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Preschool Teachers' Issues and Beliefs in English Language Teaching: A Systematic Review (2012-2022)

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Abstract: The introduction of English language teaching (ELT) at the preschool level has been widely discussed by researchers. While most agree with ELT at preschool level, considerable issues are faced in learning a second, third, or foreign language. Therefore, this systematic review discusses the issues preschool teachers face in implementing ELT and their beliefs on how ELT should be applied to young children. Using three renowned databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), 34 articles were extracted out of 85 articles, from 2012 to 2022, with exclusion and inclusion criteria taken into consideration. The findings of this study showcased eight main issues faced by preschool teachers in implementing ELT: English language proficiency, pedagogical skills, teacher perception, curriculum, teaching resources, training, socio-cultural, and classroom environment. In terms of preschool teachers' beliefs about ELT, there are four main issues: Bilingual education, children's characteristics, curriculum alteration, and teachers' experience. Generally, these findings will guide teachers, responsible authorities, and researchers to acquire an overview of the actual issues that occur in the implementation of ELT in preschools as well as the appropriate measures to overcome them, starting from the preschool teachers' beliefs.

Keywords: *Belief, ELT in preschool, issues, preschool teacher.*

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Introduction

There is a widespread belief that 'young is better' in language learning. Every child is born with the natural potential to master complex language. To help develop their second language, they need to be exposed as early as possible. Preschool children are capable of understanding and mastering a second language at the preschool level (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). The preschool years are a period of extensive growth in children's ability to acquire language and verbal comprehension. Young children have a solid potential to acquire almost a large amount of new information, especially when learning a second language (Klimova, 2013). Therefore, during this period, children need support from education to develop their language skills (Brown & Jernigan, 2012).

The most challenging aspect of English language teaching (ELT) to preschool children is 'how to do it?' It requires some awareness of how they learn the language. As suggested by Piaget (1964), children at preschool age are still at the 'concrete operational level'. They learn through experience by manipulating the objects around them. They cannot go beyond imagination if they do not experience a situation. Children of preschool age learn from their vast experience. They must experience the feeling of something to learn it well (Piaget, 1964). Numerous factors affect children's success in learning English, such as qualified teachers, curriculum planning, teaching materials and teaching methods. ELT planning for preschool children should consider motivation, teacher qualifications, class size, lesson length, course structure, methodology, and children's learning conditions (Chuang, 2001).

This paper reviews previous studies to explore the issues and beliefs of preschool teachers in ELT. The aim of this study is to identify and establish the key issues and common concerns regarding ELT in preschools and how teachers overcome them. In addition, this study also intends to identify the factors contributing to low English language proficiency among preschool teachers.

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Literature Review

The spread of ELT into preschool education demands qualified preschool teachers. What is the best way for preschool teachers to meet the needs of preschool children in English language learning (ELL)? What could preschool teachers do to create an environment to expand diverse cultures and languages? How could preschool teachers enhance their knowledge, awareness, and teaching practice appropriately to support the children's ongoing learning needs?

The implementation of ELT in preschool is an incredibly challenging task that demands different approaches from primary school children or adults. If the teachers are well trained in ELT, it is not simply that they can teach English in preschool. Only experienced teachers should work with preschool children (Khurramovna & Bakhtiyarovna, 2021). ELT in preschool is not merely sitting on a chair, turning the pages of textbooks, and talking. Its implementation in preschool should not be dull. Preschool children should endeavour to acquire their knowledge on their own. The preschool teachers' explanation of something needs to be simplified through examples. ELT in preschool is like a game for children; it must be fun. Preschool teachers are important individuals in young children's language learning (Elicker & McMullen, 2013). Teachers acquire special knowledge through continuous training, observation, and assessment of preschool children (du Plessis & Louw, 2008).

Preschool children spend significant time interacting with their teachers; thus, this will affect them socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Personal relationships between preschool teachers and children are crucial for successful learning (Narea et al., 2022). The teacher's job is to create a friendly atmosphere and prepare appropriate activities for them. Preschool children cannot take the blame as their learning depends on their teachers (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015).

In recent years, most systematic reviews have dealt with ELT at primary, secondary, or university levels. Very few of them have focused on preschool. Even if there is a study that focuses on ELT in preschool, it seems more biased to find the weaknesses of preschool teachers in ELT. For example, Goh et al. (2020), conducted a review of 20 studies that focused on barriers to the use of English among preschool teachers in the classroom. The study found that one of the barriers is a lack of English language proficiency. Interestingly, the study suggested that preschool teachers' beliefs and attitudes must be explored further to better understand the issues. A systematic review by Kim (2021) emphasised on preschool teachers' attitudes toward ELLs, and their academic abilities which were reviewed from 25 studies published between 1985 and 2015. It was demonstrated that the teachers hold opposing beliefs and attitudes. The review suggested that teachers' lack of knowledge, experience, and confidence which are necessary to teach ELL effectively must be addressed given their role in beliefs and attitudes towards ELL.

