

# A Review of the Research on Pre-service EFL Teacher Belief

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## Abstract

**Teacher belief affect teachers' actual teaching results, and the research on pre-service teacher belief has become an important indicator to judge the effectiveness of teacher education, and is the most valuable part of current teacher education. However, in this century, the research of domestic scholars has mostly focused on the theoretical research of teacher belief system and empirical research focusing on college English teachers. The proportion of research on pre-service EFL teacher belief is relatively small, and the specific research situation of foreign research on pre-service EFL teacher belief is also unclear. Therefore, in order to understand the current situation of the research on pre-service EFL teacher belief at home and abroad, this paper summarizes the previous researches at home and abroad. After analysis and arrangement, it is concluded that the current researches on pre-service EFL teacher belief has a wide range of research objects, extensive research contents and comprehensive research methods, but few people have studied the ways and methods of how to cultivate and improve pre-service EFL teacher belief at the formative stage. This paper hopes that the follow-up research can make up for the gap in this field.**

## Keywords

**Teacher belief; Pre-service EFL teacher; Pre-service EFL teacher belief.**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background and Purpose

Teacher beliefs have an extremely important impact on school education. On the one hand, for teachers, teacher belief will not only affect teachers' teaching methods and teaching effectiveness, but also have an important impact on teachers' future career development; On the other hand, for students, teacher belief will affect students' physical and mental development. For example, teachers' expectations of students will greatly affect students' learning and growth [1]. It can be seen from this that the study of teacher belief is helpful to school education. Many scholars have carried out research on teacher belief. Foreign research on teacher belief and teaching practice has developed greatly since 1970. Freeman divided the relevant research into three stages: the initial stage (before the mid 1970s), the development and change stage (1980s), and the consolidation stage (1990s)[2]. In the 21st century, many domestic scholars have just begun to study EFL teacher belief. Domestic research on teacher belief has made rapid progress in the field of general education, but compared with foreign research on teacher belief, the research on English teacher belief lags behind and is later than the research on teacher belief in the field of general education in China [3].

In recent years, the study of pre-service teacher belief has become an important indicator to judge the effectiveness of teacher education, and is regarded as the most valuable part of teacher education [4]. In addition, Zhang Junguang also said that the research on pre-service EFL teacher belief can help improve teachers' education curriculum and practice, and even help teachers to plan their career development [5]. However, since this century, the specific situation of foreign research on pre-service EFL teacher belief is not clear, and the research of domestic scholars also focuses on the theoretical research on teacher belief system and

empirical research mainly on college English teachers, while the research on pre-service teacher belief accounts for a relatively small proportion. Therefore, in order to understand the current situation of research on pre-service EFL teacher belief at home and abroad, this paper summarizes the related researches at home and abroad, analyzes the overall trend, research content and research characteristics of the research, summarizes the enlightenment obtained from previous studies, and hopes to provide new research ideas for follow-up research and promote the development of pre-service English teacher education in China.

## 1.2. Research Questions

In order to understand the current research status of pre-service EFL teacher belief at home and abroad, this paper explores three questions from the research at home and abroad: What is the general trend of pre-service EFL teacher belief research? What are the contents of the study of pre-service EFL teacher belief? What are the characteristics of pre-service EFL teacher belief research?

## 2. Key Concepts

### 2.1. Belief and Teacher Belief

From a psychological point of view, belief can be interpreted as a certain theoretical view that individuals believe in nature and society. The spiritual pillar of human understanding and transformation of the world is faith, which inspires us to engage in various activities. It can be said that the individual's three views (world outlook, life outlook, values) and moral outlook are all formed by the development of faith. Once established, belief will affect people's psychological development and behavioral changes, which determines the direction, speed and effect of individual growth and development; At the same time, if a certain belief is shaken or disintegrated, people will begin to suffer from mental collapse and behavioral degradation.

