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Abstract: This study sets out to investigate how pre-service ESL teachers shape their beliefs in the process of experimenting with new teaching methods introduced in the teacher education programme. A 4-year longitudinal study was conducted with four randomly selected ESLpre-service teachers. Their theoretical orientations of ESL instruction were tracked at intervals through a protocol which consisted of i) descriptive accounts, ii) surveys, iii) lesson plan analysis, iv) lesson recording and v) interviews. Despite the fact that these 4 student teachers had shown different theoretical orientations in the protocols, they shared similar patterns of instructional practices in the Teaching Practicum. It was also found that the new teaching method practiced in the teacher education programme was re-conceptualised by these student teachers in the actual teaching context because of the strong influence of their personal agency beliefs

Understanding Belief Systems

Traditionally, teaching has been described in terms of what teachers do - their actions and behaviours in the classroom, and the effects of these on learners. Pennington (1995) suggested that a teacher's pedagogical decisions and actions are typically colored by their experience as a learner and act as a psychological barrier, frame, or selective filtering mechanism to their classroom practices. Similarly, Gehhard (2006) asserted that what teachers actually do in the classroom is determined by their subjective teaching-related knowledge. In initial teacher preparation programmes, teaching-related knowledge is often prescribed in the courses and pre-service teachers are told what they should do to be effective in teaching. However, the thinking processes and personal beliefs which serve as the background to much of the teachers' decision and classroom actions (Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Anders, Hoffman & Duffy, 2000) are often neglected.

Teaching, as a profession, is special in that all novice and student teachers are familiar with the working environment as they have been students for more than a decade. They have usually developed well-established beliefs towards the nature of teaching and learning and the role of the teacher (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Tomlinson, 2000). According to Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981), student teachers seem to be most influenced by the thousands of hours that they spend as pupils in the classroom. Some researchers think that it is difficult to change the pre-service teachers' well-formed beliefs as they tend to teach the way they have been taught (Pajares, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999)

and implementing innovative approaches is a risk-taking act to them (Gywn-Paquette & Tchon, 2003). Other researchers affirm that teacher beliefs tend to be static and resistant to change because they exist in one's personal understandings, premises or propositions about the world which are felt to be true (see Phelan & McLaughlin, 1995; Richardson, 1996).

If it is assumed that the conservative beliefs of pre-service teachers remain latent during formal training at the university and later become a major force once the candidate is in his or her own classroom, any new teaching initiative introduced in the teacher education programme would find it hard to form the knowledge base for teaching. In some cases, the conflicting views between student teachers and the original teacher can pose a great obstacle to any experimentation. Koerner (1992) and Su (1992) have interviewed cooperating teachers who openly rejected the idea of change or innovation brought in by the pre-service teachers. Such a strong opposition is not likely to be resisted by the pre-service teacher, whose grade is partly attributed to the cooperating teacher. Richardson (1996) argues that beliefs about teaching and learning should be surfaced and acknowledged during the teacher education program if the program is to make a difference in the deep structure of knowledge and beliefs held by the students. Considering the inherent resistance of pre-service teachers, probably the best way to know more about the development of teaching beliefs among pre-service teachers and the focus of change in teacher education programme is to explore and understand their practices in the Teaching Practicum (TP).

English Language Teaching and Teacher Education in Hong Kong

In English language teaching, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has assumed the status of orthodoxy since the 70s. CLT is believed to be conducive to students' foreign language development and is more favorable to students' language learning and development as compared with the traditional pedagogy and grammar-translation approach because it provides more chances for students to speak up and experiment with the language in real-life or meaningful contexts (Willis & Willis, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 2003). CLT provides a natural and communicative context which allows learners to process language and reshape their input (Beglar and Hunt, 2002). In contrast, the traditional approach, which pays attention to a single item at one time, does not conform to the nature of natural communication. Kumaravadivelu (1994) states that the traditional language teaching approach of introducing isolated, discrete items would result in "pragmatic dissonance, depriving the learner of necessary pragmatic cues and rendering the process of meaning making harder" (p.38). In the last decade, many teachers were instructed to implement task-based learning (TBL) as a method to realize CLT (Littlewood, 2011). To most teachers, TBL and CLT are interchangeable terms.

In Hong Kong, CLT has formed the backbone of the Hong Kong English curriculum since 1983. It is introduced as the contemporary teaching approach in English Language teacher education programmes. Student teachers are taught to design and implement communicative tasks in their English lessons. However, many researchers have pointed out that conditions for implementing CLT or TBL in Hong Kong English classroom are not favorable (see Carless, 2002; Littlewood, 2007; Tang, 2004). According to these researchers, the difficulties and challenges included classroom management because of large classes, incompatibility of CLT and high stake public assessment,

ideology conflicts between western teaching and learning philosophy and the endured Chinese educational traditions and culture, heavy language demands on indigenous Chinese teachers, and reluctance and incompetence of students using target language in communicative tasks.