Thus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the issues faced by preschool teachers in ELT?
2. What are the beliefs of preschool teachers in ELT?

Methodology

The method of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 checklist was used to conduct this systematic review. PRISMA can expand the clarity and transparency of reviews (Liberati et al., 2009). The PRISMA statement consisted of 27 checklist items and four processes: identification, screening, eligibility, and included. PRISMA is not intended as a quality assessment tool, but rather to ensure consistency and answerability when documenting systematic review. The search mainly mapped existing literature and empirical studies on preschool teachers' ELT issues and beliefs. This study accessed three databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), involving journals dated between 2012 and 2022.

Process 1: Identification

A few relevant articles for this study underwent four main phases. The first phase involved identifying keywords, followed by searching related and similar words based on thesauruses, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and past research. Accordingly, search strings were developed in October 2022 (Table 1) after all relevant keywords were successfully determined.

A search strategy was developed for this systematic review to identify relevant literature on ELT in preschool. An advanced search was used to allow complex search queries using field codes, booleans, and proximity operators to narrow the search scope. Boolean AND and OR can be used to expand the search further (Grewal et al., 2016). Boolean OR is used to accommodate alternative spellings and synonyms of words, while boolean AND is a word separator for a broader range of findings and expands the search into specific studies.

Table 1. Search String Used in this Study

Databases	Keywords Used
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Challenges" OR "Issues" OR "Problems" OR "Dilemma" OR "Difficulty" OR "Solution" OR "Obstacle" OR "Belief" OR "Strategy" OR "Best" OR "Practices" OR "Ways" OR "Proper" OR "Suitable" OR "Appropriate" OR "Correct" OR "Right") AND ("English language teaching" OR "ELT" OR "English language learning" OR "ELL" OR "Teaching English as a second language" OR "TESL" OR "Teaching English as a foreign language" OR "TEFL" OR "TEACHING English to speaker of other languages" OR "TESOL" OR "English as a medium of instruction") AND ("Preschool*" OR "Kindergarten" OR "Early childhood education" OR "ECE" OR "Nursery")
WoS	TS ("Challenges" OR "Issues" OR "Problems" OR "Dilemma" OR "Difficulty" OR "Solution" OR "Obstacle" OR "Belief" OR "Strategy" OR "Best" OR "Practices" OR "Ways" OR "Proper" OR "Suitable" OR "Appropriate" OR "Correct" OR "Right") AND ("English language teaching" OR "ELT" OR "English language learning" OR "ELL" OR "Teaching English as a second language" OR "TESL" OR "Teaching English as a foreign language" OR "TEFL" OR "TEACHING English to speaker of other languages" OR "TESOL" OR "English as a medium of instruction") AND ("Preschool*" OR "Kindergarten" OR "Early childhood education" OR "ECE" OR "Nursery")
ERIC	English language teaching AND Preschool

Process 2: Screening (Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria)

An initial screening without data parameters defined from the three databases for inclusion and exclusion found 494 documents. However, 301 documents were excluded, including book chapters, magazines, lectures, reports, conference papers, conference reviews, and dissertations from the initial search. As a result, $494 - 301 = 193$ documents containing journal and review articles documented in English between 2012 to 2022 remained from these criteria (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of the Selected Articles

Data Perimeter	Inclusion	Exclusion
Literature type	Journal articles	book chapters, magazines, lectures, reports, conference papers, conference reviews, and dissertations from the initial search
Language	English	Non-English
Year Publish	2012 - 2022	<2011

Process 3: Eligibility

Eligibility is a process that manually includes or excludes articles, according to author specific criteria. After the initial screening, a total of 193 documents were prepared for the third process, known as eligibility. At this stage, the title, abstracts, and main contents of all articles were thoroughly examined to ensure that they fulfilled the inclusion criteria and research objective. From this screening, 94 articles were excluded as irrelevant to the research objectives, and 11 duplicate articles were removed, resulting in 85 articles eligible for further screening.

Process 4: Included

After going through the article eligibility process, 85 eligibility articles were selected and further read in the last process, Included. This systematic review included relevant articles to answer the research objective and questions. As a result, 34 articles were selected for this systematic review (Figure 1).

