

## INVESTIGATION OF ESL TEACHER'S BELIEFS ABOUT PRONUNCIATION INSTRUCTION

\* Shanina Sharatol Ahmad Shah  
Azmawaty Mohamad Nor

Faculty of Education  
University of Malaya  
*shanina@um.edu.my*

**Abstract:** The cognitive dimensions of how language teachers' beliefs influence the nature of their classroom instructions has been given a lot of attention by the researchers over the past few decades. These studies have provided insights into how teachers' beliefs play an important role in helping teachers to make sense of the decisions they make in the classroom (Borg, 2006). However, these studies have only examined teachers' beliefs in most of the second language skills, mainly reading, writing and grammar except for the pronunciation skill. Pronunciation skill from the aspect of teachers' beliefs is underexplored considering the important role it plays in achieving successful communication. This paper reports part of a larger study on the results of a case study exploring 5 ESL teachers' beliefs and their pronunciation instructional practices in the Malaysian secondary school context. They were interviewed and their ESL classrooms were observed. The discussion in this report focuses on the teachers' beliefs of their roles in the classroom and their focused areas in teaching pronunciation. The findings accentuate some negative consistencies between their beliefs and their actual classroom practices. In addition, this study found that the teachers' avoidance of pronunciation instructions was due to their limited knowledge on the pedagogical aspects.

**Keywords:** *Teachers' Beliefs, English as a Second Language (ESL), Pronunciation Instructions*

### INTRODUCTION

Scholars in the field of education have widely acknowledged that teachers' beliefs play an influential role in determining their classroom practices (Borg, 2003 & 1998). Teachers' beliefs affect not only their teaching but also the successful implementation of a curriculum. Many of the studies on teacher's beliefs have predominantly examined beliefs in several second language skills areas. The pronunciation skill has received the least attention. Most research on English as a second language (ESL) teachers' beliefs on language teaching has been conducted largely on the areas of grammar (Phipps and Borg, 2009; Andrews, 2003 & Chia, 2003), reading (El-Okda, 2005 & Verloop et al, 2001; Johnson, 1994) and writing (Diab, 2005, Burns, 1992 & Shi, 1990). Studies on the ESL teachers' beliefs on pronunciation instructions is by far, rather limited. This is due to the fact that pronunciation has been the least taught, and in some cases not taught at all in the language classrooms (Symanonndh, 1983; Lin Fan & Chen, 1995; Wei & Zhou, 2002; Nair et al, 2006; Jayapalan & Pillai, 2011).

Researchers in the field of language teaching have acknowledged that pronunciation needs to be taught and deserves more attention in a language classroom. Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) pointed out that non-native speakers of English need to achieve a "threshold level of pronunciation" to be understood. Given the importance of pronunciation, it is expected that ESL teachers would pay more attention on this skill in the classroom. In the Malaysian context, pronunciation skills remain the least taught by the ESL teachers despite the integrated approach emphasized in the current secondary school syllabus itself. The limited attention paid towards pronunciation is confirmed by several previous studies. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) reported that English pronunciation is largely neglected in the field of English language teaching. Nair, Krishnasamy and De Mello (2006) found that teachers avoid teaching pronunciation by giving several false reasons or excuses as a result of their lack of knowledge on how to teach pronunciation. Pillai (2008) reported that pronunciation has been side-lined due to the teachers' inability to cope with many components in the ESL syllabus that are seen as more important as they are tested in the examination. These findings are further

[33]

supported by Wahid and Sulong (2013) where they found that teachers' avoidance of pronunciation teaching was due to their lack of technical knowledge in pronunciation content and pedagogy. They also argue that the Communicative language teaching syllabus has a dampening effect on the teaching of pronunciation as focus is given on fluency in communication rather than "extended instruction on how to pronounce properly."

