# A Qualitative Exploration of the Development of a Novice English Teacher's Beliefs

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This qualitative study explored the potential development of beliefs held by a male novice English teacher in the context of teaching English as a foreign language at National Institute of Technology, Toyama College. A previous study by the author (Yamamura, 2025) uncovered his early beliefs on teaching and learning English at the time of the 2023 academic year. The present study, which was conducted at the end of the 2024 academic year, further investigated those beliefs to see any potential development by employing the narrative frames and a semi-structured interview. The findings show that his belief on the importance of teaching reading seems to be persistent while also beginning to incorporate the idea of teaching speaking and listening over the course of two years through teaching experience and mentoring.
Keywords: Beliefs, Novice English teacher, Mentoring

## 1. Introduction

The rapidly changing educational landscape makes it more vital than ever that teachers become strategic thinkers, exploratory researchers, and transformative intellectuals (Kumaravadivelu, 2012)[1]. In this post-method era, understanding teachers' hidden theories and thinking processes is crucial to developing insights for second language teacher education. What teachers know and believe provides the underlying framework for many dimensions of teachers' actions in the classroom, such as selecting activities, asking questions, providing opportunities for practice, and giving feedback on student learning (Richards & Lockhart, 1996)[2].

Few studies have investigated the beliefs held by teachers at higher education institutions in Japan, where opportunities for formal professional development are scarce. This study aimed to explore the evolving beliefs over two years of a novice English teacher at National Institute of Technology (hereafter, NIT or KOSEN), Toyama College. The study employed narrative frames and a semi-structured interview to collect qualitative data. To uncover the extent of and possible explanations for change in the teacher's beliefs, the data were compared with those found in my previous study (Yamamura, 2025)[3].

The findings showed that in his first two years at KOSEN, the teacher gradually began to consider teaching skills such as speaking and listening, although his core beliefs in teaching attentive reading and critical thinking remained stable. His emerging beliefs seemed to have been inspired by his being observed and offered feedback by a mentor and by his observing the practice of other teachers with a wider scope of teaching focuses. He also became more aware of the broader vision of teaching English.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Characteristics of teacher beliefs

Researchers and teacher educators have viewed teaching not just as observable classroom practices but also as complex cognitive activity (Farrell & Lim, 2005)[4]. As what teachers know, believe, and think impacts their classroom practices (Borg, 2003; Richards & Lockhart, 1996)[5][2], understanding the origin, content, and development of their beliefs is crucial to obtaining insights to build a better framework for professional development.

This study is concerned with teachers' beliefs, defined as "propositions individuals consider to be true, and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change." (Borg, 2011: 371)[6]. Other researchers share this view of beliefs as being resistant to change. For example, a frequently cited paper by Pajares (1992)[7] summarized a set of fundamental assumptions of beliefs, which includes their being self-perpetuating

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and persistent, especially when they are formed early.

In recent years, some research has challenged the assumption of the inflexibility of beliefs. Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000)[8] reported that in the U.K. context, the beliefs of 20 student teachers underwent changes. Yuan and Lee (2014)[9] explored the changing beliefs of pre-service language teachers and found that their beliefs exhibited various changes during a practicum. In a Japanese context, Nekoda (2015)[10] reported on both the changes and stability of student teachers' beliefs before and after taking a university's teacher preparation course. Umakoshi and Ishihara (2024)[11] revealed that student teachers' beliefs developed during a three-week practicum.

Compared to studies on pre-service teacher cognition, studies on in-service teachers' beliefs are limited (Borg, 2006)[12]. The present author (Yamamura, 2025)[3] explored the beliefs held by a novice male English teacher at NIT, Toyama College, through mentoring, (that is, a combination of classroom observations and post-observation sessions). In 2023, I observed 11 lessons by Kota (a pseudonym) and, in subsequent post-observation sessions, provided feedback as a mentor on his classroom practices through reflective dialogs, enabling his beliefs to emerge. My analysis identified 19 beliefs under four themes: teaching reading, managing learning, the aims of activities, and teaching speaking.

## 2.2 Research question for the present study

The present study investigates whether Kota's beliefs evolved over the period of two years. The study posted the following open-ended research question: How have the beliefs of a novice English teacher at KOSEN changed over time?