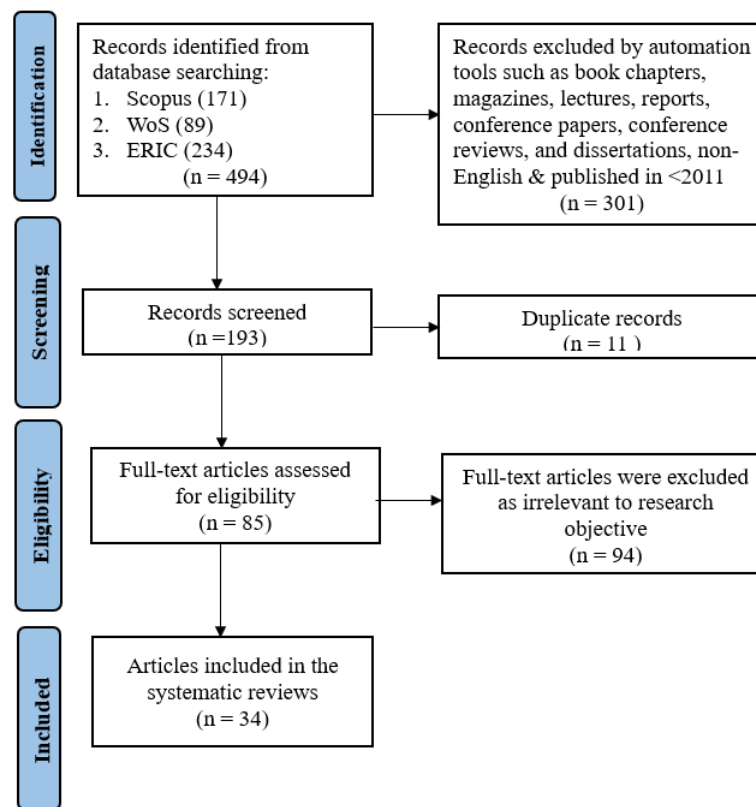


Figure 1. The Flow Diagram of the Study (Adapted From Nang et al., 2022)

Data Analysis and Abstractions

The results of the 34 included articles were analysed, evaluated and reviewed in this section. The articles for this systematic review explored the issues and beliefs of preschool teachers in ELT. The included studies are summarised in Table 3. Based on Table A1, 13 articles were selected from Scopus, 10 from WoS, and 11 from ERIC (See appendix). These databases were selected due to the quality of the articles, especially in the field of preschool education.

Data Analysis Procedures

Following the selection of articles, Mendeley Reference Manager software was used to thoroughly examine each article. Based on the two research questions, significant findings were highlighted, noted, and transferred to an Excel spreadsheet in order to identify patterns, relationships, and themes. To identify accurate themes, critical analysis and creativity are required for clustering, comparing, identifying common patterns, and building a logical chain of evidence (Whittemore & Knaf, 2005).

Using thematic analysis, the authors determined the central theme to answer two research questions:

1. What are the issues faced by preschool teachers in ELT?
2. What are the beliefs of preschool teachers in ELT?

Three experts' reviews were conducted to ensure the validity of the identified themes. Among the experts, two are from teacher training colleges with expertise in early childhood education, and one is a qualitative researcher. During the expert review process, domain validity was established to ensure that each theme was clear, relevant, and appropriate. According to the experts' feedback and comments, adjustments were made at the authors' discretion. The authors' discretion is based on suggestions by Creswell and Miller (2000), whereas many researchers have developed their own concept of validity.

A total of eight themes were identified for the first research question, and four themes were identified for the second research question. The following section discusses the findings of this study.

Findings

Research Question 1: "What are the issues faced by preschool teachers in ELT?"

In this systematic review, the issues faced by preschool teachers in ELT are categorised into eight themes namely English proficiency, training, pedagogical skill, curriculum, teacher perception, classroom environment, teaching resources, and socio-cultural. The issues are categorised as such to facilitate further discussion. Table 3 presents the category of preschool teacher issues based on selected articles.

