



Teaching Beliefs as a Dominant Factor Affecting English Instructors' Choice of Techniques to Teach Young Language Learners

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To help their children obtain higher scores in English and prepare them for a better future, many Vietnamese parents are likely to send them to a commercial English language center (CELC) for private lessons. Accordingly, the quality of CELC instructors' teaching receives remarkable attention. It is crucial to explore what factors affect their teaching instructions as well as their choice of instructional strategies. This qualitative study used Grounded Theory to gauge a deep understanding of factors affecting 21 CELC teachers' choices of teaching techniques which directly decide whether their teaching is good or bad. The data from 21 semi-structured interviews revealed that factors, including teaching conditions, teachers' sense of technique's effectiveness, teaching experience, time allotted, formal and informal professional training and development, and stakeholders' influence, significantly affected their choice of teaching techniques used in the classroom. Additionally, the Grounded Theory study indicated that teaching beliefs were more influential, even above other factors. These beliefs can be tentatively classified into (i) conviction of the effectiveness of the teaching technique, (ii) pressure from stakeholders to use a particular teaching technique, and (iii) contextual factors that may affect the selection of techniques. The article discusses the findings in light of the theory of planned behavior and Vietnamese educational and socio-cultural values. It has implications for teacher training and teacher professional development.

Keywords: teacher beliefs, teacher behaviors, motivations, young learners, English teaching

INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, growing foreign investment over the last three decades has made English skills an essential credit for employment (Bodewig et al., 2014; Le, 2011). English has become a compulsory subject in the curricula of all levels of education, starting from

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grade 3 (Phyak & Bui, 2014). The country has also witnessed tremendous English-teaching reforms and investments in improving teacher quality under the National Foreign Language Project 2020 (Nguyen, 2012; Nguyen, 2017; Phyak & Bui, 2014). Despite this investment, by graduation, many students can still not use English for daily conversation and work purposes. Therefore, several parents are likely to send their children to a commercial English language center (CELC) for private lessons to help them obtain higher scores in English and prepare them for a better future. As a result, there has been an expansion of courses designed for children in CELCs across the country, especially in big cities (<https://bmiglobaled.com/Market-Reports/Vietnam/education>). While these private lessons have contributed significantly to developing children's English skills, the quality of these English courses is often scrutinized regarding teachers and facilities. Some CELCs are equipped with the latest technologies, luxurious facilities, and qualified teachers. Others operate with a modest investment in facilities and employ teachers with just an acceptable level of English to teach children, including graduates of English Teaching, English Studies, and other disciplines. It is noted that most CELC teachers are casual and part-time with a permanent daytime jobs. Therefore, they may not devote full attention to their CELC job. However, the major problem with the quality of learning in these CELCs derives from the young learners, whose ages range from 6 to 11 in this study. Many children lack the motivation to learn in a CELC because they often treat these evening and weekend classes as 'extra.' Based on the authors' work experience in this setting for more than ten years, in most cases, children's learning is rarely correctly assessed, and even if it is, the results may not be meaningful to them. Like the teachers who have a daytime job, the children attend these classes after spending the whole or half day in compulsory schooling, thus appearing to have little energy for more learning activities.

This context suggests that improving children's engagement with learning in a CELC is vital to maintaining the quality of the learning outcomes. Student motivation refers to 'the degree to which a student puts effort into and focuses on learning to achieve successful outcomes' (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012, p. 253), whether intrinsic or extrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Student engagement is 'the range of activities a learner employs to generate — sometimes consciously, other times unconsciously — the interest, focus, and an intention required to build knowledge and skills' (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 16). Student engagement can be ongoing or solely a reaction to a challenge (Klem & Connell, 2004). If teachers can use a teaching method to draw children's attention or stimulate them to react to a learning activity, they help children to better engage with learning. Recent studies have found a positive correlation between students' motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Burdina et al., 2019; Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 2014; Mega et al., 2014). For example, using data from 5,805 undergraduate students, Mega et al. (2014) found that motivation and self-regulated learning could mediate emotions and help students achieve better results. Thus, it can be concluded that if teachers select a suitable teaching technique, they can motivate children to engage with learning, which should, in turn, help improve their understanding.

While there may be several ways to improve students' learning motivation, carefully adopting teaching techniques for use in the classroom may be the most feasible because

it falls within teachers' expertise and responsibilities. Teachers' careful selection and use of effective teaching techniques have been proven to improve students' motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, and learning achievements (Tentolouris, 2022). Thus, in the case of children learning English in a CELC in Vietnam, purposeful adoption of active teaching techniques — those that involve children in doing something besides passive listening (Chen & Yang, 2017) — may yield some benefits for children's learning. Accordingly, English teachers' choice of instructional strategies plays an essential role in deciding whether or not their teaching is effective. Consequently, it is worth investigating what factors affect teachers' choice of instructional strategies. Doing so will provide implications for teaching children in CELCs. Therefore, this current study addressed one research question: "What factors affect English instructors' choice of instructional strategies to teach young language learners in the CELCs?"

