



Teachers' Beliefs in Curriculum Innovation: Pre-Delphi Reflections of Secondary Curriculum Leaders

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Abstract: This study explores how senior secondary curriculum leaders interpret teachers' beliefs in curriculum innovation. A qualitative descriptive design was used with written reflective responses collected before a Delphi panel discussion. Participants were 60 vice principals for curriculum affairs from senior secondary schools in Aceh Tengah and Bener Meriah, Indonesia. The data were examined through thematic analysis involving familiarisation, open coding, categorisation, theme development, and peer debriefing. The findings identify three themes: moral commitment, professional resilience, and pedagogical guidance. Participants described teachers' beliefs as a source of responsibility toward students, a resource for maintaining motivation during policy change, and a reference for interpreting curriculum standards and selecting instructional strategies. The study contributes to research on curriculum reform by showing how beliefs operate before collective deliberation. It also extends existing work on teacher cognition by positioning beliefs as a moral, resilience, and pedagogical framework used by school-level curriculum leaders. The findings suggest that curriculum innovation needs professional development that engages teachers' values and reflective judgment, not only technical training.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana para pemimpin kurikulum tingkat SMA menafsirkan keyakinan guru terkait inovasi kurikulum. Desain penelitian kualitatif deskriptif digunakan dengan mengumpulkan tanggapan reflektif tertulis sebelum diskusi panel Delphi. Peserta penelitian terdiri dari 60 wakil kepala sekolah bidang kurikulum dari sekolah-sekolah SMA di Aceh Tengah dan Bener Meriah, Indonesia. Data dianalisis melalui analisis tematik yang meliputi tahap familiarisasi, pengkodean terbuka, kategorisasi, pengembangan tema, dan diskusi sesama peneliti. Temuan penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga tema: komitmen moral, ketahanan profesional, dan bimbingan pedagogis. Peserta menggambarkan keyakinan guru sebagai sumber tanggung jawab terhadap siswa, sumber daya untuk mempertahankan motivasi selama perubahan kebijakan, serta acuan untuk menafsirkan standar kurikulum dan memilih strategi pengajaran. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada penelitian tentang reformasi kurikulum dengan menunjukkan bagaimana keyakinan berperan sebelum dilakukannya musyawarah kolektif. Penelitian ini juga memperluas kajian yang ada mengenai kognisi guru dengan memposisikan keyakinan sebagai kerangka kerja moral, ketahanan, dan pedagogis yang digunakan oleh para pemimpin kurikulum di tingkat sekolah.

Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa inovasi kurikulum memerlukan pengembangan profesional yang melibatkan nilai-nilai dan penilaian reflektif guru, bukan hanya pelatihan teknis.

Keywords: teachers' beliefs; curriculum innovation; reflective practice; Delphi panel; curriculum leaders

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum innovation remains a central agenda in education systems because schools must respond to social change, technological development, and changing learner needs. Innovation does not move from policy documents to classrooms in a mechanical way. Teachers and school leaders interpret, negotiate, and adapt policy within specific institutional and socio-cultural contexts (Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, 2012; Fullan, 2007; Rogers, 2003; Zhao, Y., & Watterston, 2021).

This interpretive process gives teachers' beliefs a strategic role. Teachers' beliefs refer to assumptions, values, and commitments about teaching, learning, learners, and the purpose of education. These beliefs shape how educators understand curriculum demands, select pedagogical strategies, and judge what matters in classroom practice (Borg, 2011; Pajares, 1992; Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, 2017). When beliefs align with the values of reform, curriculum implementation can become more meaningful. When beliefs and policy expectations diverge, implementation may become procedural or symbolic (Baş, 2021; Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, 2015; Bradfield, K. Z., & Exley, 2020).

Recent research in Indonesia shows that teachers often show openness to curriculum change, but this openness does not always produce deep implementation. Teachers still face recurring difficulties in applying student-centred learning, developing learning materials, using authentic assessment, and translating new curriculum language into classroom practice (Mustofa, M., Lin, C.-Y., & Chen, 2023; Nasution, I. N., & Indrasari, 2024). These findings indicate that curriculum reform depends not only on training and policy socialisation, but also on how educators make sense of reform through their professional beliefs.

Research on teacher cognition has generated important evidence about how beliefs influence teaching practice and responses to reform. However, three gaps remain relevant for this study. First, many studies examine beliefs through surveys, interviews, or classroom observation after implementation has begun. Fewer studies examine written reflections produced before collective professional dialogue. Second, existing studies commonly focus on classroom teachers. The perspectives of vice principals for curriculum affairs remain underrepresented, although they coordinate curriculum planning and support implementation at the school level. Third, much of the literature emphasises cognitive and instructional dimensions of beliefs, while the moral and resilience-related functions of beliefs during frequent curriculum change receive less attention.

These gaps are important in the context of Aceh Tengah and Bener Meriah, where curriculum leaders work in schools that must respond to national policy while maintaining local educational

values. Their reflections can reveal how beliefs operate before formal discussion and consensus building occur in a Delphi process. This stage is valuable because it captures initial meanings before participants adjust their views through group interaction.