## 3.   Method

### 3.1 Context and participant

Kota, a male novice English teacher in his late 20s, was a mentee and the subject of investigation. He was hired in 2023 as a full-time English teacher in the Department of Liberal Arts at NIT, Toyama College. He holds an MA in comparative culture and had one year of previous teaching experience at a senior high school in Shizuoka prefecture. Before becoming a teacher in Shizuoka, he had completed a three-week teaching practicum in another senior high school.

The researcher in the present study, as Kota's mentor, observed his 11 lessons of *Comprehensive English I* for the first-year engineering students in the 2023 academic year, followed by post-observation sessions. Sometimes Kota also observed the mentor's lessons. In the 2024 academic year, Kota taught the same five classes with different students without being observed. He and I took part in casual discussions of ideas on various topics from time to time. In the same year, two new full-time English teachers, both of whom had more experience than he, joined the team of English teachers, and Kota sometimes had opportunities to observe their lessons. In addition, outside of school, he attended Toyama's English teaching method study group, which was held on a voluntary basis once a month on Saturday afternoons with English teachers, including the mentor, regardless of their school type. At the meetings of this study group, various teachers presented their teaching ideas, followed by a discussion on diverse issues in teaching English from a practical perspective.

### 3. 2 Data collection and analysis

In March 2025, with informed consent, I employed the narrative frames and a semi-structured interview to record Kota's views and feelings, which included his beliefs. The narrative frames were used, as they enabled the researcher to narrow down the areas of inquiry with specific sentence starters that were designed to elicit data related to the research questions with some flexibility and freedom (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008)[13], allowing Kota to express his ideas as he liked. I asked him to fill in the narrative frames online in English. The narrative frames I created included the following three themes: beliefs on teaching in general, beliefs on balancing the four skills, and beliefs on teaching reading. Each frame comprised four sentence starters. Among 19 beliefs and the four major themes derived in my previous study (Yamamura, 2025)[3], these three seemed to merit further exploration in the present study due to their recurrence throughout the mentoring. His beliefs on teaching in general had been less obvious before; therefore, I created the narrative frame for that belief this time. The prompts for the narrative frames are shown below.

**Narrative frame 1: Beliefs on teaching English in general**

    1. I teach English at the college level because (        ).

    2. For me, the goal of teaching Comprehensive English is (        ).

    3. Good English teachers are those who (        ).

    4. I would say that my overall approach to teaching English is (        ).

**Narrative frame 2: Beliefs on balancing the four skills**

    1. Among the four skills, the most important skill to develop is (        ). This is because (        ).

    2. I think balancing the four skills in one lesson is (        ).

    3. I think I am better at teaching a (        ) skill compared with other skills. This is because (        ).

    4. Among the four skills, I place less emphasis on teaching a (        ) skill. This is because (        ).

**Narrative frame 3: Beliefs on teaching reading**

    1. I think the main aim of teaching reading is (        ).

    2. I usually teach reading by (        ).

    3. I usually check students' understanding of English passages by (        ).

    4. In teaching reading, the use of grammatical parsing and translation into Japanese is (        ). This is because (        ).

After the completion of the narrative frames, an in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted in Japanese for about an hour in March to gather further details and corroborations for Kota's responses to the narrative frames. I prepared eight questions corresponding to the narrative frames for which further clarification was necessary.

Data from the narrative frames and the semi-structured interview were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994)[14]. First, Kota's responses to the narrative frames were coded, meaning that the author uncovered units of meaning. Second, the interview's recorded data were transcribed, and coding was conducted by the author by labeling Kota's beliefs and other ideas from his comments. The coding was checked by Kota to increase the validity. Then, on a spreadsheet, the beliefs are grouped together under the larger themes. As the purpose of the semi-structured interview was to explore Kota's beliefs and explanations in detail, many of his comments in the interview were viewed as verifications as will be discussed in the next section.

## 4.   Findings and discussion

This section discusses the findings in relation to beliefs identified in the narrative frames and semi-structured interview so as to address the research question: How have the beliefs of a novice English teacher at KOSEN changed over time? Beliefs and their potential development are further discussed with excerpts to corroborate the findings. I sometimes draw on concepts that are not beliefs to better grasp Kota's case from various perspectives.