Literature Review

English Language Teaching Techniques

In this study, a teaching technique is defined as a particular strategy or contrivance that teachers use to achieve an immediate objective in the classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). English is an international language that enhances people's opportunities for education and employment (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). Therefore, English language teaching and learning has developed quickly with its distinctive teaching principles, methods, and research. According to Tavoosy and Jelveh (2019), teaching methods, techniques, and strategies are somewhat similar. Therefore, they will not be used separately but interchangeably in this current study. Throughout English developmental course, several teaching methods have been developed (Intarapanich, 2013; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). At first, the language was taught in an environment where only the target language was spoken. This was known as the direct or natural method. Then came the grammar-translation and structural approach, which focused heavily on equipping students with rules in language use. The development of behavioral theories primed the emergence of the audio-lingual method and suggestopedia. The former stressed the importance of reinforcement while the latter emphasized providing positive suggestions and reducing students' fears of their limitations (Intarapanich, 2013). In the 1980s, a focus on practical communication gave rise to the communicative language teaching method (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Other methods, such as the silent and task-based approaches, aim to stimulate learners' autonomous learning (Intarapanich, 2013; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Recent years have also seen the integration of information technology into teaching English, creating computer-assisted language learning and mobile learning (Beatty, 2013; Chang et al., 2012). Lately, there has been a rise in blended learning, where traditional learning methods are combined with digital media to elevate the quality of learning and take advantage of technological advances (Sun & Qiu, 2017;). In the Vietnamese context, English has been taught as a foreign language. The Vietnamese students, accordingly, have not experienced the direct or natural method like those in English-speaking countries (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). With the flow of time and the development of teaching methods, Vietnamese students also learn English with the methods mentioned above, such as grammar-translation (Pham & Da Tran, 2021), audiolingual method (Pham & Da Tran, 2021; Phuong & Nguyen, 2017),

suggestopedia (Nguyen, 2022), communicative language teaching method (Mai, 2017), task-based approaches (Duong & Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen, 2022), or even using computer-based language learning and mobile-based language learning (Hoi & Mu, 2021).

Especially for children, the total physical response method is used to teach language through the repetition of physical actions, such as standing up, sitting down, opening the door, etc. (Astutik et al., 2019). This method emphasizes aural comprehension (Hanifi & Rahayu, 2017) and later prepares for natural linguistic development (Suryana et al., 2021; Intarapanich, 2013). Gamification is also used to help increase young learners' motivation for learning by using games, songs, and chants to stimulate phonological awareness (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2019). This brief review names only some popular teaching techniques/approaches in the English-language teaching industry. They have developed alongside teaching-learning-related theories and technological advances. With the abundance of English-language teaching techniques and strategies, teachers' adoption of a method is vital to developing children's English skills.

Factors Affecting Teachers' Choice of Instructional Strategies

Not many studies have investigated factors affecting EFL instructors' choice of instructional strategies in the CELC context. Therefore, this current study modified existing findings in the previous studies to build a framework for the factors affecting English teachers' choice of instructional strategies. EFL teachers will desire to use a particular teaching technique if they are convinced by its pedagogical soundness (Chetty et al., 2019; Traynor, 2003). In other words, the technique's effectiveness in their students' learning outcomes is a significant factor affecting EFL teachers' decision on whether they use it in their classes or not. Traynor (2003) also indicated the impact of EFL teachers' teaching experience and students' reactions to using instructional techniques on their choices. Teaching experience promisingly provides EFL teachers with a general understanding of a technique's effectiveness in their students' learning (Dewaele et al., 2018). For students' reactions, it is inferred that teachers will be more motivated to use a particular technique if their students show positive attitudes toward it (Francisco & Celon, 2020). Standing from another perspective has given Diaz-Maggioli (2004) different ideas about the factors affecting EFL teachers' choice of instructional strategies. For Diaz-Maggioli (2004), teachers' teaching styles differ from others regarding their choice of teaching techniques in their classrooms. Similarly, Baleghizadeh and Shakouri (2017) highlighted the correlation between teachers' teaching styles and their self-efficacy in using instructional strategies in practice. As a domino effect, teaching styles are also affected and formulated by many other factors related to their career stage, knowledge, personals, professional, curriculum, and institutional requirements.

The Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs and Their Choice of Instructional Strategies

The relationship between teacher beliefs and behavior has often been examined, but a consensus has not yet been reached. Some studies have found that teacher beliefs correlate with their behavior; some do not; others have discovered that the relationship

is mediated by personal and contextual factors (Basturkmen, 2012; Ertmer et al., 2012; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Nghia, 2017; Tran, 2017; Santos & Miguel, 2019; Schmid, 2018). There have been both quantitative and qualitative studies that examine the relationship between the two variables, mainly in formal educational contexts. However, the influence of teacher beliefs on teaching behavior is still underrepresented. In this article, the research team will address the literature gap by exploring types of teacher beliefs that influence the adoption of particular teaching techniques to motivate and engage young learners (aged 6 to 11) in CELCs in Vietnam.