For every educational change to take place, teachers' participation is indispensable since they are the frontline enactors of new policies or approaches in the classrooms. A number of studies on innovation adoption have shown that the level of use of innovation in school is positively correlated with teachers' acceptance and understanding of the innovation (e.g. Gershner & Snider, 2001). Undoubtedly, there is often a disparity between the suggested new practice and its quality and frequency of use in the real classroom (Abrami, Poulsen & Chambers, 2004).

So far, there has been scanty research into the uptake of innovation among pre-service teachers. Although it is often assumed that beliefs are resistant to change, quite a number of studies indicate that pre-service teachers who are in field-based programs can learn new theories and methods that supplant traditional curriculum (Guskey, 1986; Hollingsworth, 1986). Research on pre-service teachers is crucial as they are experiencing the most crucial period of conceptualizing teaching. In view of the unfavourable conditions, ambiguity and stress in the Hong Kong teaching environment, the understanding of the teaching beliefs of pre-service teachers in the process of experimenting with new teaching ideas during the TP, which was described as a move from "idealized conception of teaching to hard realities" (Lo, 1996, p.41), is significant to the teacher education programme. In the current study, a 4 years longitudinal qualitative study of four randomly selected pre-service ESL teachers was conducted with a multiple-method approach to identify factors that affected their decision to experiment with or to abandon the use of the contemporary approach of ESL instruction.

The research questions of this study were:
1. What are the teaching beliefs of pre-service ESL teachers?
2. How do pre-service ESL teachers experiment with the new teaching method advocated in the teacher education programme?

This descriptive study provides rich empirical data to understand how pre-service ESL teachers evolve in the early - and most crucial stage - of teacher education, particularly how their belief systems interact with the instructional practices in the experimentation of communicative practices during teaching practicum.

Research Design
Overview

The study was conducted with selected pre-service ESL teachers in a 4-year teacher education programme. These pre-service ESL teachers have to take 8 courses, equivalent to 936 contact hours, on English teaching methods. The courses are designed to provide "information of a *procedural* nature relating to teaching techniques and materials and the skills needed to implement" (Pennington 1995:51).

This is a longitudinal study of 4 subjects selected randomly at their entry year. A systematic and multidimensional approach was designed to collect their beliefs about ESL instruction. The theoretical orientations protocol included: *A Descriptive Account*, *Beliefs Inventory* (Johnson, 1992), *Lesson Plan Analysis Task* (Kinzer, 1988; Johnson, 1992), and *Analysis*

of Teaching Practicum (TP) Implemented Lesson Plans and Lesson Recording. These instruments were adopted at different stages of the study period. An individual post-TP interview was conducted in the final year to identify possible factors which affected the shaping of beliefs and their pedagogical decisions.

The theoretical orientations referenced in this study are based on the Johnson's review of how languages are learned (Johnson, 1992). They are skill-based, rule-based, and function-based. The skill-based approach relates to Skinner's behaviorism (Stern, 1983) which stresses the importance of drilling and habituation; the rule-based approach relates to Chomsky's cognitive approach which emphasizes the conscious study of grammar; and the function-based approach is similar to the communicative method suggested by Littlewood (1981) which emphasizes involving the learner in meaningful utterances and contexts. The function-based approach reflects the teaching philosophy stipulated in the curriculum, suggested in the textbook and conducted in the contemporary English classroom.

Participants

Four pre-service teachers from the 4-year English Language Education programme at the Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong were randomly selected to take part in the longitudinal study. They are, hereafter, named as TA, TB, TC, and TD. Table 1 summarizes their background, including academic performance and language proficiency.

	TA	**TB**	**TC**	**TD**
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Language proficiency	advance	advance	upper intermediate	upper intermediate
Academic performance	outstanding	good	good	outstanding

Table 1: Background of the subjects

Instruments
A Descriptive Account

At the end of the entry year, all students were asked to write on the topic: "Describe your English learning experience and your belief of how English language should be taught and learnt in local schools." The essays of the selected subjects were coded with reference to the description of the three theoretical orientations in the *Beliefs Inventory* (Johnson, 1992).