Different scholars have different views on Teacher Belief. Porter and Freeman defined teacher belief from the perspective of teaching orientation. They believed that teacher belief refer to teachers' views on educational practice, students, learning, teaching, curriculum, teaching environment, teachers' role, etc. Pajares pointed out that teacher belief are the center of teachers' teaching [6]. Teachers' teaching beliefs not only affect teachers' perception and the way of dealing with information and problems in the class, but also play an important role in determining teaching objectives and tasks. Borg believed that teacher belief is a certain view recognized by teachers themselves in the field of education and teaching [7]. It usually consists of the following aspects: teachers' understanding of classroom teaching, language view, language learning view, learners, teaching content and teachers' role. Foreign scholars have similar points of view, but Borg's explanation is more specific, and domestic and foreign scholars agree with his explanation. From the description of foreign researchers, it can be concluded that Teacher Belief is the view of teaching related factors and has an impact on teaching itself. Domestic scholars have also defined teacher belief from different levels. Chinese researcher Ye Lan believes that teacher belief are judgments based on their understanding of many facts such as teaching, environment and students [8]. Zhao Changmu explained teacher belief from a larger perspective. He believed that teacher belief and assumptions about human, nature, society, education and teaching are teacher beliefs [9]. Yu Guoqiang and Xin Ziqiang defined teacher beliefs as "teachers' judgments of certain theories, views and opinions on teaching and learning phenomena" from the perspective of teaching [1]. To sum up, scholars at home and abroad have explained teacher belief from different angles of teaching, and the teaching beliefs given by them contain different elements, but they all focus on teaching. Therefore, the author believes that the core of teacher belief is teaching beliefs. The teacher's teaching belief is the belief, attitude and psychological tendency of the teacher on the relevant

factors in the teaching process (such as teachers themselves, students, teaching objectives, teaching methods, teaching materials, teaching environment, teaching evaluation, etc.).

## 2.2. Pre-service EFL Teacher Belief

Scholars at home and abroad have different opinions about EFL teacher belief. Richards and Lockhart used a chapter in their monograph *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classroom* to elaborate the concept, content and significance of foreign language teachers' teaching beliefs. According to the description of two scholars, English teachers' teaching beliefs include teachers' understanding of English teaching in many aspects, such as the understanding of English itself (status and role, learning American or British English or other English, learning methods, the most difficult part, learning difficulty, etc.), of learning, of teaching, of projects and courses, and of language teaching profession. Brog believes that language teacher belief include their views on the relevant elements of teaching, such as classroom teaching, language, language learning, English learners, teachers' roles, curriculum reform, teachers' professionalization, etc [7]. Therefore, foreign scholars interpret the explicit part of teaching beliefs, while some domestic scholars interpret foreign language teacher belief from other perspectives. According to the actual situation of education in China, English belongs to foreign language, so the EFL teacher in China is also English teacher. Liu Ye explored the essence of the belief system of English teachers and divided teacher beliefs into eight types: teacher's professional beliefs, teacher's beliefs, teaching beliefs, classroom beliefs, phonetic beliefs, teaching plans and curriculum beliefs, learner's beliefs, and learning beliefs [10]. The classification of Liu Ye's is very detailed, but some categories overlap and can be merged. For example, teaching plans and course beliefs belong to teaching, which can be regarded as teaching beliefs. Xu Quan, combining the actual situation of English teaching in China, built a systematic and concise belief structure of English teachers with teaching activities as the center, and divided English teacher belief into five dimensions: English language view, English teaching view, English learning view, English teaching professional view, and teacher and student role view [11].

In a word, scholars at home and abroad have explained the beliefs of language teachers from different perspectives. In combination with the actual situation of pre-service English teachers, the author believes that the English teaching belief system proposed by Xu Quan is the most suitable for the actual situation. He considers the five aspects of language, teaching, learning, role and specialty, and for the first time puts forward the professional view of English teaching, that is, the skills that teachers need to have to engage in English teaching Attitude and professional development. Therefore, the pre-service EFL teacher belief involved in this paper are pre-service teachers' understanding of English teaching, English learning, and the roles of teachers and students, as well as their views on their English teaching majors.