Table 3. Categorisation of Issues Faced by Preschool Teachers in ELT

Authors	English proficiency	Training	Pedagogical skills	Curriculum	Teacher perception	Classroom environment	Teaching resources	Socio-cultural
Pollard-Durodola et al. (2012)	/	/	/					
Jawaid (2014)			/	/				
Alvira and González (2018)		/						
Prosic-Santovac (2017)				/			/	
Qin and Md Nor (2018)		/		/	/		/	
Huang et al. (2019)	/	/			/			
Mustafa et al. (2019)								/
Ping et al. (2020)	/	/	/					
Xiao et al. (2020)	/		/			/		
Bernstein et al. (2021)	/	/						
Milton et al. (2020)	/	/	/			/	/	
Fauzi et al. (2021)	/						/	
Goh and Luen Loy (2021)					/			
Biricik and Özkan (2012)		/	/					
Slapac and Dorner (2013)				/		/		
Auleear Owodally (2015)			/				/	
Ng (2015)	/	/	/					
Hegde et al. (2018)		/						/
Mede (2017)					/			
Ehri and Flugman (2018)		/						
Goh (2019)	/	/						/
Nafissi and Shafiee (2020)								/
Wang and Hou (2021)		/		/	/	/		
Lalani and Rodrigues (2012)				/				
Al-Darwish (2012)		/		/				/
Leung et al. (2013)	/		/	/		/		/
Huang (2014)			/				/	
Chu (2014)	/			/	/			
Mahmoud	/							
Ghoneim and Abdelsalam								
Elghotmy (2015)								
Baker (2019)			/					
Lai-Reeve et al. (2018)	/		/					
Jacoby and Lesaux (2019)	/			/				
Wong and Russak (2020)		/						
Zucker et al. (2021)				/	/	/		

As shown in Table 4, the main or 'popular' issue faced by preschool teachers in ELT is English language proficiency. There are fourteen articles discussing this issue (Bernstein et al., 2021; Chu, 2014; Fauzi et al., 2021; Goh, 2019; Huang et al., 2019; Jacoby & Lesaux, 2019; Lai-Reeve et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2013; Mahmoud Ghoneim & Abdelsalam Elghotmy, 2015; Milton et al., 2020; Ng, 2015; Pink et al., 2013; Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012; Xiao et al., 2020). This issue usually occurs when English is not the mother tongue of the preschool teacher. Among the problems are limited vocabulary (Pink et al., 2013; Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012), knowledge of phonetics (Mahmoud Ghoneim & Abdelsalam Elghotmy, 2015), pronunciation (Fauzi et al., 2021; Jacoby & Lesaux, 2019; Lai-Reeve et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2013), concern of teaching wrong English (Chu, 2014; Huang et al., 2019), and speaking and writing ability (Goh, 2019), which are the common concerns among the selected studies when practising ELT in preschool. English language proficiency has a negative impact on the language performance and development of young children in ELL (Bernstein et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2013; Milton et al., 2020; Ng, 2015; Xiao et al., 2020).

Apart from English proficiency, there are also fourteen articles that discuss training issues in preschools ELT (Al-Darwish, 2012; Alvira & González, 2018; Bernstein et al., 2021; Biricik & Özkan, 2012; Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Goh, 2019; Hegde et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2019; Milton et al., 2020; Ng, 2015; Pink et al., 2013; Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012; Wang & Hou, 2021; Wong & Russak, 2020; Qin & Md Nor, 2018). Preschool teachers is still awaiting to undergo formal training for ELT in the preschool context, which affects their ability to develop children in ELL (Qin & Md Nor, 2018). Preschool teachers need to be exposed on how preschools ELT should be conducted (Huang et al., 2019; Milton et al., 2020; Ng, 2015). Preschool teachers are more equipped with early childhood education than trained in preschool ELT. As some see bilingual education (BE) as the best practice resource in building children's interest in learning English, more training is also needed. Most preschool teachers 'explore' BE through their teaching experiences and execute it through their approaches (Bernstein et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2020). Even though preschools teachers are given relevant training, they fail to follow (Wang & Hou, 2021). In terms of curriculum, even with the implementation of a curricular intervention with enhanced instructional and supportive professional development training, preschool teachers tend to generalise their practices beyond the intervention. They need more support with their professional development training (Al-Darwish, 2012). They also need more focused training such as BE and how to teach culturally diverse children (Goh, 2019; Hegde et al., 2018). Preschool teachers need training for quality instruction, particularly for preschool children at-risk for dyslexia or struggle with literacy acquisition (Wong & Russak, 2020).