Beliefs Inventory

The *Beliefs Inventory* consists of fifteen statements about ESL instruction, representing the three theoretical orientations: rule-based, skill-based and function-based. Students were asked to rate each statement, with 1, being "strongly disagree" and 5, being "strongly agree", to specify their preferences in ESL instruction. The *Beliefs Inventory* was conducted before student-teachers had their first one-month TP in the third year. Each

student was assigned three separate scores, representing the three theoretical orientations. The highest score received in one of the three orientations would signify the dominant orientation of that subject towards ESL instruction.

Lesson Plan Analysis Task

To verify their understanding of the different teaching methods, the four participants took part in the subsequent *Lesson Plan Analysis Task*. They were asked to choose the most preferred one from three separate instructional lesson plans (Kinzer, 1988; Johnson, 1992). Each lesson plan was designed to teach the same grammatical concept of modals (e.g. can, will, may, might) with one of the three methodological approaches, i.e. skill-based, rule-based, or function-based. At the end of the task, they could justify their choices and make suggestions for modification of the lesson plan chosen.

Before the lesson plans were adopted in this task, they were validated by two expert raters who were university professors in the field of ESL teaching. They were asked to code each lesson plan according to the features of the three methodological approaches suggested by Johnson (1992). All three lesson plans received total agreement by both raters and were, therefore, accepted without any modification.

Analysis of TP implemented lesson plans and lesson recording

All lesson plans implemented during TP and the reflective journals of each subject collected from their 4-week Teaching Practicum in the final year were reviewed by two independent interviewers for identifying any distinctive features of lesson planning and prominent factors affecting implementation. The features included usual teaching procedures adopted and the proportion of the three methodological approaches used throughout the whole teaching practicum. In addition, the two interviewers also viewed a videotaped lesson to highlight any discrepancies between the subject's lesson plan and his/her actual videotaped lesson for discussion during interview. A check was made for reliability of identification of any features of lesson plans, notable factors affecting lesson planning and implementation, and differences between lesson plans and actual practice. An inter-rater agreement of 100% was obtained.

Post TP Interview

An interview based on implemented lesson plans and lesson recordings was carried out with each subject. During the interview, the subject was shown some of his/her lesson plans during the teaching practicum and asked some probe questions to elicit his/her rationales behind certain lesson plans/teaching activities; suggestions for improvement of a particular lesson; views towards ideal teaching approaches; and constraints that affected lesson planning. The subject was also asked to identify any discrepancies between the implemented lesson plan and the actual lesson, and the causes leading to the discrepancies.

In order to explore factors influencing the subjects' lesson design and actual practices, each subject was invited to discuss factors or concerns which affected his/her lesson planning and implementation by referring to their lesson plans, reflective journals and class recording. Interview transcripts were coded using non pre-specified codes to avoid researchers' preconceptions or *a priori* theoretical knowledge about the issue (Flick, 1998). At the end of the interview, the interviewers explicitly explained to the subjects the purpose of the study and interview, as well as the features of the three methodological approaches of second language instruction. Each subject was provided with an opportunity to categorize his/her own lesson plan design, videotaped lesson and general teaching beliefs based on the three theoretical orientations

Table 2 below summarises the research framework. The findings collected from the instruments for each subject were compiled into individual profiles for analysis and interpretation.

Instruments	Time line	How the data were analyzed	To find out…
Descriptive Account	Year 1	Coding the English learning experience and perceived English teaching methods	Teaching beliefs
Beliefs Inventory	Year 3 (before TP)	Identifying the theoretical orientations through the scores	Teaching beliefs
Lesson Plan Analysis Task	Year 3 (before TP)	Lesson plan chosen among the three teaching approaches	Teaching beliefs
Analysis of TP Implemented Lesson Plans and Recording	Years 3 and 4 (during TP)	Identifying the teaching approaches adopted in lesson planning and implementation	Instructional practices
Post TP Interview	Year 4 (after TP)	Investigating the decision making in planning and implementation	Factors affecting the choice of practices

Table 2: Summary of the research framework

Results
Identifying teaching beliefs

At the end of the first year, all student teachers were asked to complete an assignment which described their English learning experience and their perceived ways of English teaching in their future classroom. In the *Descriptive Account*, all 4 subjects seemed to recall common ways of learning English. The lessons were characterized by their emphasis on the teacher-, grammar, and use of textbooks. Students attended the lessons passively. There were no particular classroom activities. Learning was promoted through mechanical practice and memorization. Although the subjects were strongly experienced by the skill-based teaching approach of their upbringing, they all showed sensitivity to the importance of using authentic materials and activities to motivate students. They mentioned the significance of having a variety of lesson designs for active participation and a desire for a more communicative classroom. If past learning experience is a major determinant in formulating teaching belief, then the past learning experience of these subjects did not seem to be strong enough to uphold and concur with their perceived way of teaching and learning.