Given the importance of pronunciation in language teaching and the lack of research in teachers' beliefs in teaching pronunciation, this study attempts to address these gaps. Firstly, this study explores the emic perspectives of the ESL teachers as opposed the many research on teachers' beliefs which were approached quantitatively. Many of the research on teachers' beliefs have not included classroom-based data. Hence, an important element in this research is the inclusion of the observation of the teachers' actual classroom practices where actual learning takes place. This study also responds to the need for further studies in pronunciation in the secondary school level. As noted by Couper (2003) and Derwing and Rossiter (2002), it is crucial to study pronunciation at this stage otherwise pronunciation will remain a neglected skill in the ESL classroom and successful communication will not be achieved. Relatively, very few ESL teachers are academically prepared to teach pronunciation effectively (Macdonald, 2002 & Fraser, 2000). Understanding teachers' beliefs about pronunciation teaching and learning will inform the TESL teacher educators the type of experiences that are crucial for the ESL teachers (Luft, 1999; Yerrick et al., 1997). This helps to enhance the learning development of the teachers. It is the purpose of this study to enhance the knowledge on the pedagogical aspects of pronunciation based on the investigation of teachers' beliefs and classroom practices.

## BACKGROUND LITERATURE

There has been a large body of research on teachers' beliefs and their influence on classroom practices in general education over the last forty years. In ESL classrooms, teachers' cognitive processing can provide an insight into their classroom practice. It is important to understand their beliefs and its influence on their classroom practices. It is through these beliefs that teachers usually perform as they do in their classrooms. Teachers' beliefs influence their decision making including adopting particular teaching approaches and selecting certain instructional materials. Borg (2006) summarized the core elements that embody the meaning of teacher beliefs; personal, practical (through informed by formal knowledge), tacit, systematic and dynamic. In investigating the teachers' beliefs, Borg (2006) provides a schematic conceptualization of teaching on how teachers' cognition plays a crucial role in the teacher's lives. Borg (2006) has used the term 'teacher cognition' to collectively refer to several psychological constructs that form the basic formation of teacher's beliefs. These psychological constructs refer to the teacher's learning experiences both in formal and informal situations. Borg (2006) argues that teachers' beliefs are developed during their schooling years and professional training. These learning experiences have been shown to have an impact on the teacher's classroom practices. Their classroom practices may also have been influenced by contextual factors such as prescribed curriculum, time constraints and high-stake examinations. To understand when and how the ESL teachers incorporate pronunciation in their ESL lessons, the study of the teachers' beliefs concerning their decisions on pronunciation instructions would provide the answer. It would unravel the reasons for the lack of attention to pronunciation as well as the amount of knowledge they have on strategies to teach pronunciation.

In the Malaysian secondary school syllabus known as KBSM (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah / Integrated Secondary School Curriculum) pronunciation skills are included as part of the language content apart from grammar and vocabulary. According to the syllabus, the objective of teaching the pronunciation skills is to enable the pupils to 'pronounce words correctly as well as to observe the word stress, intonation and rhythm correctly'. In addition, all the four language skills outlined in the syllabus require some knowledge or understanding of pronunciation. The KBSM syllabus encourages an integrated approach in teaching the English Language. Burgess and Spencer (2000) argued that ESL teachers are expected to ensure that their pronunciation teaching practices in the classroom is in line with the current perspective of language teaching and learning that is to teach learners to be communicatively competent in the target language. Pronunciation completes the journey in achieving communicative competence. This view is shared by Rajadurai (2006) who argued that without pronunciation skills a learner's speech will be less intelligible and communicative competence will not be achieved

Despite the acknowledgment that pronunciation needs to be taught and deserves more attention in a language classroom, it is not the case in many ESL classrooms context. Derwing & Munro (2005) described the pronunciation component as an 'orphan' in language teaching to describe the treatment pronunciation has received from the ESL teachers. It has been argued that the neglect of pronunciation instruction in the ESL classroom is associated with the focus on meaning that is conveyed in the communication rather than on specific pronunciation focused activities. Teaching pronunciation is related to a more social view of communication. This is in line with the communicative language teaching (CLT) perspective where teaching of pronunciation shifts from an aspect of phonological accuracy to a global conversational competence (Pennington & Richards, 1986). Another reason for the neglect of pronunciation teaching could be due to the lack of ability to deal with a component which is considered difficult for most ESL teachers (Nair, Krishnasamy & de Mello, 2006; Wahid & Sulong, 2013). These difficulties could be caused by many reasons. Among the reasons would be the lack of knowledge in the content and pedagogical aspects of pronunciation, and the challenges that the ESL teachers face in teaching pronunciation in terms of facilities and availability of resources. Several studies have also indicated that many ESL teachers neglected the pronunciation skills because they lack confidence, skills and knowledge to teach pronunciation (Macdonald, 2002; Fraser, 2000 & Brown 1992).