## 3. Researches on Pre-service EFL Teacher Belief in China

For domestic research, the author conducted advanced search on all papers published in journals which are published since the beginning of this century included by CNKI, and then collated them to ensure the accuracy of the search results. First of all, with the theme of "pre-service English teachers" and "teacher belief", and the time range set from January 2002 to October 2022, the author conducted an advanced search of the papers published on CNKI. The results showed that a total of 119 papers were published, of which 36 were journal papers and the rest were doctoral papers. Secondly, in order to avoid the omission of the search, the subject words of "English normal students' teacher beliefs" and "pre-service foreign language teacher belief" were used for the search, and a total of 14 relevant documents were obtained. Finally, the author screened 133 documents retrieved and concluded that there were 54 documents on the study of pre-service EFL teacher belief in China since this century. Therefore, based on these 54 papers, this paper makes a review of the research on pre-service teacher belief in China.

### 3.1. General Trend

First of all, from the time of publication, China has published research on pre-service EFL teacher belief since 2006. By 2012, the number of publications reached the peak (8 articles). After that, research in this area has decreased year by year (Figure 1). Secondly, from the perspective of resource types, most of the papers come from master’s and doctoral theses, and after knowing the schools of these authors, we will find that their schools are basically teachers’ colleges, which shows that the relevant teachers’ colleges attach great importance to the development of teacher belief. Finally, from the perspective of journal sources of journal literature, there are 11 journals of normal colleges and universities, 2 general foreign language journals and 3 general education journals. Among them, the journals of normal colleges and universities have published 13 articles on pre-service EFL teacher belief, 3 foreign language journals and 4 general education journals. However, when the survey was published in 14 foreign language teaching and 42 core educational journals, the author found that there were many theoretical studies on the belief system of English teachers and empirical studies focusing on college English teachers, but the study of pre-service EFL teacher belief was hardly involved. Therefore, the current English teachers in higher normal education schools have recognized the importance of cultivating English teacher belief in the pre-service stage, and they have carried out relevant research. However, at present, the core journals pay less attention to the research on pre-service EFL teacher belief.

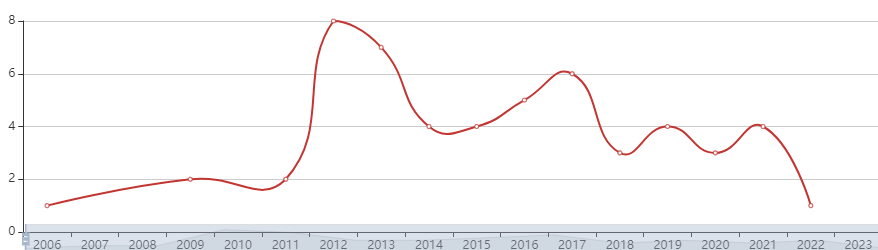


Fig. 1 Publication Date

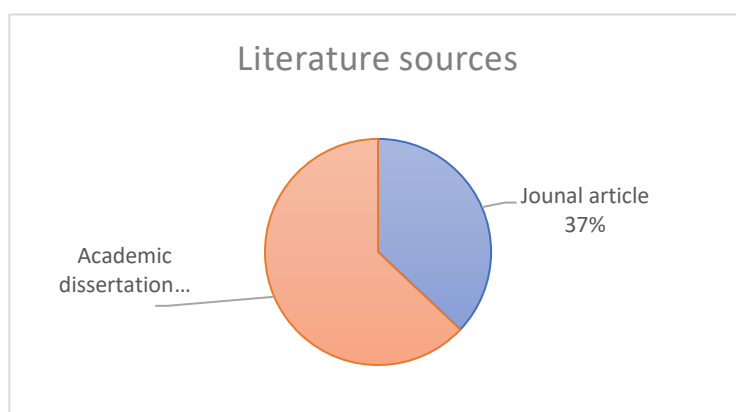
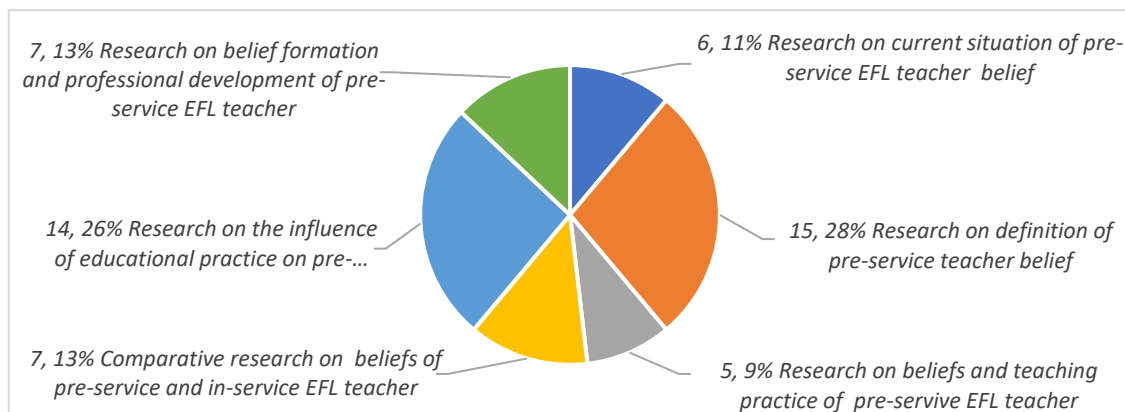