To teach effectively, teachers must possess knowledge of the education system, subject, and students, as well as have mastery of pedagogical and assessment methods (Selvi, 2010). Their awareness of a teaching situation or educational context or the differences in the learning needs between student groups will also help make them better teachers. Although there is no clear distinction between awareness and knowledge, the former strongly connects with the latter (Trevethan, 2017). However, even when teachers have awareness, knowledge, and skills for using a teaching technique, they may not employ it in the classroom. Their use of a specific teaching technique seems to depend on their beliefs about whether it is appropriate, effective, and optimal in their teaching context (Ertmer et al., 2012).

Teacher belief is a persistent dispositional state of mind that may or may not manifest itself in either consciousness or teaching behavior (Armstrong, 2001). It is based on sociocultural background, professional expertise, life experiences, and working environments (Mihaela & Alina-Oana, 2015; Tiwari et al., 2015; Wang & Du, 2016). Many researchers contend that teachers' knowledge and beliefs influence their teaching practices (Pajares, 1992). It is noted that teacher knowledge and beliefs are often treated as one due to the complexity of separating the two (Zheng, 2009). However, teacher beliefs seem more influential because 'the potent affective, evaluative, and episodic nature of beliefs makes them a filter through which new phenomena are interpreted' (Pajares, 1992). Both teacher knowledge and beliefs are malleable, but the latter appears more durable (Spruce & Bol, 2015), particularly those related to essential socio-cultural aspects (Tiwari et al., 2015). For example, in countries embedded in Confucian culture, such as China and Vietnam, teaching is seen as a noble profession; teachers have the power to influence students, and they expect students to accept their teaching without question (Pham, 2010). Such beliefs have lasted for thousands of years and are a significant barrier to recent teaching reforms that use student-centered pedagogical approaches (Pham, 2010).

Several studies have produced mixed findings about the relationship between teacher beliefs and teaching behaviors (e.g., Basturkmen, 2012; Ertmer et al., 2012; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Tran, 2017). For example, a qualitative study conducted by Tran (2017) showed an indirect relationship between the beliefs of Vietnamese university teachers and how they teach generic skills to students. Tran found that institutional leadership and teachers' motivation affected the translation of teacher beliefs into actual teaching of generic skills. In addition, while investigating the relationship between peripheral and core beliefs about language learning and behavior related to English grammar teaching techniques, Phipps and Borg (2009) found that participants' practices were not

consistent with peripheral beliefs but were aligned with their core beliefs. Furthermore, reviewing 17 publications related to language teacher beliefs and their behaviors, Basturkmen (2012) concluded that there was a limited correlation between their beliefs and behaviors. The author found that contextual factors and constraints mediated the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their behaviors. Therefore, teacher beliefs can be viewed as a reliable guide to their selection of teaching techniques, together with teachers' accumulated learning experiences and planned aspects of teaching.

Findings from the studies reported above are well aligned with the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). According to this theory, one's behavior is guided by three kinds of beliefs: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs. Behavioral beliefs are about the results of a particular behavior. Such beliefs produce a positive or negative attitude toward the behavior based on subjective evaluations of the outcomes the behavior may produce. Normative beliefs are beliefs about the expectations of others or social pressure for or against certain behaviors. Control beliefs are beliefs about the existence of factors that may affect the performance of a specific behavior. When these three kinds of beliefs are combined, they form a behavioral intention, which may be translated into actual behaviors under suitable conditions. For example, a teacher believes that music videos can motivate young children to learn (behavioral beliefs), the method is encouraged by the CELC managers and is expected by the children (normative beliefs), and it is convenient because CELC facilities are available (control beliefs); therefore, the teacher decides to use music videos in their classes.

METHOD

Research Design

The research team conducted a qualitative case study in CELCs in Vietnam to explore the relationship between teacher beliefs and their teaching behaviors in relation to the teaching techniques they used to promote children's learning motivation and engagement. A qualitative method was appropriate for this study because it can investigate and understand individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences regarding a phenomenon in their setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is a powerful way of exploring an issue in depth and within its actual context (Yin, 2017) and has the potential to generate tentative hypotheses for future research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Additionally, this current study used Grounded Theory to explain more profoundly factors affecting EFL teachers' choice of teaching techniques. Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Marzukic et al. (2021) suggested the grounded theory as a tool for instructing and helping qualitative researchers avoid these limitations of sociological analysis imposed by large-scale approaches. Not based only on theory emerging from a purely inductive process, the research team used the theory to involve a constant two-way dialectical process between the collected data and the presented framework.

Participants

Data were collected in a big city in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. Using the convenience sampling technique, 21 teachers were invited to participate in the project (Etikan et al., 2016). Potential participants were informed of the research purpose, what

they would have to do, and how their identity would be protected. Besides, they could withdraw if they felt uncomfortable being a participant in the study. The participants were called by pseudonyms to keep their information confidential. Table 1 displays the demographic information of the current participants.