Research has shown that teachers face various challenges in their efforts to conduct pronunciation classes (Bateman, 2008). In relation to this, understanding their beliefs about the teaching of pronunciation help improve and develop understanding of the teachers' performances and reasons for their actions in the classrooms. The current research attempts to fill a gap in this area.

## METHODOLOGY

This study reports only on the beliefs of the participants about pronunciation instructions. It is part of a larger study that looked into teachers' beliefs and practices as well as their congruence. A separate focus into their beliefs of pronunciation instructions are important to be discussed as it reflects the underlying factors that led to the teachers' decisions of instructions in pronunciation.

A qualitative approach was used in this study. Merriam (1998) clarifies that the key concern of employing a qualitative method is when the concern of understanding the phenomenon under study is to explore the perspective of the participants and not the researcher. Merriam (1998) used the term 'emic' perspective to refer to the perspective of the participants rather than the 'etic', or the researcher's perspectives. The teachers' beliefs are based on their own life experiences and how these experiences have affected their thoughts and decisions in their teaching practices. Teachers' beliefs are intensely personal and unique in each individual teacher. The way to unravel the tacit nature of belief is through face to face expressions of their experiences. Thus, their beliefs are best told by the teachers themselves. There has been research on teachers' beliefs which investigated beliefs and classroom practices using questionnaires, however, a lack of depth and the high possibility of misinterpretation of the questions might occur. From questionnaire, one could not investigate where beliefs come from, and the effect beliefs have on the learning process (Woods, 1996). Thus, a case study method is able to uncover the depths of beliefs based on a specific community context. Beliefs about pronunciation instruction are best investigated based on a specific context of a community as the context also shapes the beliefs of the teacher. How the language is used in the community and how the community interacts among each other are important determiners of beliefs.

This study employs the multiple case study method where data was collected based on in-depth interviews with five selected secondary school English Language teachers and selected students taught by these ESL teachers. The teachers' classrooms were also observed where lessons that may include elements of pronunciation were selected. A multiple case study method was chosen as teacher's belief by nature is tacit or in other words, belief is an unobservable phenomenon. Two methods of data collection used in this study were in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The in-depth interviews were conducted due to the small participants involved in this study. Hence it is a suitable method of data collection where an exploration of the teachers' beliefs could be conducted. In order to observe and examine the actual practices of pronunciation instructions, classroom observations were also conducted. Thus, through in-depth interviews with the participants and classroom observations, the actual beliefs and actions would be uncovered. The five English Language teachers selected teach the lower and upper secondary school students in Selangor, the west coast

[35]

of the Peninsular of Malaysia. They were based at different districts, mainly the Petaling district which is located in the middle of the Klang Valley, Kuala Selangor district which is an old royal town, and the Hulu Langat district, a suburban area located between Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya.

These teachers were selected based on two criteria. First is the difference in their academic qualifications regardless of whether they possess academic qualification in teacher education or non-teacher education. Therefore, the participants of this study consist of a mix of fully trained, semi-trained and untrained English Language teachers. Fully trained teacher refers to a teacher who has at least a degree in (TESL) Teaching English as a Second Language or (ESL) English as a Second Language. Semi-trained teacher refers to a teacher who has a certificate in Education (KPLI) Kursus Perguruan Lepas Ijazah (Graduate Teacher Training Course). Untrained teacher refers to a teacher who has a degree in other fields other than education and has never undergone a teacher training program. Case 1 and Case 3 are fully trained ESL teachers where both hold a degree in TESL. Case 2 and Case 5 on the other hand are semi trained teachers with a Diploma in Education. However, Case 2 holds a degree and master's degree in Linguistics and Case 5 holds a degree in Mass Communication. Case 4 is the only candidate who is not TESL trained. She holds a degree in Business Administration.

Secondly, these teachers are chosen based on their length of experience in teaching the secondary school students. Therefore, there is a mixture of novice and expert teachers in this study ranging from three to twenty-two years of experience in teaching the English Language subject. A guiding factor for these selections was to get a fair overview of the beliefs of the teachers of different levels of experience and training in teaching English Language subject. Furthermore, by categorizing the teachers selected into "expert" and "novice", the study could discover if they show similarities and differences in their cognitions and actions on the teaching of pronunciation.