This study seeks to answer the following question: How do curriculum leaders conceptualise the meaning and function of teachers' beliefs in curriculum innovation? The study contributes to the literature by using pre-Delphi reflections as baseline data, by focusing on vice principals for curriculum affairs as curriculum leaders, and by conceptualising teachers' beliefs as an integrated moral, resilience, and pedagogical framework for school-level curriculum innovation.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive design with reflective inquiry as the main strategy. This design was selected because the research aimed to describe participants' meanings and interpretations in direct relation to their professional experience. The design also matched the purpose of pre-Delphi reflection, which was to capture initial belief orientations before structured dialogue and consensus formation (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2016).

Participants and Research Context

The participants were 60 vice principals for curriculum affairs from senior secondary schools in Aceh Tengah and Bener Meriah Regencies, Indonesia. They were selected because they held strategic responsibilities in curriculum planning, coordination, supervision, and school-level implementation. Their position enabled them to interpret teachers' beliefs not only as individual classroom dispositions, but also as factors that influence curriculum leadership and policy enactment.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (1) holding the position of vice principal for curriculum affairs, (2) being actively involved in curriculum planning or implementation, and (3) having at least two years of experience in curriculum-related leadership. The sample size was considered adequate because it provided diverse school-level perspectives while remaining manageable for thematic analysis.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a written reflective questionnaire administered before the Delphi panel discussion. The main prompt was: 'In your experience, what is the meaning and role of teachers' beliefs in fulfilling the responsibility of educating future generations during curriculum change?' Participants were asked to give reflective and experience-based responses. Most responses ranged from 150 to 400 words.

The use of written reflections was intended to reduce the influence of dominant

voices during group discussion. It also allowed each participant to present an initial interpretation before the Delphi process introduced collective deliberation.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The procedure involved data familiarisation, initial coding, grouping similar codes into categories, developing themes, reviewing the themes, and interpreting the patterns in relation to the research question (Braun, V., & Clarke, 2006; Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, 2014). Coding focused on words, phrases, and statements that described the meaning, function, or practical role of teachers' beliefs during curriculum change.

To strengthen trustworthiness, two researchers reviewed the coding process independently and discussed differences until agreement was reached. An audit trail was maintained to record coding decisions, category development, and theme refinement. Peer debriefing was also used to check whether the final themes were grounded in the participants' written responses.

Ethical Considerations

Participants received information about the purpose of the study and their voluntary involvement before data collection. Written informed consent was obtained. All responses were anonymised during analysis, and participant codes were used in reporting quotations to protect personal and institutional identity. The study followed institutional ethical guidelines for educational research.

Code grouping produced three analytic categories. Statements on responsibility, sincerity, educational mission, and dedication were grouped as ethical responsibility toward students and developed into the theme moral commitment. Statements on adaptation, persistence, confidence, and motivation were grouped as capacity to respond to change and developed into professional resilience. Statements on decision-making, instructional strategies, and curriculum interpretation were grouped as

guidance for instructional practice and developed into pedagogical guidance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The thematic analysis identified three main themes concerning the function of teachers' beliefs in curriculum innovation: moral commitment, professional resilience, and pedagogical guidance. These themes show that participants viewed beliefs not as abstract opinions, but as practical references that influence responsibility, adaptation, and instructional decision-making.

Teachers' Beliefs as Moral Commitment

Participants frequently described teachers' beliefs as a moral foundation for educating students. One participant wrote, 'A teacher's belief is what keeps us committed to students even when curriculum policies keep changing' (Participant 12). Another participant stated, 'Teaching is not only about delivering lessons; it is a responsibility to shape students' character and future' (Participant 27). These responses indicate that participants linked beliefs with ethical responsibility, sincerity, and professional integrity.

This theme shows that curriculum innovation was not understood only as a technical adjustment. Participants associated teachers' beliefs with a broader duty to guide students and protect the educational purpose of teaching. Beliefs helped educators maintain a sense of responsibility when new curriculum demands created uncertainty.

Teachers' Beliefs as Professional Resilience

Teachers' beliefs were also viewed as a source of resilience during curriculum change. A participant explained, 'Strong beliefs help teachers stay motivated when administrative demands become overwhelming' (Participant 8). Another participant noted, 'Beliefs give teachers confidence to adapt without losing their educational principles' (Participant 34). These reflections show that beliefs supported motivation, confidence, and adaptability in uncertain policy environments.

Participants did not present resilience as simple endurance. They described it as the capacity to keep working, interpret change, and continue improving practice while facing new administrative and pedagogical expectations. Beliefs helped educators remain engaged when reform required adjustment and learning.

Teachers' Beliefs as Pedagogical Guidance

Participants further described teachers' beliefs as guidance for instructional decisions. One participant wrote, 'Our beliefs influence how we interpret curriculum standards and choose teaching strategies for different students' (Participant 19). Another stated, 'Beliefs help teachers decide what is most important for students' learning, not just what is written in policy documents' (Participant 41). These statements show that beliefs shaped curriculum interpretation and pedagogical judgment.

This theme indicates that beliefs provided a practical framework for responding to diverse student needs. Participants viewed teachers as active interpreters of curriculum standards rather than passive implementers of documents. Beliefs helped teachers decide how to translate policy language into classroom action.