Fig. 2 Literature Sources

### 3.2. Research Contents

From the distribution of research contents, domestic scholars have different concerns about pre-service EFL teacher belief at present, but the research contents can be divided into six categories: the survey of pre-service EFL teacher belief, the study of the connotation and elements of pre-service EFL teacher belief, the study of pre-service EFL teacher belief and teaching practices, the comparative study of pre-service and in-service English teacher belief Research on the influence of educational practice on pre-service teacher belief, and research on

pre-service EFL teacher belief formation and professional development (Figure 3). These contents reflect the current focus on pre-service teacher belief, almost covering all aspects of pre-service EFL teacher belief, and have very important guiding significance and reference significance for pre-service teacher belief education in China.



**Fig.3** Research Contents of Pre-service EFL Teacher Belief

The first type of research accounts for 11%, mainly about understanding the general research situation of pre-service EFL teacher belief in China. Qi Shan took the students in a class of Grade 4 in the Department of English Education of a normal university in Beijing as the subjects of the survey [12]. She used questionnaires and interviews to investigate the teacher belief of English normal students. The results showed that pre-service English teachers formed good beliefs. Li Pei paid special attention to the beliefs of pre-service English teachers of different sexes in his own research, and the results showed that girls have more advanced educational beliefs than boys, which meet the needs of contemporary education. From the relevant research results, the current pre-service EFL teachers in China hold positive and good teacher beliefs, which meet the requirements of contemporary English teaching [13]. Li Pei believes that pre-service EFL teacher belief about teaching are relatively idealistic, which deviates from the actual classroom teaching, and there are differences in beliefs held by English normal students of different grades and different genders.

The second type of research accounted for the largest proportion, 28%, mainly exploring the definition of pre-service EFL teacher beliefs. Different scholars have different views on this, which have been explained in the previous article (2.2.1), and will not be repeated here. However, from the comprehensive research conclusion, it can be concluded that the core of pre-service EFL teacher belief is teaching beliefs, including pre-service teacher belief on English teaching, English learning, teachers' and students' roles and teachers' occupation.

The third type of research accounts for the smallest proportion, 9%, mainly studying the impact of pre-service EFL teacher belief on actual teaching. Li Siqing and Zhang Lu used empirical research methods to investigate English normal students and found that teacher belief in English vocabulary learning are positively correlated with their teaching beliefs [14]. This shows that positive teaching beliefs will have a positive impact on vocabulary teaching. Jiang Shuyan studied the influence of pre-service EFL teacher belief on grammar teaching. She said that, influenced by internal and external factors, when teaching grammar pre-service EFL teachers showed inconsistency between teacher belief and behaviors in the use of mother tongue, grammar teaching methods, and classroom error correction methods [15]. There are relatively few studies on the impact of pre-service EFL teacher belief on actual teaching, but this is also caused by the limitations of the research topic, because beliefs are an abstract concept and are not easy to control, and the beliefs that teachers think in their minds may not

be displayed in actual teaching. However, from the existing research, it can be concluded that pre-service teacher beliefs do have an impact on actual English teaching.