The two factors which became the basis of selection of the participants of this study was based on the potential influence that these factors have on the ESL teachers' beliefs and practices about pronunciation instruction. Studies by Borg, 2006; Allen, 2002; Flores, 2001; and Richards et al., 1992 suggested future studies in teacher cognition to take into account of these factors which might bring about insightful findings and contribute to the studies in teachers' beliefs about pronunciation instructions. The participants were selected based on their different educational background. Each participant in this study has their unique experience of teaching and learning both professional (formal) and informal exposure. According to Borg (2006) expert language teachers use their formal and experiential knowledge to decide the best method for their learners, to anticipate problems and to respond to learners in a technically skilled manner and sensitive to the learners' needs and problems. On the other hand, novice teachers are less flexible, lack variety in their teaching approach, and have difficulties in placing themselves in the learners' shoes. Another criterion of the selection of the participants was their length of service as a teacher. Experienced teachers having been exposed to the school environments, being familiar with the education system and demands may posit different beliefs about pronunciation teaching as opposed to novice teachers who are coping to adapt to the school environment.

It is then worth to see evidence of different roles and focused areas to the teaching of pronunciation between the expert and the novice teachers in this study. Based on these criteria, the study reveals an understanding of the case understudy in varying contexts. This strengthens the precision, validity, and stability of the findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p29).

Besides the five teachers, several students taught by these participants were also involved in the data collection and analysis. The students were selected by the participants themselves based upon the criteria requested by the researcher. The researcher had requested at least two students from each level of proficiency mainly advanced, intermediate and lower intermediate. Alternatively, the researcher had informed the participants that they could use the students' latest examination performance as the criteria for selection. The rationale for the criteria was to get a clear response and as a counter check from the students of the practices of pronunciation instructions. Each student was interviewed once and it was audio recorded. The interview sessions were conducted either individually or in a small group of three students. The observations of each participant were organized based on the discussion of the appropriate topics or skills taught by the participants that could help the researcher to observe any direct or indirect teaching of pronunciation. This is based on the fact that pronunciation is not always incorporated in the English Language subject. Thus, the researcher had negotiated with the participants on observing relevant lessons that may contain the integration of pronunciation

skills. All observations were video recorded. The participants were also interviewed to gain in depth understanding of the teachers' beliefs on pronunciation instruction. This intends to uncover and triangulate the reasons for focusing certain areas in pronunciation and the methods and techniques of their pronunciation lessons based on the lessons observed. The purpose of the interview was also to identify if the lesson was conducted as how it was planned and based on their beliefs and if not, what were the changes or adjustments made, and the justifications of the adjustments. By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to seek specific information and issues pertaining to the study and at the same time provide opportunities for the participants to express their beliefs effectively. The first phase interviews attempted to understand the teachers' beliefs of their roles in pronunciation instructions and their focused areas. The second phase interviews were conducted after each of the observations conducted to gain further understanding of the selection of contents, activities, tasks and methods used.

For data analysis, the raw data which were first transcribed and then typed in *Microsoft Word 97* format were kept in several formats – in a CD, printed as hardcopy and as soft copies in the computer. The initial codes and the episodes were then tabulated in to matrix tables based on the research questions of the study. Then a *Microsoft Excel* spread sheet is used where the initial codes, episodes and sources from the interviews and classroom observations were typed then categorized and sorted in alphabetical order. The themes that emerge from the categories and their explanations were then developed into mind maps. At the same time, mind maps were also developed for each interview, indicating all the emerging themes and their possible relationships to each other and to the research questions of the study. The mind map became the basis for the development of a summary for each participant. To prevent from arriving at a conclusion prematurely, the constant comparative method of analysis (Glazer and Strauss, 1967) was used.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In discussing the beliefs investigated, emerging themes are used. The themes as presented in Table 1, describe the ESL teachers' role and focused areas in teaching pronunciation.