Overall, the findings suggest that Kota's belief in the importance of teaching reading stayed stable. This belief was firmer at the start of his career at KOSEN. However, his view was affected by and had converged in various ways with other ideas about teaching English. In other words, he began to doubt the "reading only" approach and considered different alternatives: teaching reading with different ways such as extensive reading and teaching other skills, particularly productive skills. This demonstrates that this new belief was added to his existing belief, which led him to a dilemma. He found it difficult to implement lessons that incorporated new ways of teaching reading and productive skills due to his own limited command of productive skills in English. Lastly, it has become clear from the findings that he holds a belief as an educator as well as a researcher in the importance of developing students' thinking skills.

In summary, Kota developed new beliefs over two years, but his most important belief—that of teaching reading— remained stable. It seems that his new belief had already emerged in his first year, and the data collected this time did not include new beliefs. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that Kota's self-awareness of his beliefs and explanations had grown from his two years' experience of teaching English at KOSEN, affected by his experiences, including mentorship and other learning opportunities.

## 4.1 The importance of teaching reading

The first salient point in Kota's narratives and interview was his belief in the importance of teaching reading, in particular, attentive reading, wherein students are expected to pay attention to parts of speech and the grammatical functions of words to arrive at the meaning of each sentence correctly. From the beginning, this belief in the importance of teaching reading recurred most frequently. Out of the 12 sentence starters in the narrative frames, Kota mentioned "teaching reading" in the frames described below. (In quotations, NF1-2, for example, refers to the narrative frame 1-2.)

"For me, the goal of teaching Comprehensive English is (to improve students' English proficiency by focusing on their precise reading skills and to give them a chance to acquire various reading skills in an enjoyable way) (NF1-2)". Also, his preference to reading was evident in the following frames. "Among the four skills, the most important skill to develop is (reading). This is because (we need to get a lot of information through reading in daily life) (NF2-1)". "I think I am better at teaching a (reading) skill compared with other skills. This is because (I have thought about this skill when considering English teaching) (NF2-3)". In relation to the frame 2-3, I asked Kota why he thought he was better at teaching reading. Below is an excerpt from the interview:

Mentor: リーディング指導が得意、っていうのはどうしてですか？
Kota: うーん、まあどうしてですかね…。他のスキルに比べたらリーディングのほうがましだから、ですかね。ライティングとかスピーキングよりも、他の技能よりはできるから、一応教えることができるんじゃないかって思います。あとは、これまでの学習経験を考えたときに、この学校に来るまでは、リーディングあっての他の技能だっていう考え方が僕の頭をほぼ占めていたので、リーディングを何とかしなければ、他の技能なんて考えられないんだ、と考えてたとこがあって、だからリーディングのことばかり考えていたんじゃないかなあと思っています。
M: なるほどね。
K: 最近になってから、他の技能の指導のことを考えていなかったなあって思って、リスニングとかの本も見てるんですけど、ほんと最近ですね。さっき本で情報を仕入れてきたって言ってましたけど、これまで見てきた本とかも、ほぼリーディングのことが印象に残っていて、あのー、無意識に他の技能の指導法を捨ててきてしまったなあ、って思っていますね。選択しない、っていうことで切ってきてしまったなあって思いますね。
K: それはどうしてですか？さっき言ったことですかね。まずもってリーディングだと思っていたから？
M: と、思ってましたね。
M: で他の技能のことも考えるようになったのは、他の先生の授業を見たから、ですかね。
K: 自分が、山村先生におっしゃっていただいて、英語を使った授業っていうのを考えたときに、なんていうか改めて、なんていうんですかね、発信って面が、やっぱり弱いってことに気付くわけですけど、そもそもどうやって、発信ってどう教わったのか考えたときに、教わっていなかったよなあってこともあって、発信するほうにも目がいきはじめた感じがしますね。

Kota told me that he had taken the teaching of reading for granted until he came to KOSEN, mainly because of his reading-centered learning history. This is reasonable given the fact that he had spent two years in graduate school, where reading is the main source of acquiring expertise in his field of study. His reading preference could also be explained by his comparatively fewer experiences of being taught speaking when he was a student as also shown in the excerpt above. When he observed my lessons in 2023, he found that I had used more English for various functions, which made him recognize the paucity of English he spoke. He then recalled not having been taught how to speak English as a student, leaving him unaware of how to teach speaking.