Towards the end of the third year and before the first Teaching Practicum, the 4 subjects were asked to complete a *Beliefs Inventory* to track their theoretical orientation after extended methodological input from the teacher education programme. Only 2 subjects (TC & TD) showed an inclination to the CLT approach which most methodology courses of the programme emphasized. TA and TB remained a traditional mindset in their teaching beliefs.

In the *Lesson Plan Analysis Task*, subjects were asked to select the lesson plan which best reflected their belief about second language teaching. TB, TC & TD chose Lesson Plan 2 which was a sample of a rule-based lesson. The subjects commented that Lesson Plan 2 was direct, simple and effective with a clear introduction explaining the target language items to students. They felt that Lesson Plan 3 was not good enough as students would not learn a language simply by communicating with others. Explicit teaching of grammar or language was necessary.

> "*The introduction part of Lesson Plan 2 allows students to know what modals are.*" (TD)
> "*Lesson Plan 3 does not explain what modals are.*" (TD)
> "*In Lesson Plan 3, it is difficult for students to differentiate between the uses of different modals as there is no explanation.*" (TB)
> "*Lesson Plan 3 is not effective since there is no clear instruction from the teacher.*" (TC)

Although TA selected Lesson Plan 3, she was also keen on Lesson Plan 2.

> "*The introduction part of Lesson Plan 2 is effective but it is boring.*"(TA)

When asked if they would like to modify or improve the lesson plan they had chosen, four subjects suggested a combination of different lesson plans to form a new one. TC proposed inserting the introduction of language items in Lesson Plan 2 after the introduction of a situation in Lesson Plan 3.

Although these pre-service teachers had shown a dominant theoretical orientation in separate research tools, their ESL teaching beliefs in the protocol were not consistent (see Table 3). Three of them (TA, TC and TD) showed a weak consistency on the function-based approach, while TB had a weak consistency on the skill-based approach.

The finding suggests that these student teachers did not hold strong beliefs in a particular teaching approach.

		TA	TB	TC	TD
Descriptive Account	*Learning experience*	Skill-based	Skill-based	Skill-based	Skill-based
	Perceived teaching method	Function-based	Function-based	Function-based	Function-based
Beliefs Inventory		Rule-based	Skill-based	Function-based	Function-based
Lesson Plan Analysis Task		Function-based	Rule-based	Rule-based	Rule-based

Table 3 Summary of teaching beliefs of the four participants

Similarly, these pre-service teachers did not want to commit to a particular approach in a lesson. They seemed to see a lesson as an organized structure with different stages of teaching and learning. These stages served different purposes. They believed that students need adequate input from teacher before they could proceed to practices and communicative activities which require production from the students. While these pre-serviced teachers had shown signs of influence from the teacher education programme on the role of communication in language learning, they believed that activities should be incorporated after the teacher had given adequate input and when students were linguistically ready to take part in the communicative tasks. This perceived lesson framework fits well with the traditional Presentation-Practice-Production model observed in a Confucius-heritage culture (CHC) classroom mentioned by Tang (2004).

Analyzing instructional practices

In the post Teaching Practicum interview, subjects were asked explicitly about their preferred teaching approach. None of the subjects had a definite preference. TC suggested that when teaching young learners, a skill-based approach should be adopted before teaching in a function-based way. Three other subjects suggested a sequence of teaching approaches in a lesson. For example, TA and TB anticipated a sequence of skill-based → rule-based → function-based. TD proposed a rule-based → skill-based → function-based approach. The sequencing in the teaching process confirms the observation from the *Lesson Plan Analysis Task* that these pre-service teachers have shaped a structural approach towards the theoretical orientations. They trusted that their students should have a solid foundation or adequate input from the teacher, followed by vigorous drills before any communicative tasks could be implemented.

To examine the instructional practices closely, four randomly selected lesson plans used in the Teaching Practicum of each subject were first coded by two raters based on the characteristics of rule-based, skill-based or/and function-based teaching approach. Inter-rater agreement of 100% was reached on all the lessons. To increase the reliability of the coding of the subjects' instructional practices, the subjects were presented with the features of the three theoretical orientations at the end of the interview and were asked to code their

own videotaped lesson. They were not informed how the raters coded their lessons. The results were presented in Table 4:

	TA	TB	TC	TD
Lesson plans coded by researchers	Skill-based	Skill-based	Skill-based	Skill-based
Lesson plans coded by subjects	Skill-based	Skill-based	Mainly skill-based with a bit of function-based	Mainly skill-based with a bit of rule-based