Cross-Theme Pattern

Across the three themes, participants consistently portrayed teachers' beliefs as an internal reference framework that supports consistency, adaptation, and pedagogical judgment. Moral commitment gave purpose to teaching, professional resilience helped educators face change, and pedagogical guidance supported curriculum decisions. The relationship among these themes is shown in Figure 1.

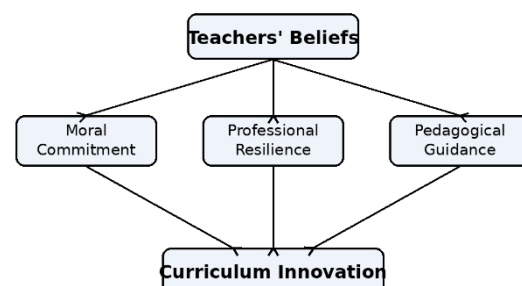


Figure 1. Moral, Resilience, and Pedagogical Framework of Teachers' Beliefs

Discussion

The findings support previous studies showing that teachers' beliefs influence how curriculum policies are interpreted and enacted (Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, 2015; Borg, 2011; Pajares, 1992). However, this study extends that work by showing that curriculum leaders did not describe beliefs only as cognitive assumptions about teaching. They described beliefs as moral commitments, resilience resources, and pedagogical references that help educators navigate curriculum innovation.

The strong moral framing is one of the most important findings. Earlier research often discusses beliefs in relation to instructional practice and teacher cognition. In this study, participants repeatedly connected beliefs with responsibility toward students and society. This pattern may reflect the socio-cultural context of Aceh, where education is closely related to communal values and moral formation. It also supports Kelchtermans' (2009) argument that teachers' professional self-understanding shapes how they teach (Kelchtermans, 2009; Schön, 1983).

The resilience theme adds another contribution. Curriculum reform often creates pressure because teachers must learn new terminology, adjust planning documents, and respond to new expectations. Participants indicated that beliefs help teachers maintain motivation and professional direction under such pressure. This finding aligns with studies on teacher resilience and agency that emphasise the role of identity, purpose, and professional judgment in sustaining practice during change (Day, C., & Gu, 2014; Wang, 2022).

The pedagogical guidance theme also shows how beliefs mediate between policy and classroom action. Participants did not frame curriculum implementation as direct compliance. They viewed teachers as interpreters who must decide which strategies suit student needs and local

conditions. This finding is consistent with policy enactment theory, which explains that school actors translate policy through situated judgment and contextual negotiation (Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, 2012; Bradfield, K. Z., & Exley, 2020; Mezirow, 1997).

The Indonesian context strengthens the relevance of these findings. Recent evidence shows that Indonesian teachers may accept curriculum change while still struggling to implement it deeply (Hargreaves, A., & O'Connor, 2018; Mustofa, M., Lin, C.-Y., & Chen, 2023; Nasution, I. N., & Indrasari, 2024). This study suggests that one reason for this gap is that technical training alone may not address the belief systems that guide practice. Professional development should therefore create reflective spaces where teachers can examine their values, discuss the purpose of reform, and connect policy demands with classroom realities.

The focus on vice principals for curriculum affairs also offers a distinct contribution. These curriculum leaders work between policy and classroom practice. Their reflections show that teachers' beliefs have a collective dimension because beliefs influence how curriculum leaders guide colleagues, discuss implementation strategies, and support teachers during change. Curriculum innovation therefore depends not only on individual teacher readiness, but also on leadership practices that recognise and support teachers' belief systems.

Figure 1 summarises the study's conceptual contribution. Teachers' beliefs operate as a moral, resilience, and pedagogical framework. These dimensions reinforce one another and help explain how curriculum innovation can remain meaningful in changing policy environments. Reform is more likely to become sustainable when schools attend to teachers' values and reflective judgment, not only to procedures and administrative compliance.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that teachers' beliefs play an important role in how curriculum innovation is understood and enacted at the school level. Based on pre-Delphi reflections from 60 vice principals for curriculum affairs, teachers' beliefs were conceptualised through three interconnected functions: moral commitment, professional resilience, and pedagogical guidance. Participants viewed beliefs as a source of responsibility toward students, a resource for maintaining commitment during policy change, and a basis for interpreting curriculum standards in classroom practice.

The study contributes to research on curriculum reform by capturing initial belief orientations before collective Delphi deliberation. It also highlights the perspective of curriculum leaders, a group that receives less attention than classroom teachers in studies of teachers' beliefs. The findings suggest that belief-oriented professional development can strengthen curriculum innovation because it connects policy implementation with educators' values, identities, and pedagogical judgment.

This study has limitations. It was conducted in two regencies in Aceh and involved only vice principals for curriculum affairs. The findings may not represent all school contexts. The data were also based on written reflections, not prolonged observation or repeated interviews. Future research could combine Delphi processes with interviews, classroom observation, or longitudinal designs to examine how teachers' beliefs evolve during curriculum reform. Comparative studies across regions and school types would also help test the transferability of the moral, resilience, and pedagogical framework.

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