The fourth type of research is a comparative study of the beliefs of pre-service and in-service English teachers, accounting for 13%. It mainly studies the differences and characteristics of the beliefs of pre-service and in-service English teachers. Xiong Meihua and others explored the belief level of English teachers at different career stages by taking pre-service English teachers and in-service English teachers as the research objects [16]. The research results showed that the beliefs of pre-service and in-service English teachers in Gannan Soviet Area are very different, and the beliefs of English teachers are dynamic and have the characteristics of stages. Cao Yang investigated the teacher belief of normal students in a normal school and middle school English teachers in a certain area, and the results showed that there were differences in teacher belief between the two groups, specifically in two aspects: actual performance and theoretical understanding. This kind of research shows that there are differences in teacher belief between in-service and pre-service English teachers. Although different scholars surveyed different regions, pre-service EFL teacher belief are more positive and more in line with the requirements of the field of English education.

The fifth type of research is to explore the impact of educational practice on the beliefs of pre-service English teachers. Because educational practice is an important educational learning experience for pre-service English teachers or English normal students, it will have a great impact on their learning and teaching, so the degree of attention is still high, accounting for 26%. Chu Juan investigated the master of English education and found that teachers' educational beliefs fall into five categories (beliefs in English language, beliefs in English learning, beliefs in learners, beliefs in English teaching and beliefs in teachers' profession) [17]. She compared the changes of teacher beliefs of English master students before and after the practice, and found that the educational practice had a positive impact on the teacher beliefs of English master students, and had an impact on every English master student, but not all five aspects of beliefs were affected, and different practice schools and different instructors were the key factors affecting the teacher beliefs of English master students. Deng Fanqiong, taking English majors as the research object, investigated the changes of teacher belief of English teachers' students in a school in Guangdong Province after their internship [18]. The results showed that there was no significant difference between English majors' perceptions of English language, English teachers' occupation, language learning and learners before and after the internship, On the understanding of teaching beliefs, the normal students affirmed the view that teaching should be student-centered after practice. Therefore, according to previous research on educational practice, it can be seen that practice is a very important teaching experience for pre-service teachers, and practice experience will have a relatively positive impact on pre-service teacher belief. However, some teacher belief, such as teachers' understanding of language learning, have gradually formed from the beginning of pre-service teachers' learning of English, and short-term practice experience will not change pre-service teachers' fixed understanding of English learning. However, before and after the internship, English normal students or master students have always been open to language. They attach great importance to the communicative nature of language, which is in line with the language view of the new era. The sixth type of research mainly explores the formation of pre-service EFL teacher belief and professional development. This type of research accounts for a relatively small proportion (13%). It is mainly to start with cultivating teacher belief, explore ways of teacher development, and promote pre-service teachers' professional development. Zhang Guangjun investigated and discussed the factors that affect pre-service EFL teacher belief [5]. The results showed that pre-service teacher belief are mainly affected by learning experience and school curriculum. So Zhang proposed that schools can innovate in teaching form and curriculum to help students' professional development when training English teachers. Qiao Mingwen further explained

how the school should improve the curriculum [3]. He pointed out that the teacher education curriculum should include four steps: teaching design, observation teaching, trial teaching and reflection. He also carried out the self-reflection action research of pre-service English teachers, through which the pre-service English teachers' individual teacher beliefs could be reviewed and reconstructed in advance, so as to effectively improve their teaching ability and promote their professional development.

In short, domestic research mainly focuses on the above six aspects. Most researchers attach great importance to theoretical research and pay more attention to the impact of educational practice on pre-service EFL teacher belief. However, there are still deficiencies in the depth and breadth of domestic research, especially in the formative stage, how to cultivate and improve the operational methods or ways of pre-service EFL teacher belief needs more exploration.

#### **4. Researches on Pre-service EFL Teacher Belief at Abroad**

Around the 1980s, the whole world was in a period of educational reform, and foreign scholars began to pay attention to the study of teacher belief. On the contrary, the research on teacher belief at that time also affected the reform of education to a certain extent. Many foreign experts have carried out empirical research on teacher belief, and finally came to a conclusion that teacher belief do have an important impact on teachers' professional development [19].