The third issue identified is pedagogical skills. This review identified eleven articles that discuss pedagogical skills issues (Auleear Owodally, 2015; Baker, 2019; Biricik & Özkan, 2012; Fauzi et al., 2021; Huang, 2014; Jawaid, 2014; Lai-Reeve et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2013; Milton et al., 2020; Ng, 2015; Pink et al., 2013; Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012; Xiao et al., 2020). Lack of pedagogical skills guidance is one of the problems faced in relation to this issue (Lai-Reeve et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2013; Milton et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2020). Preschool teachers without guidance depend entirely on textbooks as a source of pedagogical guides to design ELT practices or activities (Jawaid, 2014; Pink et al., 2013). In a study by Baker (2019), BE belief becomes the basis of preschool teachers' ELT practices, but they still determine whether those practices are good. Although preschool teachers succeed in pedagogical skills after receiving guidance, the quality of their instruction, especially their vocabulary, is consistently low (Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012). In addition, the teacher-centred approach practised by preschool teachers causes young children to feel bored with learning English (Biricik & Özkan, 2012). Teachers also rely on translation to teach young children new vocabulary without the support of visual aids (Auleear Owodally, 2015). ELT in preschool is characterised as product-oriented, with harsh use of mechanical drilling of vocabulary (Ng, 2015). In literacy lessons, preschool teachers ELT mostly use repetition and imitation approaches (Huang, 2014).

Furthermore, curriculum is the fourth important issue identified when discussing preschool ELT as found in those eleven articles (Al-Darwish, 2012; Chu, 2014; Jacoby & Lesaux, 2019; Jawaid, 2014; Lalani & Rodrigues, 2012; Milton et al., 2020; Prosic-Santovac, 2017; Slapac & Dorner, 2013; Wang & Hou, 2021; Qin & Md Nor, 2018; Zucker et al., 2021). The highly prescribed curriculum in preschool English that emphasises academics negatively influences the principles of developmentally appropriate practice (Jawaid, 2014; Qin & Md Nor, 2018). Teachers have to follow the curriculum more rigidly (Al-Darwish, 2012). Most preschool curricula are too intensive and well-planned (Leung et al., 2013). Although preschool teachers successfully implement the curriculum, considerable effort and time is needed to translate this curriculum based on young children's needs (Slapac & Dorner, 2013). Schools or districts need clear guidelines to find time to 'fit in' the curriculum (Zucker et al., 2021). Interestingly, Chu (2014) and Jacoby and Lesaux (2019) found no significance for intervention in a specific curriculum in the English language acquisition process for preschool children. Ironically, it is also reported that integrating ELT with popular cartoons that young children are regularly exposed at home motivates them to learn more than a grammar-based curriculum (Prosic-Santovac, 2017). In assessment of preschool ELT, it is difficult for preschool teachers to evaluate their children when integrating it with curriculum guidelines (Wang & Hou, 2021). Teachers have multiple assessment strategies to assess their young children that may not be supported by curriculum guidelines (Lalani & Rodrigues, 2012).

The fifth issue identified is preschool teachers' perception of ELT, with seven articles asserting this subject (Chu, 2014; Goh & Luen Loy, 2021; Huang et al., 2019; Mede, 2017; Wang & Hou, 2021; Qin & Md Nor, 2018; Zucker et al., 2021). Preschool teachers should realise that their perceptions can positively or negatively shape their expectations of

preschool children's English learning (Goh & Luen Loy, 2021; Zucker et al., 2021). There is a perception among preschool teachers that English should be taught in the teacher's mother tongue (Huang et al., 2019). Chu (2014), Mede (2017), Wang and Hou (2021), and Qin and Md Nor (2018) found that there is a mismatch between teachers' perception of the ideal practice and actual practice in preschools ELT. Preschool teachers realise the challenges in practice and suggest better strategies for improving teaching, but they are controlled by requirements to follow a higher authority.

Meanwhile, the sixth issue identified from six articles is classroom environment (Leung et al., 2013; Milton et al., 2020; Slapac & Dorner, 2013; Wang & Hou, 2021; Xiao et al., 2020; Zucker et al., 2021). The classroom environment includes the problem of large class size enrollment (Milton et al., 2020; Wang & Hou, 2021), classroom facilities (Leung et al., 2013; Milton et al., 2020; Slapac & Dorner, 2013), and lack of classroom management skills (Zucker et al., 2021). As preschool teachers need to attend to learners' individual learning needs, they need help dealing with large class enrollment (Milton et al., 2020). Wang and Hou (2021) found it difficult and problematic for preschool teachers to attend to individuals' needs as they need to take care of the entire class. In contrast, Zucker et al. (2021) opined that preschool teachers often need more skill to manage a small group of young children, especially when asking them to do activities independently. This is due to ineffective classroom management by preschool teachers. In the aspect of classroom facilities, the absence of multimedia and context-dependent classrooms for interaction, teamwork, and game-playing activities causes preschools ELT non-interactive (Xiao et al., 2020). According to Slapac and Dorner (2013), the classroom could be more conducive to supporting ELL as previously it was a warehouse and noisy. For Leung et al. (2013), although classroom facilities are equipped with literacy centre, writing, and library corner, the availability of space could be a problem.