Table 1
Demographic information of participants

No.	Participants	Gender	Age	Educational level	Teaching experience for YLLs	Employment contract	Discipline
1.	Olivia	Female	<25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Teaching
2.	Emma	Female	>25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Teaching
3.	Thor	Male	>25	Postgraduate	>3	Full-time	English Studies
4.	Amelia	Female	>25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Teaching
5.	Isabella	Female	>25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Teaching
6.	Mia	Female	<25	Undergraduate	<3	Full-time	English Studies
7.	Evelyn	Female	>25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Studies
8.	Benjamin	Male	<25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Teaching
9.	Steven	Male	>25	Undergraduate	<3	Full-time	English Studies
10.	Luna	Female	>25	Undergraduate	<3	Full-time	English Studies
11.	Sofia	Female	>25	Postgraduate	>3	Full-time	English Teaching
12.	Chloe	Female	>25	Undergraduate	>3	Full-time	English Studies
13.	Violet	Female	<25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Teaching
14.	Zoey	Female	>25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Studies
15.	Stella	Female	>25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Teaching
16.	Lucy	Female	<25	Postgraduate	<3	Full-time	English Studies
17.	Naomi	Female	>25	Undergraduate	<3	Part-time	English Teaching
18.	Brooklyn	Female	>25	Undergraduate	>3	Part-time	English Studies
19.	Valentina	Female	>25	Undergraduate	>3	Full-time	English Studies
20.	Quinn	Female	<25	Undergraduate	>3	Full-time	English Teaching
21.	Athena	Female	>25	Postgraduate	>3	Part-time	English Studies

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews (Horton et al., 2004) were used to collect data from the 21 teachers. Before the interviews, the interview questions were piloted with two teachers to determine if they could be used to collect relevant data for the research. Some minor rewording and restructuring of the questions occurred after this process. In the interviews, in addition to background information, participants were brought in to discuss their work, what they had done to motivate and engage children with learning, the reasons they chose a particular teaching technique and/or factors affecting their choice of techniques. All the interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and reviewed immediately after the interview to help the researchers determine the adequacy of the data. Follow-up interviews via telephone were also conducted to clarify teachers' perspectives.

Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed each interview independently using a content analysis approach (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). They then compared the codes, discussed inconsistencies in the coding, and agreed on the solution. In the next step, the researchers compared the codes between interviews to generate common themes and

variances. By the end of this process, the research team identified nine factors influencing the adoption of teaching techniques, not including teachers' teaching beliefs. The researchers then analyzed the findings through the lens of the theory of planned behavior regarding the educational and socio-cultural aspects of Vietnam. Later, the research team reviewed the existing literature and findings to determine whether any other factor was underrepresented in previous studies. Finally, the researchers developed a theoretical explanatory model for factors affecting EFL instructors' choice of instructional strategies in teaching young language learners at CELCs. Besides the nine factors that the interviewees directly indicated, the research team used the Grounded Theory to highlight teachers' teaching beliefs as a dominant factor affecting the teachers' choice of instructional strategies.

Procedure

The study was conducted following these steps. First, the research team searched for the literature to build the framework of the study. Later, the team designed the interview questions and chose the participants for the pilot study. Conducting the pilot study helped the research team check the validity and reliability of the instrument. Afterward, the researchers used convenience sampling to recruit the official participants. The interviews were then conducted to collect data. For the next step, the research team used thematic analysis to analyze the data. After figuring out the factors affecting the participants' choice of instructional strategies through themes, the research team used Grounded Theory to analyze the participants' excerpts again by constant comparison to see whether they meant anything else. As a result, the team developed a theoretical explanatory model to explain the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through the qualitative content analysis approach, the researchers identified 10 factors influencing their adoption of a teaching technique. Table 2 manifests the summary of the results.

Table 2

A summary of beliefs that affected teachers' adoption of a teaching technique

Factors	Frequency (N = 21)
1. Teachers' teaching beliefs	21
2. Teaching conditions	17
3. Teachers' sense of technique's effectiveness	16
4. Teachers' teaching experience	15
5. Time	11
6. Preservice teacher education	6
7. Young language learners' expectations	4
8. Student parents' demands	3
9. Managers' requests	3
10. Collegial impact	3

Teaching Conditions

Most teachers considered the available CELC facilities before adopting a teaching technique. Some teaching techniques required careful preparation of teaching aids, hand-outs, stationery, and tools. If teachers decided to use these and the CELC did not

have them, they had to put their hands into their own pockets. To avoid this, they chose a teaching technique that could take advantage of whatever facilities the CELC provided. Olivia and Emma said,

“The CELC where I work equips the classroom with a big TV screen, so I often show music videos or clips related to the lessons so the kids can learn better.” (Olivia)

“I know some techniques useful for teaching young language learners, but the facilities at the CELC where I work are not qualified enough to do that... Therefore, I am afraid I cannot use these techniques successfully.” (Emma)

According to Yousaf et al. (2021), teaching and learning facilities significantly impact language learners' motivation and learning achievements. Therefore, lacking qualified facilities prevents EFL teachers from employing teaching techniques that can be useful for their learners. For instance, Emma's excerpt indicated a downturn in her willingness to employ the techniques as she believed that the facilities in her workplace were not good enough to meet her demands.