Table 1  
*ESL Teachers' Beliefs about Pronunciation*

Case	Role	Focused Area
Case 1	Not Taught, Not Tested – Not Important	Success in Communication
Case 2	Superiority of the Native Model	Grammar and Examination Oriented
Case 3	Greater Efforts from Learners	Teaching Focus – Grammar and Writing
Case 4	Pronunciation Only as a Basic Skill	Language Contents Build Strong Foundation
Case 5	Encourages Improvement	Focus on Grammar and Writing

The themes developed were mainly based on the initial and subsequent interviews conducted with the participants although in the lessons observed, participants may have tried to show how they would carry out a pronunciation integrated lesson. For each participant, at least 6 interviews were conducted until the researcher felt that saturation of data was achieved as similar responses were given based on interview questions which were rephrased. However, based on prolonged observations it was evident that pronunciation is not often dealt with in their English Language lessons. Thus, indicated the reliance of the statement of beliefs of the participants. What they stated in the interviews about their beliefs reflected their real feelings about their roles and areas that they would give focus in pronunciation. The researchers have summarized the findings of the interviews for each participant and have confirmed the answers that have been given. This has strengthened the validity of the findings. The interviews were assigned initial codes and later collapsed into categories. Each emerging theme describes each participants' roles and focused areas in pronunciation instructions.

## THE ROLES

Based on the themes that describe the roles the selected ESL teachers portrayed in their pronunciation lessons, negative portrayal of roles was evident. All five participants did not show evidence of regular focus on pronunciation skills in their ESL lessons. Various factors were given by the participants in order to defend their stand for not giving prominence in the pronunciation component.

The first case revealed the reason for not including pronunciation is due to the lack of emphasis on pronunciation given in most assessments in the school and generally, the unanimous understanding that pronunciation is never taught in the ESL lessons. Case one stressed the collective understanding that all the ESL teachers need not focus on pronunciation as other language skills required more attention. The attention meant by Case One is the attention on the skills needed in the examinations. Thus, case one believes that ESL teachers collectively do not play a big role in teaching pronunciation.

*“Of course, the other four skills were given a lot of importance compared to teaching and learning pronunciation. Even during my class time and also even in the school. It is only covered in the school textbooks. But whenever we have meetings or discussions in terms of curriculum, nobody gives emphasis; nobody emphasizes on pronunciation. We always look at grammar drills. We look at comprehension, summary; exactly whatever that covers for exams and communication skills, just because of the oral. So usually nothing much on pronunciation. It’s all individual. It depends on the teachers. If we have extra time; if we have good students then we can just go on with it.”*

*(Subject 1, Interview 2 – Lines 15-22)*

Case two strongly believes that ESL teachers should as far as possible model after the native speakers. The expectations of objective in pronunciation placed by this participant seem high. Although, the participant realized the impossibility of her own expectation, she felt that ESL teachers should aim for such level of pronunciation in order to be a good model to the learners. Through good modelling of the teachers’ speech with appropriate near native pronunciation, teachers would fulfil their role of indirectly teaching the pronunciation skills. The participant holds on strong to the belief that pronunciation is not learnt effectively if it is directly taught to the learners rather it should be indirectly experienced by the learners through good modelling of the language by the ESL teachers.

*“I wish more teachers are like me. And you know, they want to speak like me, like native speakers. They would want to know more about the language if they’re English teachers. Especially the English teachers, right. They should be speaking close to native speakers, like the native speakers so that they will be more respected. They can make the difference because the students are listening to us all the time, I’ve been to so many schools and it’s really hard to find an English teacher who speaks like the native speakers.”*

*(Subject 2, Interview 2 – Lines 363-370)*

Case three has also revealed the minimal role played by the participant in teaching pronunciation. In this case, the participants believe that active involvement by the learners in improving their pronunciation skills would lead to a higher self-motivation in learning pronunciation. If learners are self-motivated, learning pronunciation would be faster and easier. Thus, this participant had encouraged greater efforts from the learners to improve their pronunciation through regular use of the language and more attention paid to important areas in the language which will enhance their fluency and accuracy in the English Language.

*“If you really want the students to be very good in English Language from standard one until six years of learning and the form one until form five. I think if you find their eleven years of learning I think it’s more than enough but I can really master English in one and a half years by really focusing on how to pronounce and use the language in the correct way.”*

*(Subject3, Interview 2- Lines 97-100)*

Pronunciation is often viewed as a prerequisite for language learning. Case four revealed her belief that extensive focus on pronunciation skills should be given at the early stages of language learning. In the case of Malaysian schools, the

participant believes that attention to learners' pronunciation skills is best dealt by ESL teachers in the primary school stage.