Table 4 Theoretical orientations shown in subjects' lesson planning

The most dominant teaching approach adopted by the four subjects was the skill-based approach. Characteristics of the skill-based teaching approach observed in the lesson plans included oral and written repetition of target vocabulary items and sentence structures, pattern drills, exercises and memorization. The dominance of skill-based features was verified and confirmed in the recorded lessons which were analysed by the researcher. In the recording, oral repetition of language items was frequently practiced by all four subjects. Despite the differences shown in the *Belief Inventory* and *Lesson Plan Analysis Task*, the pre-service teachers all ended up adopting the same approach to teaching English. When asked why they adopted the skill-based approach in the classroom practices, those who showed a dominant rule-based or function-based theoretical orientation in earlier years suggested the age and proficiency of the learners.

> "*For young learners, it is difficult for them to learn grammar.*" (TA)
> "*The students in primary schools were not cognitively mature enough. They were not able to complete tasks which were cognitively demanding.*" (TC)
> "*Lesson planning was affected by students' low language proficiency and the great individual differences of students.*" (TD)

From their point of view, the skill-based approach was the only appropriate and effective method for ESL teaching and learning, particularly at primary level. Students repeated language items in drills and learned accordingly. This finding is in line with the usual practice observed in the CHC classroom where imitation, repetition, and memorization are emphasized (Tang, 2009).

Other factors, such as, limited class time, discipline problems, and tight school schedules were also mentioned. TA said:

> "*As the lesson was too short, I didn't use any communicative activities. My Teaching Advisor said that my class was the worst class in the form. In conducting a task, a teacher has to explain everything very clearly, provide a lot of guidance, and manage their discipline very well. So, time limitation and students' unfamiliarity with the format of using tasks are the two problems. Also, the discipline of the class is another restriction for lesson planning and implementation too.*"

Some subjects were not satisfied with their delivery skills and classroom management skills and they thought it affected the implementation of their lessons.

> "*I gave instructions which were not clear to students as I spoke too fast…My blackboard management skills were not good enough as students were not able to identify the main points on the board.*" (TB)

Although some of the observed lessons showed characteristics of a function-based approach such as the use of authentic language in a situational context, these lessons were specially designed for course assessments because they were to be observed by professors from the university. As suggested by TB and TD in the interviews, the presence of the professor affected the way they planned and taught their lessons. They adopted a function-based methodological approach when the professor was present in order to demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts in language teaching. They admitted that in most of the other lessons, the function-based approach was not exhibited.

The observationsso far seem to suggest that pre-service teachers do not make their instructional decisions in connection with the theories of learning, teaching and curriculum. In the formulation of a teaching belief system, Ford (1992:124) stated that "personal agency beliefs play a particularly crucial role in situations that are of the greatest developmental significance - those involving challenging but attainable goals". Ford listed two types of personal agency beliefs: capability and context. Capability beliefs are beliefs about personal ability to meet the desired outcomes that one would like to achieve. Context beliefs are beliefs about the responsiveness of the external factors and/or people that exist in the teaching environment. These beliefs help or hinder the teacher from achieving the goals. Indeed, the 4 subjects expressed some specific contextual and capability constraints which influenced the practicing of the new methods preached in the teacher education programme. Table 5 shows the common contextual and capability factors that concerned the subjects most during lesson planning and implementation:

	TA	TB	TC	TD
Contextual factors				
Discipline	✓	✓	✓	
Tight schedule/school syllabus		✓	✓	
Limited class time	✓	✓	✓	✓
Language proficiency of students	✓	✓		✓
Age of students	✓		✓	
Presence of the Professor		✓		✓
Capabilities factors				
Teachers' delivery skills	✓	✓		✓
Teachers' classroom management skills		✓	✓	✓

Table 5: Personal Agency Beliefs of the Subjects

One might argue that the personal agency beliefs factors identified above can be justified by their inexperience in the teaching environment as student teachers. However, it is more important to understand how these constraints could be overcome so that new practices could be introduced to the classroom to create and facilitate better learning opportunities for their students. In dealing with capability beliefs, Bandura (1997) suggested that self-efficacy is the most powerful agent to "execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p.3). As such, self-efficacy beliefs of ESL student teachers warrant further research to provide insights into experimenting with innovation in the process of teacher education.

Perceived hierarchy in teaching approaches

After four years of exposure to the communicative methodological approach in the teacher education programme, the pre-service teachers showed a high hybridity in their teaching beliefs during the developmental process. What the student teachers claimed to believe, what they expected to see in the language classroom, and what they actually did in real teaching were not the same. Table 6 below provides an overview of the subjects' teaching beliefs gathered from different research instruments and the actual instructional practices in the English classroom.