In addition, among various purposes and functions of reading, he stressed his belief in developing critical thinking skills through reading. "I think the main aim of teaching reading is (to develop students' precise reading skills and give them a chance to read materials critically) (NF3-1)". His comments in the interview demonstrate this.

M: リーディング指導の目標は、precise reading skills を育てることとありますが、こう考えるのはなぜでし

ょうか？

K: うーん、そうですね、難しいですね。逆に他の先生方が、どういうふうな目的をもってリーディング指導をしようとしているのかをあまり考えていないっていうところがまずひとつあります。正確な読みっていうのは、うーん…読む意味がないって思っちゃうんですよね、正確に読んでないんだったら、誤読しているだけで、あのー、例えば説明書とかにしても、正確に読むことが、読みの目的そのものかなあって思っていますね。でー、クリティカルリーディングについては、さっきのとも関係してくるんですけど、正確に読んだ上で自分との対話だとも思っていて、なので、そこから自分の意見を出したりとかするときに、どうしてもクリティカルになる必要がある、と思ってますね。それでリーディングを指導するときに、自分との対話をすることに重点を置くことが発信にもつながるかなと思ってますね。

## 4.2 Exploring new teaching options

As discussed above, Kota's belief in stressing the teaching of reading merged with different approaches to teaching, such as assigning extensive reading as opposed to reading short passages by analyzing parts of speech and providing students with opportunities to use English by setting communicative tasks or interacting with students in English. He became aware of some of the drawbacks of "reading only" approach as expressed in the NF3-4. "In teaching reading, the use of grammatical parsing and translation into Japanese is (an easy way to teach English but not the only way of teaching English). This is because (it is very helpful to give students the chance to read English passages precisely through their Japanese, but this way may lead students to read English materials by always using [translating] Japanese) (NF3-4)".

In the interview, particularly in connection with NF1-2, I asked him why the idea of teaching reading preoccupied his mind. He expressed that he had believed that reading was a prerequisite for all the other skills, which explains his emphasis on reading, but teaching reading for its own sake became less self-evident or blurred while observing lessons by colleagues, including the mentor, who used a repertoire of skills and activities different from his own as shown below.

M: まあ、だからその実用面というか、考えるとリーディングが、重点的に教えたいと？

K: はい。あ、でそうだ、もうひとつあって、他のスキルを上げる前提になるのも、リーディングスキルを上げることだと思っているので、あのーそう思ってましたね、ずっと。

M: ました、っていうのは？

K: いま、違うかそこはちょっと分からなくて、ぼやけてるとこなんですけど、なぜかっていうと、高校とか、自分の学習経験では、リーディングスキルあっての他のスキルだ、っていうのがまあ当たり前だったんですけど、この学校で、いろいろな授業を見たときに、必ずしもリーディングは大事なんですけど、例えば話すこととか、あのーそのあくまでも過程なんだっていうのを忘れちゃいけないなっていうか、書くことを前提とすれば、その過程として必然的にリーディングがついてくるっていう考え方もあるって思ったので。

The next excerpt most evidently shows that he became aware of the change himself:

M: でもまあいろんな授業見たりして、聞くこととか話すことも、まあちょっと他の技能も考えるようになってきた、っていうのはある？

K: ありますね。そこはそうですね、変化ですね。

M: そこはもうさっき言ってましたね。他は何かあるんですか？

K: そうですねーうーん…

M: まあでもリーディングが大事だっていうのは変わってないわけでしょ？

K: そうですね。盲目的にリーディング、っていうふうなところから脱したっていうのは大きいかなあって思います。

At other points in the interview, Kota clearly stated that observing other instructors' teaching was a catalyst to change. Kota learned how to organize and conduct English lessons by observing other lessons, mainly at school and also at the

voluntary English teaching method study group in Toyama.