Teaching resources is the seventh issue identified from six related articles (Auleear Owodally, 2015; Fauzi et al., 2021; Huang, 2014; Milton et al., 2020; Prosic-Santovac, 2017; Qin & Md Nor, 2018). Limited access to authentic materials, such as branded toys or products (Prosic-Santovac, 2017), ready-to-use materials (Milton et al., 2020), digitalised materials (Fauzi et al., 2021) and insufficient books and other materials, is the problem reported in those articles. Although preschool classrooms are well decorated with pictures and mobiles, teachers should utilise them more as powerful tools to stimulate ELL (Auleear Owodally, 2015). Preschool teachers use translations for children's ELT, with rare support of teaching resources such as visual aids (Huang, 2014). On the other hand, Qin and Md Nor (2018) found that preschool teachers are not provided with specific teaching aids, resulting in inactive learning.

Socio-cultural is the eighth or final issue identified, with six articles discussing it (Al-Darwish, 2012; Goh, 2019; Hegde et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2013; Mustafa et al., 2019; Nafissi & Shafiee, 2020). In a study by Al-Darwish (2012), young children's motivation to learn English is critical, and it may occur as some parents refuse their children to learn any foreign language at all. Moreover, P. S. C. Goh (2019), reported that preschool teachers perceive that having high English language proficiency may not be essential, especially when children are more familiar with their mother tongue. There is an argument from preschool teachers that ELT affects young children's ELL when their mother tongue language and socio-cultural identity have not been shaped (Nafissi & Shafiee, 2020). While preschool teachers provide an 'alteration' of approaches in ELT, there are circumstances where the approaches are incongruent with the ELLs' culture (Mustafa et al., 2019). In relation to this, Leung et al. (2013) indicated that there is a strong demand by parents who prefer native-English language teachers to teach than local teachers. Hegde et al. (2018) claimed that preschool teachers are only prepared to teach children when they experience it themselves in the classroom.

Research Question 2: "What are the beliefs of preschool teachers in ELT?"

For the second research question, this systematic review explored preschool teachers' beliefs in ELT. Beliefs play a significant role in shaping preschool teachers' ELT. There is a strong relationship between teachers' beliefs and ELT practices (Chu, 2014). This review investigated several essential issues regarding preschool teachers' beliefs from 34 selected articles. Among those selected articles, 21 articles discussed preschool teachers' beliefs in ELT. This systematic review categorised preschool teachers' beliefs in ELT into four themes namely bilingual education, children's characteristics, curriculum alteration, and teachers' experience. Table 4 shows the themes of preschool teachers' beliefs based on the articles selected for this review.

Table 4. Themes of Preschool Belief on Articles Selected

Authors	Bilingual Education	Curriculum Alteration	Children Characteristics	Teachers Experience
Pollard-Durodola et al. (2012)		/		
Ping et al. (2020)			/	/
Jawaid (2014)	/	/	/	
Prosic-Santovac (2017)			/	
Bernstein et al. (2021)	/	/		/
Mustafa et al. (2019)		/	/	

Table 4. Continued

Authors	Bilingual Education	Curriculum Alteration	Children Characteristics	Teachers Experience
Xiao et al. (2020)	/			
Milton et al. (2020)	/			
Biricik and Özkan (2012)	/			
Slapac and Dorner (2013)			/	/
Auleear Owodally (2015)	/	/		
Ng (2015)				/
Hegde et al. (2018)				/
Mede (2017)	/			/
Goh (2019)	/			
Nafissi and Shafiee (2020)			/	
Wang and Hou (2021)			/	
Leung et al. (2013)	/			
Chu (2014)		/		
Baker (2019)	/	/	/	
Jacoby and Lesaux (2019)	/			