		TA	TB	TC	TD
Descriptive Account	*Learning experience*	Skill-based	Skill-based	Skill-based	Skill-based
	Perceived teaching method	Function-based	Function-based	Function-based	Function-based
Beliefs Inventory		Rule-based	Skill-based	Function-based	Function-based
Lesson Plan Analysis Task		Function-based	Rule-based	Rule-based	Rule-based
Instructional practices		Skill-based	Skill-based	Skill-based	Skill-based

Table 6: Subjects' teaching beliefs and instructional practices

The findings have shown that these pre-service teachers were not consistent in what they believed, what they wanted their classroom to be and what had actually happened in their English classroom. None of them demonstrated a preference to the contemporary teaching method, i.e. the function-based approach or communicative language teaching, in actual classroom practice. This was aligned with the finding from the *Lesson Plan Analysis Task* that these pre-service teachers believed that students could not learn a language only through communication. Although they all claimed that function-based approach was an appropriate teaching method in second language classroom, they insisted that their students would not be able to learn the language if there were no explicit teaching or language drills.

Pre-service teachers also shared a common framework which they considered to be effective in introducing a new language item. This framework follows a sequence of various teaching approaches. It was observed in the *Lesson Plan Analysis Task* that a hierarchical relationship existed among the three theoretical orientations. Subjects suggested adding Lesson Plan 3, a sample of function-based lesson, to Lesson Plan 2, a sample of rule-based lesson and to Lesson Plan 1, a sample of skill-based lesson, to function as a follow-up so as to consolidate students' understanding and use of the language items. Subjects' perceived hierarchical conception of the three methodological approaches was further elaborated in the interviews. All 4 subjects proclaimed that they would like to adopt the three methodological approaches at different times for different purposes. More importantly, there was a unanimous consensus that skill-based and rule-based approaches should be adopted prior to the function-based approach.

"Rule-based and skill-based approaches can provide students with a stronger foundation for English learning before the function-based approach is adopted." (TD)

"A topic is usually introduced to students through drilling and repetition first. Next, rule-based approach is adopted as grammar rules are taught to students. Finally, students can make use of what they have acquired in function-based activities." (TA)

Whereas experts and scholars believe that students can acquire language better through a function-based approach or authentic communication, the pre-service teachers in the study treated function-based approach as a consolidation for English learning only. They did not believe that students can acquire new language items or the language itself through merely a function-based approach. Their lessons were characterized by a hierarchical relationship between different methodological methods (Figure 1).
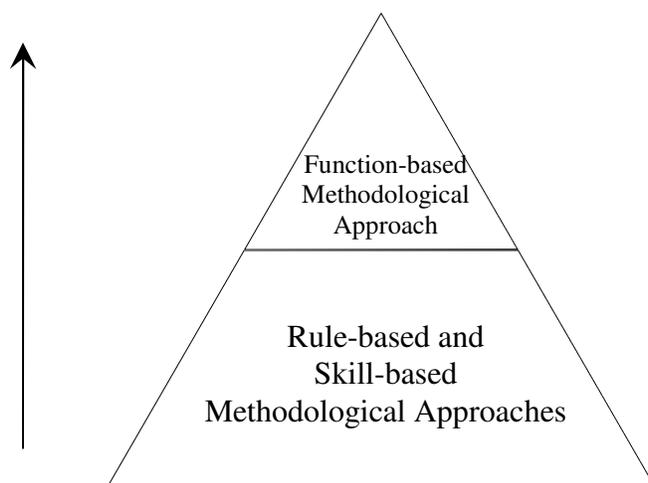

Figure 1: The perceived hierarchical conception of the methodological approaches

Although there were signs of a function-based approach, it was done as a showcase for assessment only. In other words, communicative tasks were not sequenced as a customary stage of a unit. This might suggest that these pre-service teachers would probably resort to the 'safe' teaching method, which was proven to be effective in their learning experience, when they become regular teachers. One non-selected pre-service teacher illustrated in her reflective journal her frustration and uncertainty when trying out the new teaching method:

"In operating TBL, I always think that task-based learning is good in a sense that students can experience the language during the task, instead of just simply spoon-feeding the target language items……Yet, in real practice, students are just interested and engaged in the while-task, in which they find it fun. While in the post-task, the consolidation stage, the stage that I found it crucial, students would lose all their attention and patience…... I started to wonder why I don't just teach them in a more traditional way, like using the PPP approach, and ask

students to do mechanical exercises again and again……Why should I plan a lot to suit their interest, but it turned out to be ineffective?"