Class size was another factor that teachers often considered before they decided to adopt a teaching technique. As the number of students in a class varies across CELCs, using the same teaching technique in two different CELCs may yield different results. Thor and Ben explained the influence of class size on their intentional and actual use of a teaching technique as follows,

“Class size does influence the effectiveness of a teaching technique. A teaching technique may not yield learning effects as it should if excessive students are in class. The teacher cannot observe each student and check whether they understand the lesson for that day.” (Thor)

“It is tough for me to check all students' products if a 25 square classroom includes more than twenty-five students...” (Ben)

Unfortunately, most CELCs often have larger class sizes to reduce the course tuition cost per student. Also, classrooms are not well built, so noise from one class can easily disturb other types through thin walls. Therefore, teachers reported that they had to consider the controllability of a teaching technique before deciding to use it, as they did not want to disturb colleagues and their students who studied in neighboring classes. Amelia said,

“Organizing a game depends much on teachers' ability to control it because it often causes much noise, disturbing nearby classes. [...]. Organizing games will not bother surrounding classes if the number of students in a class is not big.” (Amelia)

Like school classrooms, those in CELCs in the Vietnamese context are small but include many students (Tien et al., 2020). Accordingly, it negatively affects Vietnamese teachers' applications of innovation in their classes because class size is undoubtedly an obstacle to innovative teaching methods (Hoa & Tuan, 2007). Besides, many previous studies have highlighted that noise-making is one of the most significant barriers to employing communicative methods in the Vietnamese context (e.g., Vuong et al., 2018;

Phuong, 2019; Ngoc & Yen, 2018). Therefore, the teachers' choice of instructional strategies was remarkably affected by this factor.

Teachers' Sense of Technique's Effectiveness

The teachers reported that these techniques promoted children's learning motivation and engagement because they could use the funny activities to draw on children's interests, attract attention, and increase participation. Isabella and Mia stated,

“Teaching young language learners is very different from teaching adults or teenagers. Especially, we [EFL teachers] have to find ways to encourage them as well as enhance their learning motivation. Consequently, teaching techniques useful for these things will be more accepted....” (Isabella)

“I just use the teaching techniques that help motivate my young language learners to learn. If not, I will not use them in my teaching...” (Mia)

The above excerpts indicated the differences between teaching YLLs and others, such as teenagers or adult learners. According to Arikan and Taraf (2010), teaching English to YLLs has several challenges due to their characteristics that are entirely different from those of older learners. One of the most significant factors differing from these characteristics is YLLs' motivation for language learning (Li et al., 2018). Therefore, teaching YLLs requires the teachers to pay remarkable attention to enhancing their learning motivation using appropriate teaching techniques.

Teachers' Teaching Experience

In the interviews, the teachers mentioned various techniques they had been using to motivate young language learners to learn, such as games, pictures, music videos, and movies, miming or total physical response, role-play or drama, storytelling, and a blend of these. Evelyn and Benjamin said,

“I use many techniques to teach young language learners. For example, gamification techniques, storytelling, total physical response, or others are frequently used in my classes as I believe that they are helpful for my young language learners, especially their learning motivation....” (Evelyn)

“We [EFL teachers] have to change the teaching techniques frequently because young language learners lose their motivation for learning easily. Using various teaching techniques, such as games, films, role-play, drama, and the like, will help avoid their learning boredom....” (Benjamin)

Throughout the experiences in employing these teaching techniques, most participants reported that they adopted a teaching technique if they believed, either via their learning or experience in using the method, that it was effective for stimulating young children to learn. Teachers often matched the suitability of a teaching technique with children's age, learning style, attitudes, likes and dislikes, and their learning situation at the CELC. Below are examples of teachers' perspectives on the suitability of different teaching techniques for young learners.

“After using this technique [drama], I have found that my students enjoy it. At first, they are shy and do not know what to do, but then they gradually become more

active and confident. In addition, I feel that they like going to class more than before.” (Steven)

“A [suitable] technique is more about communication activities. That is, children will exchange ideas orally rather than write. They have already registered so much during the day. So, when they come to the CELC in the evening, they are bored with writing lessons. They prefer something to play with. I have learned these in my working time in this CELC.” (Thor)

Lessons learned from practice through teaching experience help EFL teachers evaluate the effectiveness of each teaching technique for different students. It is similar to the study by Brown and Rose (1995), which emphasized the impact of EFL teachers’ teaching experience on their choice of teaching techniques. Specifically, teachers would tend to avoid using a particular teaching technique if they used to experience failures in implementing the technique in their classes. Based on Thor’s excerpt, he preferred communicative teaching approaches to reading and writing tasks as he had observed their positive impacts on his YLLs’ engagement in English classes.

Time

Teachers often considered the time a teaching technique would require to complete all learning activities. As different teachers may teach a class, each had to cover all session content so that their colleagues could continue with the next lesson. Thus, time constraints became a factor that teachers had to be aware of when adopting a teaching technique. For example, Isabella reported on the influence of time limits on her use of drama:

“Drama is quite time-consuming because all children are involved in it. I can only save a maximum of 20–25 minutes for acting out the conversation. That amount of time excludes the time I teach new words and structures and play the CD for the kids to rehearse the talk two to three times, depending on the complexity of the conversation. Then I let them practice in groups and complete some gap-filling in the workbook [before acting out the conversation].” (Isabella)

As another example, Athena explained why she limited the use of games and pictures in the class:

“It will take your time and grey matter to think and create new effective games because children do not like playing only one kind of game. Teachers must be creative in using games to achieve the objectives successfully. Honestly, I do not want to spend much time designing games when I teach in the CELC....” (Athena)

Undoubtedly, the time allotted is a considerable factor affecting EFL teachers’ choice of a particular technique in their teaching. Isabella’s excerpt showed a lack of desire to employ the drama technique, which helps develop YLLs’ communicative competence but is quite time-consuming (Alasmari & Alshae’el, 2020). However, Athena’s excerpt highlighted the impact of EFL teachers’ awareness of their responsibility for teaching. For most CELC teachers, teaching is a part-time job to gain extra income in addition to their primary day job. Therefore, they do not want to invest substantial effort and time in

preparing their CELC teaching activities. Accordingly, they would choose a teaching technique that took little time and effort to prepare.