In this review, eleven articles related to preschool teachers' beliefs in bilingual education (BE) were discovered (Auleear Owodally, 2015; Baker, 2019; Bernstein et al., 2021; Biricik & Özkan, 2012; Goh, 2019; Jacoby & Lesaux, 2019; Jawaid, 2014; Leung et al., 2013; Mede, 2017; Milton et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2020). The principle of BE presented in this review is the integration of the children's mother tongue or home language as a strategy of ELT in preschools. Preschools teacher believe that young children should learn English in their mother tongue (Milton et al., 2020). Teachers are concerned about young children's difficulty, stress, and uneasy understanding of English, thus they realise when is the time to switch to their mother tongue (Biricik & Özkan, 2012; Goh, 2019). The use of mother tongue for teaching English should be encouraged, and teachers should provide a suitable platform for its implementation (Xiao et al., 2020). According to Auleear Owodally (2015), one of the strategies suggested for implementing BE is to develop similarities between the mother tongue and English language in teaching. Furthermore, Mede (2017) suggested preschool teachers to integrate ELT with other subjects, which could aid young children's language development. Teachers perceive BE as practical in preschools ELT (Baker, 2019; Bernstein et al., 2021). The benefits of preschool teachers to use their mother tongue in ELT are to increase motivation, build confidence, encourage interaction with young children, and facilitate language acquisition (Jacoby & Lesaux, 2019; Jawaid, 2014). In Hong Kong, BE has been established in their language policy (Leung et al., 2013).

Curriculum alteration is the second theme identified in relation to teachers' beliefs in preschool ELT as reported in eight articles (Auleear Owodally, 2015; Baker, 2019; Bernstein et al., 2021; Chu, 2014; Jawaid, 2014; Mustafa et al., 2019; Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012). Curriculum alteration is when teachers alter their instructional or pedagogical knowledge in the curriculum based on their beliefs in their young children's learning abilities. The curriculum alteration may impact the lesson delivery but maintain the standard goals set in the curriculum (Mustafa et al., 2019). Teachers' curriculum alteration frequently stems from their own experiences (Bernstein et al., 2021). It is essential to address the young children's learning needs by delivering approachable and responsive learning opportunities through teacher instructional quality (Auleear Owodally, 2015). Furthermore, Chu (2014) stated that preschool teachers alter their lesson plans through self-reflection to assist young children in learning. They recognise the importance of analysing the success of lesson plans and taking some remedial measures for children who still need to meet their set learning objectives. In addition, this review advocated that the implementation of curriculum intervention also serves as an essential aspect of curriculum alteration. Curriculum intervention is another method of instructional support or pedagogical knowledge that may assist preschool teachers in preparing their ideal lessons for young children (Pollard-Durodola et al., 2012). Subsequently, another aspect of curriculum alteration is the teachers' belief in co-constructing learning activities with children (Alvira & González, 2018; Baker, 2019; Jawaid, 2014). Co-constructing learning activities means that young children are given the option to suggest desired activities, and thus guided by their teachers. Young children will feel more important when their opinions are valued.

The third theme identified for preschool teachers' beliefs in ELT is children's characteristics with eight related articles (Baker, 2019; Jawaid, 2014; Mustafa et al., 2019; Nafissi & Shafiee, 2020; Pink et al., 2013; Prosic-Santovac, 2017; Slapac & Dorner, 2013; Wang & Hou, 2021). Children characteristics refer to preschool teachers' belief that each young children in the classroom has a unique identity either in socio-cultural background or interests that influence their ELL ability. Embracing young children's characteristics will assist preschool teachers to think what is acceptable and unacceptable in ELT (Jawaid, 2014; Slapac & Dorner, 2013). In a study by Baker (2019), it was found that preschool teachers encouraged young children to share their Korean socio-cultural background in the daily classroom while learning English. They believed it was essential to involve socio-cultural background of young children in ELT. This demonstrates how teachers create opportunities for young children to learn spontaneously (Mustafa et al., 2019). Aside from that,

Nafissi and Shafiee (2020) discovered in their study that preschool teachers used their Iranian cultures, such as ceremonies, foods and lifestyles, as part of topics to maintain children's interest in ELL. Understanding young children's interests is another important aspect of children's characteristics that preschool teachers believe in ELT, particularly when dealing with their behaviour. For example, Prosic-Santovac (2017) stated that popular videos or branded toy cartoons are a source of strategy or pedagogical content used by preschool teachers in ELT to engage young children in ELL. Preschool teachers believe popular cartoons 'operate' and 'stimulate' young children's minds, and influence their behaviour, knowledge, and attitudes. In an assessment, Wang and Hou (2021) found that preschool teachers argued on the standardisation measurement criteria to evaluate young children's development without considering their characteristics.