The dilemma confronted is not uncommon among pre-service teachers. When attempting to carry out innovative teaching ideas, they often encounter conflicts and tension. They are not able to cope with high levels of uncertainty about an innovation. While acknowledging the advantage of the relatively new teaching approach, there is a tendency for pre-service teachers to fall back on traditional approaches, which they themselves have experienced as learners. For an innovation to make an impact, it has not only to be agreed with by the enactors, who in this case are pre-service teachers, but also to be continually trialed before it can be permanently uptaken. Failures will occur when the enactors do not understand the idea or reject it on the road from intake to output (Pennington, 1995).

The subjects declared that the school, students and personal factors were so overpowering and strong that they determined their methodological choice and inhibited the trial of the communicative teaching approach. Figure 2 illustrates the hierarchical conception of the three methodological approaches perceived by the subjects and its relationship with the contextual and capability constraints.
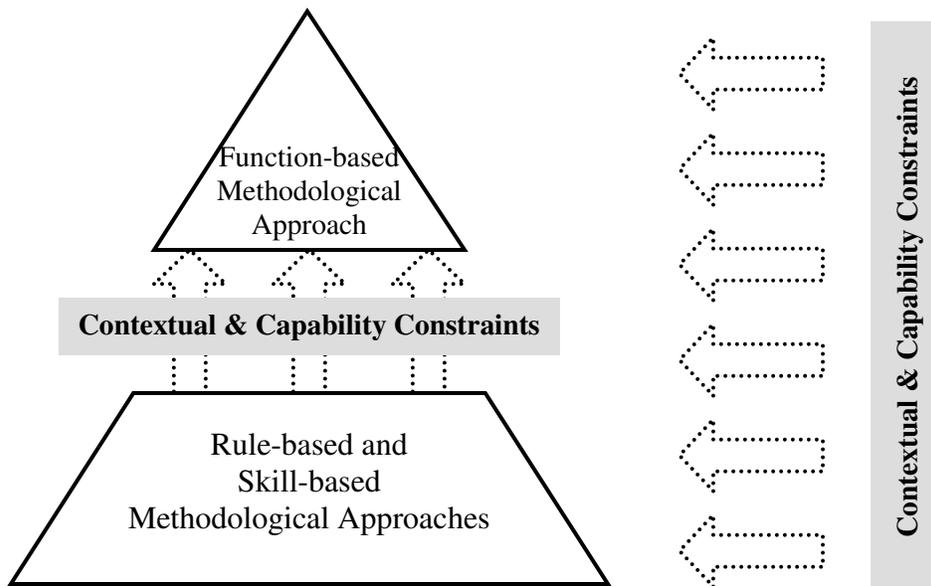

Figure 2: The impact of personal agency belief on methodological choice

Discussion

This study sets out to investigate pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs and instructional practices with the aim of finding out how they experimented with the new English teaching method introduced in the teacher education programme. The study works on the assumption that these pre-service teachers would have more potential for change as they are at the beginning stage of being teachers. A longitudinal study was carried out with 4 randomly selected subjects in the entry year. Their theoretical orientation protocols were compiled using different research tools at difference stages to identify their teaching beliefs and instructional practices. It was found that these pre-service teachers had a similar and traditional English learning experience. In the entry year, all 4 subjects declared that the communicative approach would be desirable in their English teaching in future. While going through the 936 contact hours of methodological input from the teacher education programme, subjects did not demonstrate a strong belief in communicative language teaching nor hold a consist belief in the process of teacher education. They appeared to hold a particular theoretical preference to different research instruments but they did not insist. When they were finally in a classroom, they taught in the same way as they were taught as ESL learners with no particular sign of or impact from the new teaching approach introduced in the teacher education programme.

Although the teaching philosophy of the teacher education programme is to learn English as a second language through communication, this could not be observed as the principal instructional practice by the subjects. Interaction between teacher and students and among students was not central in the classroom. Some suggested that non-native English teachers were reluctant to adopt a communicative approach in their lessons because it creates too much demand on their communicative competence (Littlewood, 2007). However, in this study, subjects with better proficiency were not eager to try the communicative approach in their class. In this study, high language proficiency and outstanding academic performance do not seem to make an impact on the choice of teaching approach.