Teacher Professional Training and Development

Teacher professional training and development could be gained through both formal and informal training events. Some teachers often associate their beliefs about the effectiveness of a teaching technique (to motivate and engage) with their formal teacher education, teacher orientation, training, and professional development. Some others read books to foster their understanding of teaching techniques, their impacts on students' learning, and how to apply these techniques to their teaching in practice. Amelia and Olivia remarked,

“I just learned these teaching techniques from my teacher education course. Then I could experiment with these effects based on my practice of using them in authentic teaching situations. Then I must be flexible in using them, depending on each class's characteristics so that the technique can become more effective.” (Amelia)

“As far as I know from reading teaching method books, some developed countries also use these methods to teach children. Active teaching lets children learn while playing, not necessarily alone, without any authentic situations or associated learning aids.” (Olivia)

As observed in the excerpts, participating in teacher professional training and development made a massive impact on the teachers' choice of teaching techniques. Many previous studies have affirmed that participation in professional development training will change EFL teachers' teaching practices (e.g., Borg, 2018; Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Yaakob et al., 2020). Throughout these training events, the teachers would enhance their pedagogical knowledge allowing them to evaluate the suitability of a particular teaching technique for their YLLs. Accordingly, it was not surprising to observe the impact of this factor on the teachers' choice of teaching techniques in their classrooms.

Learners' Expectations

Other stakeholders' influences also affected the teachers' choice of instructional strategies. Foremost among these was their young learners' preference for a particular technique. For example, Sofia and Mia shared their view on the influence of children's characteristics and their preference for games on teachers' use of games:

“After I organize a game for the children to play, if they like it, they will ask me to manage that game again. Each kid may prefer a particular type of game. However, I do not always follow their request but stick to the games or equivalent activities that I have prepared to ensure that I can cover the content of that teaching session.” (Sofia)

“My learners vary their preferable activities. Therefore, it is not very easy to satisfy all students' expectations. Therefore, I often organize activities that can cover the content of the lesson rather than those related to my learners' expectations. However, I sometimes still find some funny tasks that my learners want to do to help increase their enjoyment in my classes.” (Mia)

Tileston (2010) affirmed a strong relationship between learners' motivation for English learning and their expectations. In other words, failing to meet learners' expectations will decrease their learning motivation and vice versa. However, YLLs' awareness does not fully develop because of their lacking living experiences (Arikan & Taraf, 2010). Therefore, the teachers rarely organized the activities that their YLLs asked for.

Student Parents' Demands

Parents' opinions were another factor that these teachers considered when adopting a teaching technique to motivate and engage young learners. A couple of teachers mentioned that parents wanted them to focus on preparing children for English tests and exams for their formal education instead of learning to use the language practically. Mia and Steven remarked,

“Sometimes, children's parents pass by [the classroom] and see that we are organizing some games, which we know are helpful for children's learning, despite some noise. Nevertheless, when they see that, they do not think as we think; they feel that we cannot control the class, not that we are teaching them using an active method.” (Mia)

“To some learner parents, learning at CELCs is to help their learners obtain high scores in their school examinations. Therefore, they usually ask CELC instructors like to focus on test-based teaching techniques. Accordingly, games are not welcomed by these parents...” (Steven)

According to Mellati and Khademi (2018), parents' expectations of their children's teachers strongly affect the teachers' teaching performances. In this current study, the impact of parents' demands was even more substantial. As CELC is a for-profit business, meeting parents' expectations is essential for the existence of many CELCs and the continuation of employment contracts for many teachers. Therefore, some teachers consider learner parents' expectations of how their children should be taught and for what end.

Managers' Requests

In addition, many interviewed teachers said their adoption of a teaching technique was influenced by CELC managers' requests to use specific teaching techniques in their centers. Chloe and Naomi said,

“The CELC's managers require me to use specific teaching techniques for kids' classes. They also want me to cover all content in the book. I think it depends on learners to adopt a suitable teaching technique. The center sets up everything in advance, but following their syllabus and lesson plans or not depends on each teacher.” (Chloe)

“In my CELC, we [English teachers] do not need to have our lesson plans because everything is prepared. The center provides us with a syllabus and lesson plans before we teach a course. Therefore, it saves much time for deciding what should be done in the classroom...” (Naomi)

Usually, discussions about the role of superiors in education are relevant to the impact of institutional support on teachers' professional development (e.g., Harland & Kinder,

1997; Kadujevich, 2006; Kibler, 2013). However, in the Vietnamese context, which indicates a significant power distance (Nguyen et al., 2021), the impact of educational superiors in CELCs is even more remarkable on the teachers' choice of teaching activities. Such an imposition received different responses from the teachers, but they generally confirmed that they prioritized students' learning needs more often than managers' requirements.