*“Actually, they are supposed to learn pronunciation, master pronunciation during the primary school level in standard 1, 2 and 3. These are the times the students learn the basics of English. So, during this time, they should be taught how to pronounce each word so that when they come to secondary school, they can learn other skills besides pronunciation. Pronunciation will be less, will not be given that much of importance in secondary schools. Since these students are weak, they're in Remove Classes. They have to start back from scratch.”*

*(Subject 4, Interviews 2 – Lines 118-124)*

Finally, Case Five has also indicated a negative belief about her role in pronunciation instructions. This participant has placed pronunciation at the back seat where she believes that her role is only in a form of encouragement for the learners to improve their pronunciation. This belief has resulted from the belief that her focus of English Language teaching is on other language skills that are more crucial for the learners to acquire and important for them to pass in the examinations.

*“Because it will help them a lot in listening and speaking, you know. They can understand what others are saying and then, they themselves, can speak well and pronounce properly and they, it will build their confidence to speak in the public without fear. I think one reason they are not speaking is they don't know how to say things. So, if they learn up the correct way, why not. They all will be so happy and confident speaking”.*

*(Subject 5, Interview 2 – Lines 113-117)*

In short, it is evident that the ESL teachers portrayed negative beliefs about their roles in pronunciation instructions. Based on these findings, it appears that pronunciation is trivialized by the participants. Their belief of the negative role that they hold in pronunciation instructions is in concern. If pronunciation instructions continue to be trivialized, learners would be deprived of their rights and advantage in acquiring the expected competency in the English Language.

## THE FOCUSED AREAS

Even at the beginning of this research, the participants approached were sceptical of the researcher's intention in investigating their pronunciation beliefs. This is so because pronunciation has never been in their thoughts thus, not always evident in their lessons. Their beliefs on the focused areas on pronunciation seem to indicate that pronunciation areas are rarely dealt in their ESL lessons.

Case One for instance were not able to show a specific focus on any pronunciation area or topic and thus believe that the focus on pronunciation is incorporated especially in creative activities that she carried out with her students. She believes that if one achieves success in communication, all aspects involved that led to the learner being communicatively competence has been dealt with. This includes dealing with all the important linguistics elements such as pronunciation, grammar, lexical and syntax. According to Case One, activities that are designed to create maximum participation from the learners creatively would incorporate all the elements of English Language including the pronunciation components.

Another reason that has made Case One to lump the contents of pronunciation into one goal that is to achieve success in communication is based on her schooling experience. Case One has never experienced a pronunciation lesson that is separated from the other perceived important skills in language learning. According to Case One, pronunciation was not highlighted when she was learning English as a student. In fact, it was only dealt through the speaking and reading activities. Case One has ranked pronunciation the lowest among all the language skills and content. Thus, reflected her decision to the integrated approach in her teaching as a way of hiding the pronunciation skill.

*“There is but very little emphasis is given because it’s not ranked as high as the four main skills. It’s more like bringing them to the world. Getting them to broaden their general knowledge. Preparing them for exams. And only then, probably towards the end, pronunciation comes in.”*  
(Subject 1, Interview 3 – Lines 62-70)

Case One could vaguely trace the experience she had on the learning of pronunciation. This clearly shows the reason for generalizing the goals of her ESL lessons. When interviewed about her exposure to pronunciation lessons during her schooling, Case One had only commented that it was only incorporated in speaking and reading activities. This shows that pronunciation was a hidden component in the activities that promotes success in communication such as the speaking activities.

*“We never had any separate lessons. We were not taught any technical terms or separate lessons. It just came within speaking and reading.”*  
(Subject 1, Interview 3 – Lines 70-75)

Her exposure during her professional education to pronunciation instruction in the pedagogical as well as the technical aspects on pronunciation was not far different from her experience in her schooling years too.

