practices, where the value of Pearson’s r is 0.507, and p is less than 0.05. Since r is bigger than the critical value, the hypothesis is rejected. According to the size of correlation coefficient suggested by Davies (1971), it describes that there is a strong correlation between teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ teaching practices. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is, in fact, a significant relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their teaching practices in teaching phonics (r = 0.507, p< 0.05). This shows how teachers’ beliefs are reflected positively in their teaching practices. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.
5. Conclusion
The research aimed to examine teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices in teaching phonics to young learners. This research utilized the survey design of the quantitative method to examine teachers’ belief and teaching practices in phonological instructions. According to the analyzed results, the majority of the teachers believed that learners who are at the beginner level of language learning should be taught phonic skills and participate in literacy programs. Teachers using a demonstration of sounds to teach phonics was the most popular teaching practice. This shows that both teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices have an effect on the teaching process of phonics to younger learners. Furthermore, there was a positive correlation between teachers’ belief and teaching practices in the teaching and learning of phonics. In this sense, the gaps in research of which the focus on teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices relationship in phonological instructions are fulfilled.

The researcher did not include teachers of different teaching environments and geographical differences or teachers with students of various cultural background as this research only focused on a particular group of participants. For future research, the researcher can include qualitative research methods to study teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices in depth.

This research is significant towards the development and the enhancement of teachers’ teaching approaches in phonological instructions, whereby teachers have the awareness to inculcate appropriate teaching strategies to make the acquisition of the English language skill more meaningful.

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6. References


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