Collegial Impact

The teachers also associated their choice of teaching techniques with their observations in colleagues' classes. Violet and Quinn stated,

“I learned to teach children from colleagues. In addition, by experimenting with these teaching techniques, I will use them more often if I recognize that a teaching technique is effective and that children like it.” (Violet)

“I usually observe my colleagues' classes to learn more about the useful techniques for teaching YLLs as I do not have rich teaching experience. Thanks to them, I learned more interesting classroom activities. I have applied some of them and gained a lot of benefits from them in my classrooms...” (Quinn)

Classroom observation, considered an informal professional development training, has been approved as an effective way to enhance teachers' teaching performance (Kane et al., 2011; Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Throughout observations in colleagues' classrooms, the teachers could re-evaluate the effectiveness of a particular technique, reflect on their implementation, or even learn new techniques they had never used in their classes.

Teachers' Teaching Beliefs as the Most Dominant Factor

Using Grounded Theory allowed the research team to determine the teachers' teaching beliefs as the most dominant factor affecting their choice of teaching techniques. Teachers' beliefs and their choice of instructional strategies will be discussed in light of the theory of planned behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2012), linking the discussion to the sociocultural and educational context of Vietnam. According to the theory of planned behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2012), three types of beliefs can drive human behaviors: behavioral, normative, and control. Backtracking to the literature, behavioral beliefs produce one's positive or negative attitudes towards a particular behavior by using subjective evaluation of its outcomes; normative beliefs are related to the behaviors caused by what others expect, and control beliefs are positively correlated with the factors affecting one's behaviors. The teachers' behavior regarding adopting a suitable technique to motivate and engage children was directed by nine belief variables, which appeared to match with the behavioral, normative, and control beliefs, as noted in the theory of planned behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Based on the presented findings, even though the teachers did not mention the impact of their teaching beliefs on their choice of instructional strategies, three main domains of teacher beliefs could be observed, each of which appeared to be associated with different personal factors and educational and socio-cultural values.

The analysis revealed that their beliefs in the effectiveness of a teaching technique — tentatively called pedagogical practice beliefs — were built from their formal education,

self-professional development, peer learning, and experience in implementing a teaching technique in their class. Indeed, all knowledge related to teaching approaches, student characteristics, English subject matter, and so on that preservice teacher acquires from their teacher education program would serve as the most valuable currency for them to enter the teaching profession after some initial attempts to apply these in their teaching practicum. The same applies to those who did not major in Teaching or Education but entered the teaching profession after an intensive induction training program provided by CELC managers. Once entering the job, they had more opportunities to experiment in authentic teaching situations. Via this type of experimental learning, i.e., learning through life experience (Kolb, 2015), teachers critically analyzed what they had studied and reflected upon their experience using a teaching technique. Informal learning from colleagues was another channel for them to validate whether a teaching technique was adequate and appropriate for a teaching situation. All of these factors indicate that their expertise accumulated from their formal and non-formal education, informal learning, and work experience, which collectively contributed to forming their beliefs, just as previous studies have noted (Mihaela & Alina-Oana, 2015; Tiwari et al., 2015; Wang & Du, 2016). The teachers' belief in the effectiveness of a teaching technique was based on their application of it in the classroom suggests that knowledge resulting from experimental learning seems to be an essential element of this belief component. This implies that teacher educators should provide more teaching practice sessions or class observations if they want teachers to believe in and adopt recommended teaching techniques. Theory-based teacher training alone may not convince teachers of the effectiveness of a teaching method/technique.

In addition, the study demonstrated that the demands or expectations of stakeholders involved in the business at a CELC could also form another belief type, tentatively called social norm beliefs. Teachers were aware that stakeholders such as CELC managers, children, parents, and the general public expected them to use specific teaching techniques with the children. Thus, they considered these expectations or preferences when adopting a teaching technique. This was consistent with previous studies that found that social factors constitute teacher beliefs and affect teaching behaviors (Tiwari et al., 2015; Wang & Du, 2016) and with the concept of normative beliefs in the theory of planned behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2012). In Vietnam, the teaching profession is regarded as noble, and teachers receive much respect from students, parents, and the general public (Dang et al., 2013; Pham, 2010). Traditionally, teachers decide everything that happens in the classroom, and others involved often submit to the teacher's authority. However, in the context of a CELC, teachers were aware that these stakeholders held some power over their teaching because the education offered by a CELC was a kind of education-related business, unlike traditional education, where teachers enjoy the status of nobility. They may lose their job if they cannot satisfy customers (i.e., students and their parents) or comply with CELC regulations. Concerning the transition of education in Vietnam, where pedagogical reforms are vigorously taking place in the public education sector and more private education providers are being established, this students-as-customers concept can be a starting point for teachers to adapt teaching techniques to meet students' learning needs or

learning styles. However, it may also involve some risk — indulging students' requirements may harm the quality of their teaching and may not achieve the learning objectives. Students, especially children, are not teaching experts; thus, sometimes, their needs may not be relevant, requiring teachers to use professional judgment to decide whether they should satisfy the students' needs. However, not many teachers in this study referred to these beliefs, which indicated that many were unaware of the difference between teaching in the public and private environments; or, if they were, they ignored these differences. This can be an issue that teacher trainers and educational leaders should address so that teachers can work more appropriately across different teaching contexts.