*“We just browse through the books, the dictionaries and things like that. So, we don’t really know like we don’t really have a proper lesson plan. We don’t know how to come out with a proper lesson plan. If, I mean, in relation to pronunciation, it’ll be very tough for us. So, we just go along as we teach to make sure they pronounce it correctly. We make them listen and things like that. We don’t really teach them the technical, we don’t bring them so deep inside.”* (Subject 1, Interview 3 – Lines 90-95)

Case Two seems to focus more on grammar and succumb more to the education policy concern in many countries that is being examination oriented. From the interview with Case Two, pronunciation does not appear as the central concern of Case Two in the teaching of English. In fact, she believes that pronunciation is a skill that cannot and should not be taught directly. Her main focus is mainly the grammar component and other skills which are tested in the examination. According to Case Two’s understanding, in Malaysia, the main goal of teaching and learning English was just to be understood and if a speaker is not understood, communication can be replaced or accompanied with gestures. She believes that pronunciation was just a small component played in conveying one’s intended meaning. Having the belief in mind she is in the stand that a focus on pronunciation would make a less impact in helping the learners to improve their proficiency.

*“Pronunciation will slightly help students to improve their English Language but not so much because what is important in our country is the message that gets across. Yes, as long as you are understood and people here, we speak to Indians, Chinese and Malays, right. They are not native speakers. They can understand if you use gestures. You don’t even have to articulate. So, as far as I’m concerned in this country, teaching pronunciation is not that important to improve their English. What is important would be grammar.”* (Subject 2, Interview 2 – Lines 116-129)

Case Two has placed examination as the focus of her teaching especially when she had the experience of being the examiner in one of the Standard English Language examination in Malaysia. At the end of the day, the examination results were the measurement for the teacher’s success in teaching as well as the students’ academic achievement.

*“We focus on the examination format. We want them to be creative in essay writing because I’ve been an examiner.”* (Subject 2, Interview 2 – Lines 187-191)

Case Three has almost similar belief in her focused areas in pronunciation as Case Two. Once again, the content of pronunciation is not included when Case Three designs her lessons. The central focus of her ESL lessons is in grammar and writing. According to Case Three, she believes that she has a responsibility to gear and assist her students to achieve the end result which is to pass in the examination. She added that after all, examination is the only yardstick as to provide an indicator of a students’ success. As a teacher she believes that she has to help her students achieve the desired result.



*“In reality the teacher has to really follow the syllabus. Majority mostly focus on essay. Since essay carries 50 marks and then comprehension that we cover in paper one, 40 marks and another 10% for oral test. So, let say if they want to have like 25% in oral I don’t think it will be a problem. The problem is, whether they have enough time to finish the syllabus or not, whether we have enough time to really focus on those four skills. Listening and speaking, essay writing, comprehension and as well as grammar in a year.”(Subject 3, Interview 2 – Lines 137-144)*

One reason that has made Case Three to spend more time on teaching the tested skills is the time constraint. According to Case Three, there are just too many topics as well as skills that need to be taught however, the time allocated for English lessons does not permit her to focus on pronunciation although she would like to teach pronunciation if she has the luxury of time. The limitation of time has forced her to focus only on the important skills thus, be exam-oriented.

*“We have to finish fast, we have exam week, we have other things coming on, in the next month, so frankly, I don’t really plan to teach or I don’t really teach listening and speaking with my students. I only focus on reading comprehension which is covered in Paper 1 exam. Then I have to teach grammar since it will be useful for them because they need to write correct sentences in their essay and I also have to teach literature and essay since it will come out in the exam so it’s really exam oriented.”(Subject 3, Interview 1 – Lines 619-624)*

Case Three’s choice of content focus was based on the emphasis of the examination. Passing in examination is her priority in the selection of skill to be focused even though she believes that pronunciation does have a place in the learning of English Language. She also acknowledges the fact that if a learner lacks the exposure to the skills of pronunciation the learner might be disadvantaged in their proficiency.

Case Four and Case Five have also shown similar beliefs in the focused areas. Pronunciation again is almost sidelined. However, Case Four and Five did not reveal too much of negative beliefs in the focused area of pronunciation as much as the other participants. Pronunciation was dealt in cases where learners are considered beginners in terms of their proficiency in the language. Although more often, the segmental features of pronunciation were the focus, there were also evidences of indirect dealing with the suprasegmental features of pronunciation especially when it is integrated with other language skills such as reading and speaking.

## DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the findings from the study reflects the complex nature of beliefs as Pajares (1992) and Nespor (1987) posited several characteristics of belief. Beliefs are subject to the level of certainty of an individual, the evaluation based on the norms that an individual hold identity of an individual. The negative beliefs that the teachers hold about pronunciation instructions has been the result of the teachers’ previous experience in schools and professional training. Besides the teachers personal learning experience, contextual factors such as the teachers and examination demands are also the precursors of the teachers’ beliefs. The participants of this study have shown to possess negative beliefs about their role and focused areas in pronunciation instruction. The negative beliefs they have are influenced by the negative experience they had with pronunciation instructions. The absence of pronunciation teaching in their learning years have been their reason for them to defend and justify themselves against the negative beliefs they have about pronunciation instructions. However, behind the negative beliefs, the participants still have the awareness on the relevance of the skill in improving learners’ proficiency. The participants have developed negative beliefs about pronunciation instructions due to the “passed down” practices of trivializing pronunciation. Another explanation to the formation of the negative belief is due to the conflict that arises between the implementation of pronunciation instructions and the English Language curriculum.

### *Trivializing Pronunciation*

As reported in this study the participants have allocated more attention to grammar and writing. This study has also proven that the participants have limited knowledge on the pedagogical aspects of pronunciation. Thus, the activities

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and tasks that they use in teaching pronunciation are mostly based on what they believe the focus on pronunciation should be and their limited knowledge about pronunciation content and instructions. Thus, the amount of emphasis that pronunciation instructions deserve is trivialized.

The findings of this study have also proven that the participants have trivialized pronunciation in their ESL classes. This fact contradicts Setter and Jenkins' (2005) study where they regarded pronunciation as playing a major role in the L2 speakers' personal and social lives. This can thus be concluded that the participants have failed to fulfil the learners' needs in order to be communicatively competent in the second language. Celce Murcia et al (2006) had stated that when ESL teachers neglected the pronunciation skills in their ESL lessons, they have abrogated their duty as an ESL teacher.

#### *Conflict with the Implementation of Pronunciation Instructions and the English Language Curriculum*

In this study, the ESL teachers were found to have taught the pronunciation component through the traditional methods although their beliefs stated that in teaching pronunciation, the CLT approach should be used. Furthermore, Wagner (1996) argues that if the real concept of an approach and the teachers' beliefs about the approach are not in line, teachers will tend to interpret innovative ideas in light of their own theories to conform to their own teaching style, which means that new ideas will not be implemented, as intended by the curriculum planners. This brings to the implication that the teacher's will tend to alter their methods based on their beliefs of what and how English should be taught regardless what is professed in the English Language curriculum.

In addition to this, Littlewood (2007) highlighted in his article some of the challenges faced by East Asian classrooms which intend to employ this approach. The challenges include the external conflict with the educational policy that hinders the implementation of the CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) and TBLT (Task Based Language Teaching) approaches. In the KBSM English Language syllabus, pronunciation should be taught in integration with other skills, however, the syllabus and examination policy do not support the inclusion of pronunciation. ESL teachers could conveniently leave pronunciation out of their ESL lessons as it does not affect the performance of the students and their performance as teachers. Thus, a mismatch of the desired approach in teaching pronunciation and the positioning of the skill in the English Language curriculum are evident.

#### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study suggests that there is a pressing need for more research to be conducted specifically on ESL pronunciation instructions. First and foremost, the focus of future research in this area could focus on the assessments methods that allow the inclusion of pronunciation component to be assessed in integration with other skills. Although in the Malaysian oral examination, pronunciation appears to be one of the construct of assessments, based on the findings of the study, the ESL teachers tend to neglect the pronunciation component and had evaluated their learners' proficiency based on their overall communicative ability. This appears to be one of the reasons that pronunciation is trivialized. The assessment on pronunciation should be a benchmark of how the learners have improved or need further improvement on their intelligibility of pronunciation.

Secondly, it is recommended that future research could focus on ESL teachers in wider settings where participants of the research from various schools could be involved. In this light, it would be valuable if the school factors could be the basis for the selection of participants. This is to investigate the conditions of the schools that might influence the teachers' beliefs and decisions to incorporate pronunciation in the ESL lessons. This study has revealed that contextual factors which are mostly the factors that relate to the school have strongly influenced the teachers' beliefs and decisions. Thus, it is worth that further investigation on the contextual factors is conducted to further understand the problems and issues related to each factor.

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