In this study, the participating pre-service English teachers seem to have gone through a hybrid process of formulating their teaching beliefs. It was hard to recognize the identifiable and strong teaching belief of each subject that could be affirmed in their instructional practices. While these subjects showed varied teaching beliefs in their protocols, they demonstrated comparable instructional practices with one another. Their instructional practices bore a resemblance to the traditional approach of teaching in Asian ESL classrooms where teachers begin a language lesson with explicit teaching, followed by mechanical drills and practices which focus on accuracy (Tang, 2004). Some asserted that the western teaching and learning philosophy of communicative language teaching (CLT) denies the deep-rooted Confucius-heritage culture (CHC) style in the Asian classroom. The CLT which advocates learner-centredness, multiple roles of teacher, authentic materials, and variety of classroom organization upsets the old and prevailing classroom practices in the CHC context. If the innovation clashes intensely with their schemata, the chance of transformation is low. Given the fact that certain elements in the CHC style of learning have proven to be effective, it is worthwhile to explore an ESL pedagogy which retains cultural, pedagogical and psychological characteristics. What might be called the "traditional" learning behaviour of CHC learners is not necessarily divergent from modern teaching techniques learned from the West. It would be irrational to regard the two as mutually exclusive in language learning. Even when clashes between

local culture and western ideology in learning are found, seeking adaptations or pragmatic teaching strategies should be taken as the best way to break down barriers, promote pedagogical exchange and cultivate intercultural communication.

Change is always regarded as a gradual, complex and cyclical process (Korthagen, 2001). Scherp (1995 cited Flores, 2005) suggested that change implies the interplay between the individual and the context. It is not clear if the failure of uptake is due to inadequate input from the programme or reluctance from the pre-service teachers. Yet, the personal agency belief appears to be crucial in making methodological decision. According to Pennington (1995), there is a 'cognitive-affective filter' which operates to enhance, block or distort incoming information depending on the degree of congruence between the innovation and the individual's schema. This in turn, is shaped by the teacher's individual characteristics such as personality, intellect and experience, and perception of the classroom and the larger educational environment as well as a collective, cultural aspect which is realized in individual teachers.

For an innovation to be successfully translated into output which benefits students' learning, an input must be noticed, processed cognitively and be integrated into the existing schema. As construction requires more processing in the cognitive and metacognitive level, it usually takes the longest time (Pennington, 1995). As described by Roger (1983), an important step for a teacher in deciding whether to use an innovation permanently or frequently depends on whether he or she can have positive confirmation of the usefulness and effectiveness of innovation. Teacher education programs, need to consider ways to arouse pre-service teachers' motivation to attend to the innovation, help them recognize the need for change, equip them with proper metacognitive strategies to process the innovation, and provide opportunities for successful experience.

Pre-service teachers, when compared with experienced in-service teachers, are in closer touch with updated teaching approaches and in fact, often bring information about new methodologies to the in-service teachers through teaching practicum. Despite being heavily influenced by past learning experiences as a learner, they are relatively open to changes as they have not yet developed actual routines in their teaching which would form inertia (Houston, 1998), inhibiting them from embracing new ideas. Together with the pre-service education programme, it makes available an ecosystem that is more conducive to the adoption of innovations as intensive coaching and supportive feedback could be provided (Gywn-Paquette & Tchon, 2003).

Believing that the communicative approach is valuable and effective in motivating learning, ways to accommodate constraints that inhibit pre-service ESL teachers from experimenting with innovative practice should be postulated so as to enhance supportive elements that promote change. A closer relationship or partnership between teacher education institutes and schools can probably help pre-service teachers overcome the contextual and capability factors. A variety of field experiences should be offered to try out new ideas so as to build up confidence and repertoire of teaching strategies and management skills. A reflective teacher education programme which stresses the importance of understanding and assimilating teacher beliefs in the face of new teaching practices should also be promoted. The ability to reflect and evaluate new concepts and practices helps pre-service teachers to learn how to teach. A case-based approach of engaging pre-service teachers in viewing and discussing teaching cases can provide students with the opportunities to understand the realities of their future professional contexts, identify critical issues, analyse problems and suggest possible solutions. Pre-service teachers may also need further assistance and support to raise their self-efficacy

beliefs before they have the courage to try the new teaching idea and use it effectively in the classroom. The relationship between self-efficacy and the implementation of new teaching approach warrants further investigation.

Conclusion

Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) viewed teacher development as knowledge and skill development, self-understanding, and understanding of the teaching context. Development involves both 'change and growth' (Head and Taylor, 1997: 1) and involves the ability to reflect on one's teaching experience and develop a range of strategies to tackle problems (Korthagen, 2001). It is a developmental process that requires personal awareness of the possibilities for change and of what influences the change process. Through self-reflection and questioning of the old practices, new ideas will be able to emerge. Constant discussion with peers, mentors and faculty staff, and experimentation during teaching practicum can foster the adoption of a university-taught teaching approach by pre-service teachers.

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