> M: 本を見るとか、勉強会に行くとか、他の教え方を知る機会は十分にありましたかね？
> K: あったと思います。ただ、いま教員3年目で分かってきたのは、はっきり言って、一番勉強になるのは、他の先生の実践例を聞いたりだとか見たりすることだなって正直思っていて 。なぜかっていうと、その一学術的な研究だったら、先行研究が生きるんですけど、本を読んでも自分の授業に活かせている感じがしにくいっていうのがあって、他の先生の授業を見たり勉強会とかで、現実的な授業づくりがどうなっているのかを見る、っていうのが即効性があるっていうんですかね、授業改善の特効薬かなあと思います。
> M: 真似する？
> K: そうですね。それこそ総合英語は先生のやり方を丸パクリというか、見させてもらったからある、と思っています。

In addition, when asked about the gap he perceived between what he did in the classroom and his ideal of teaching, he explained that what made it difficult for him to implement teaching options other than reading was his habitual practice of explaining sentence by sentence when teaching reading as well as his self-perceived inadequate speaking proficiency. He believed that command of spoken English was necessary to enable him to teach English in a variety of different ways, including impromptu interactions with students in English. This leads us to the next theme.

## 4.3 Future issues

As discussed above, his belief was challenged by the emerging idea of teaching reading differently and incorporating the teaching of productive skills. This does not mean, however, that he was immediately able to transform his own teaching. In the interview, I asked him what made it difficult to bridge the gap between his ideals and reality; this was in response to his answer to NF1-4, where he said his overall approach to teaching was emphasizing translation and grammar: "I would say that my overall approach to teaching English is (to place too much emphasis on grammar and translation [passive aspects in using English] ) (NF1-4)".

> K: これは理想っていうのはないですけど、ひとつあるとしたら、全体を100としたとすれば、読む量が少なくなっちゃうっていう面があるなあって思っていて、精読と速読、多読とかを組み合わせるとか、あとは、読んだ内容について話をする機会などを設けられたらいいなあ、と思っています。そうすれば理想に近づくかなあと。
> M: なるほどね。文法とかは悪くないので、それだけっていうのが良くないんであって、一方で話したりとか。
> K: そうですね。
> M: そしたら、この現実と理想を隔てるものはなんですか？
> K: ひとつは、英語力だろうと思いますね、僕の。
> M: ああ、先生の？
> K: 運用するっていう意味で、あのー、自分の英語力がもう少し、っていうかもっと自由自在に使えるくらいあれば、いいのかなあっていうふうに思ってます 。

His awareness of the area for improvement, speaking proficiency, already came up in the interview as one potential explanation for his preferred teaching style. He thought that more productive skills would enable him to adopt a range of teaching options, such as engaging in oral interactions with students more naturally in English.

## 4.4 Developing students' thinking skills

Another interesting feature of the present case is that Kota's interests extended beyond the teaching of English. It is not unusual for researchers who teach English at higher education institutions to have research interests in areas other than English

language teaching, such as linguistics, English literature, communication studies, and so on, and Kota is not an exception. He identified himself more as a researcher whose passion lay in inquiry into second language acquisition and sentence processing than in teaching English for its own sake. That belief may have formed when he was a graduate student, affected by his postgraduate education. This brings us back to his preference for the development of critical thinking skills as seen in the description of why he thought it important to teach reading. This idea is evident in the following comments near the end of the interview when we talked about his understanding of his change.

> M: いまもまあ、どのくらいかは分かんないですけど、うーんと、さっき一番最初に言った、考える人を育てるっていうところにあるんですかね。
>
> K: そうですね。たぶん英語の教師としての信念というよりかは、教育者としてどういう人間を育てていきたいかっていう、核みたいなところが、考える人間 、っていうところかなあって思います。なんていうんだろうなあ、思考するっていう、同じですけど、なんていうんですかね、考えるチャンスを与える、っていうんですかね、教員は。そういうのがいいことなのかなあって思っていますね。

## 5. Conclusion

The present study reveals that the beliefs held by a male novice English teacher went through a process of development over two years at KOSEN. While his core belief in teaching reading remained stable, which supports the view that beliefs are persevering particularly when formed early, emerging beliefs in teaching reading differently and more often using productive skills converged with that existing belief. This led him to his current situation, in which the need to acquire speaking skills poses an obstacle for him to realize his new ideals of teaching.

## 6. Acknowledgments

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