Woods (1996) conducted a long-term study on two teachers who taught the same English course in Canadian universities but with different teaching concepts. He concluded that teaching methods and teaching behaviors are determined by teaching concepts. For example, if the teacher believes that teaching should be based on the textbook curriculum, her classroom decision-making will be carried out in strict accordance with the curriculum content prepared before class. If another teacher believes that teaching should be student-centered, then decisions in the classroom will be based on students' behaviors in the course. Teacher belief not only affect teachers' teaching methods, but also affect students' learning habits. Horwitz set up a course on teacher beliefs, and investigated the changes of pre-service EFL teacher belief after taking such courses, taking master students as subjects. His research found that when the content explained in the course conflicts with the existing beliefs of pre-service English teachers, the beliefs of pre-service EFL teachers will change. Matheoudakis conducted a longitudinal study in Greece, trying to track the possible changes of these beliefs in the three-year teacher education plan, which Matheoudakis wanted to make a investigation of pre-service EFL teachers' teaching and learning belief and explore the impact of teaching practice, especially on the beliefs of students and teachers. The results show that although the beliefs of students and teachers have gradually developed during the course of the course, and sometimes have significant development, the participation of students and teachers in teaching practice seems to have little impact on the development of their beliefs. Görsev Inceçay selected two pre-service English teachers as the subjects of investigation, and used interviews and surveys to explore the impact of pre-service English teachers' language learning views on teaching practice [21]. The results showed that the methods and strategies used by the two teachers in the teaching process were affected by their own foreign language learning beliefs, and some external factors made teacher belief different from actual teaching. In 2012, Debreli carried out a study to investigate the change of EFL students and teacher belief in a nine-month training plan [22]. The research results show that pre-service teachers have different beliefs about teaching and learning when starting teacher training programs. Most of these beliefs are similar to the language teaching trend of CLT method, which is also in line with the concept of the current teacher training plan. There was no significant change during the first term of office. However, in the second semester of the training plan, when pre-service teachers have the opportunity to observe the real classroom and teach in the real classroom, they have more

understanding of their own beliefs. Although they held some similar beliefs before training, they are now more clearly aware of the inconsistency between their beliefs and reality.

## 5. Conclusion

According to the previous analysis, it can be found that scholars at home and abroad are paying more attention to the changes of pre-service EFL teacher belief. Most scholars are exploring the factors that affect pre-service EFL teacher belief. In a comprehensive view, the current pre-service EFL teacher belief research is gradually becoming mature, showing the characteristics of broad research objects, multiple research contents, and comprehensive research methods.

First, the research object is extensive. The research on the beliefs of pre-service English teachers covers a wide range of pre-service English teachers, mainly including students majoring in English education, such as free normal students, interns and masters of education majoring in English teaching. Secondly, the research content is extensive. The current research on pre-service EFL teacher belief involves several aspects of EFL teacher belief (language view, learning view, teaching view, curriculum view, student view and teacher view). The current research also analyzes the factors that may affect the change of pre-service EFL teacher belief, whether the impact of educational practice on pre-service EFL teacher belief is positive or negative, and what is the difference between pre-service and in-service EFL teacher belief. What is the impact of pre-service English teacher beliefs on teachers' professional development and the relationship between the two, and put forward suggestions to help novice teachers improve the scientific teacher belief system: teachers' colleges should open courses on teacher beliefs in the teacher education stage, and guide students to gradually establish scientific teacher beliefs in the stage of learning to become teachers. Finally, there are various research methods. Most studies combine quantitative and qualitative research methods. For example, when scholars explore the impact of educational practice on pre-service EFL teacher belief, they first use the literature review method to analyze the connotation of pre-service EFL teacher belief, and then use the empirical method to explore the changes of pre-service EFL teacher belief before and after the practice and relevant influencing factors.

However, the current research also reflects some deficiencies. First of all, the research includes many aspects of EFL teacher belief, but there are still deficiencies in depth and breadth. There are few empirical studies on the inspection and correction of pre-service EFL teacher belief. Besides, although some studies have analyzed pre-service EFL teacher belief and knowledge from the perspective of personal cognition, there are still few qualitative studies on the relationship between teaching practice and pre-service EFL teacher belief and knowledge. What's more, need to further improve the scientificity and effectiveness of research methods. Finally, how to cultivate and improve the beliefs of pre-service EFL teachers in the formative stage needs to be further explored.

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