Moreover, this study revealed that many contextual factors that facilitated or hindered the use of a teaching technique also formed another type of belief — tentatively called control beliefs — which affected their adoption of a teaching technique. They comprised CELC availabilities of facilities, class size, time, effort, and costs associated with preparation for a teaching technique, the amount of time required for carrying out a teaching technique in class, and controllability of a method in a class. Many studies have found these contextual factors to affect teacher behaviors (Basturkmen, 2012; Ertmer et al., 2012; Nghia, 2017). It is noted that teachers weighed the pros and cons of adopting a particular teaching technique within a CELC, which suggests that contextual factors may not directly affect teacher behaviors. Nonetheless, considering these factors helps form beliefs about using or not using a teaching technique within that teaching situation. These control beliefs suggest that contextual factors could mediate teachers' pedagogical practice beliefs more directly than social norm beliefs, at least in the context of the CELC in this study. This was demonstrated by the fact that more teachers mentioned the influence of control beliefs on their adoption of a teaching technique compared with social norm beliefs. This third teacher belief component also suggests that for teachers to convert their beliefs into teaching behaviors, they must be provided with favorable conditions for carrying out the teaching behaviors.

The above notions indicate a strong connection between teacher awareness, knowledge, and beliefs. Teacher beliefs appeared to reflect the interaction of three beliefs: pedagogical practice, social norm, and control beliefs. Respectively, these types of beliefs result from (1) knowledge acquired from different learning activities or work experiences, (2) awareness of existing social expectations or requirements, and (3) understanding of the teaching environment that may affect the use of a teaching technique. These all serve as necessary conditions for teachers to form beliefs that may be durable and influence their behavior.

CONCLUSION

It is essential to investigate what factors affect English teachers' choice of instructional strategies to help enhance YLLs' learning achievements. Therefore, this current study was conducted qualitatively to gauge insightful data. According to the data collected from 21 EFL teachers, the study contributed to the literature in this field. Particularly, this qualitative study identified several factors affecting EFL teachers' choice of instructional strategies to teach YLLs at CELCs, namely teaching conditions, teachers'

sense of technique's effectiveness, teachers' teaching experience, time allotted, preservice teacher education, and stakeholders' demands. Interestingly, the use of Grounded Theory showed that teachers' teaching beliefs significantly affected their choice of instructional strategies. In other words, it was a dominant factor affecting the teachers' decision-making in what methods would be used in their teaching practices. Particularly, various teacher beliefs associated with motivating learners were classified into three components: (i) beliefs about the effectiveness of a teaching technique, (ii) beliefs about stakeholders' demands for the use of particular teaching techniques, and (iii) beliefs about the influence of contextual factors on the effectiveness of using a teaching technique. In conclusion, the teachers' teaching in practice was affected by several factors; their choice of instructional strategies, however, significantly depended on their behavioral, normative, and control beliefs. Moreover, these beliefs were associated with the knowledge and awareness teachers have developed throughout the trajectory of becoming and being teachers. Therefore, preservice teacher training and professional development activities for teachers need to pay more attention to these beliefs should educational leaders want to change teachers' teaching behaviors.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have some implications for teacher education and teacher induction and probation programs. They point to the value of an experimental training approach for training preservice teachers, including those attending an induction-probation period, because by experimenting with a teaching technique, teachers may consolidate their knowledge, challenge their assumptions, and draw conclusions about the appropriateness or effectiveness of the teaching technique for a specific teaching context and with certain groups of students. Secondly, when designing teacher education programs, leaders should pay attention to differences in the socio-cultural features of the organizations employing their preservice teachers. Private educational providers are using more and more teachers in Vietnam. Education is a customer-oriented business in all aspects, unlike the public-school culture, which primarily focuses on nurturing students' intellectual ability. Thus, in addition to teacher competence and attributes, preservice teachers need to be trained in business-related skills to perform their job more effectively. Finally, in case leaders would like teachers to adopt a particular teaching method or technique, such as reforming pedagogical practices, they should remove contextual barriers for their significant influence on teachers' willingness to adopt these methods.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the findings are most relevant to the context of CELCs in Vietnam; therefore, the results cannot generalize to talk about teaching and learning in other teaching contexts and situations. Secondly, using non-representative participants, with female participants outnumbering male participants, could have resulted in biased data. Thirdly, the analysis excluded demographic or identity factors such as age, gender, and cultural background, which may significantly influence the choice of a teaching technique. Therefore, future studies should replicate this study with a probability sample from different educational settings and statistically construct,

validate, and measure the impact of teacher beliefs on their teaching behaviors. The number of participants should be intensified to help researchers generalize their findings. Besides, it is worth exploring students' perspectives about their teachers' use of instructional strategies on their learning outcomes. Such studies would produce more insights across educational contexts.

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