The final theme or the fourth theme about preschool teachers' beliefs in ELT identified is the teachers' experiences. Six articles are related to this theme (Bernstein et al., 2021; Hegde et al., 2018; Mede, 2017; Ng, 2015; Pink et al., 2013; Slapac & Dorner, 2013). Teaching experience as well as educational and learning background are important aspects in shaping preschool teachers' experiences (Mede, 2017). Ping et al. (2020) discovered that the older or experienced preschool teachers in teaching, the more suitable for them to work with young children. ELT in preschools requires a limited amount of specialist knowledge. What is crucial for them is to be proficient in preschool education rather than English. According to Bernstein et al. (2021), preschool teachers' age and teaching experience are core related. They perceive English as a 'tool' and less problems in bilingual or multilingual views on preschool ELT. Contrary to Slapac and Dorner (2013), teaching experience in preschools is less important than experience in teaching language immersion. Hegde et al. (2018) found that experiential knowledge gained from trial-and-error practices in an actual classroom is more valuable than training programmes attended for preschool ELT. Teachers tend to think or make decisions for their own ELT approach from experience and intuition. They found the training programme must be more significant and helpful (Ng, 2015). Thus, as a decision-maker, it is the teachers' responsibility to consider the approach and its appropriateness in preschool ELT (Mede, 2017).

Conclusion

In the study, it was revealed that a lack of proficiency among preschool teachers is a major concern in almost every non-English speaking country or community that introduces ELT into preschools. Similarly, Moussu (2018) found that approximately 80% of non-native-English teachers around the world are concerned about their proficiency and ability to teach English effectively. To ensure their children's future success in education, many Chinese parents send their children to English medium schools. However, parents perceive teacher proficiency in ELT to be a significant challenge (Mwalongo, 2016). Another study by Md Zamin et al. (2022) indicates that preschool teachers in Malaysia are not proficient in English, especially when it comes to productive skills such as speaking or writing. This resulted in teachers' lack of confidence in using the language, limiting the amount of vocabulary used in their interactions. Preschool teachers need to be equipped with the necessary skills.

Preschool teachers are also undertrained in ELT. It is evident from this finding that most have insufficient knowledge and skills regarding teaching English to young children. This is consistent with a study by Sikki et al. (2013), which found 51% of Indonesia preschool teachers never attended ELT training. Solution to this problem is to design a more effective and comprehensive training programme to ensure improved performance (Reynolds et al., 2021).

This review also discovered the issue of preschool teachers struggling to fulfil the contents of the prescribed curriculum that emphasises academic outcomes. Although preschool teachers have a curriculum to execute, they will still alter the curriculum in their own context based on their beliefs (Ntumi, 2016). Responsible parties such as the ministry of education, teacher training institutes, and experts in the field of preschool education should jointly investigate and think of the best solution to ensure that curriculum plans are in line with the preschool teachers' views.

While altering English curriculum content is crucially needed, practicable instructional guidance for preschool teachers should also be considered. This review found that the issue of pedagogical practices needs more practical guidance on instructional quality. Instructional guidance can develop teaching quality, change teaching behaviour, and support preschool teachers' pedagogical skills. As an example, Neuman and Dwyer (2009) stated that preschool teachers who acquire vocabulary instruction guidance in ELT have a positive impact on young children's vocabulary development and reading. In terms of teaching approach, the study found that most preschool teachers prefer the traditional method, which involves teaching literacy and memorising vocabulary. Even though preschool teachers are aware of effective teaching approaches, the recommended approach did not seem to be properly adopted (Abdullah et al., 2017). A study by Michaelidou and Pitri (2022) found that preschool teachers intend to be creative in teaching, but they are unsure of how to accomplish this. As suggested by the study, preschool teachers need a framework and strategy for guiding them towards a creative approach in ELT.

Furthermore, this study explored negative teacher perceptions in ELT. Majzub (2013) drew the attention of Malaysian preschool education to the low level of confidence among teachers in using English to teach. Furthermore, Abdullah et al. (2017) found preschool teachers lack the basic skills required to teach ELT. The problem appears to persist, as Abdul Aziz (2019) found that preschool teachers were ineffective in ELT. Aziz and Mamat (2018), recommended a training

module, aims to increase teachers' efficacy in preschool ELT. Additionally, Reynolds et al. (2021) suggested that teacher education institutes should offer English courses in ELT

Classroom environment, including classroom features, conditions, and facilities, significantly influences young children in ELL. Every aspect of the classroom environment should reflect its learning priorities. Ideally, preschool teachers should utilise classroom facilities such as spacious and context-dependent classrooms for interaction, teamwork, and game-based activities (Martin, 2006). By utilising classroom facilities, young children may have access to more diverse learning opportunities, stimuli, and experiences (Barrett et al., 2019).

Finally, socio-cultural issues need to be addressed. According to the findings, there is a struggle among teachers to incorporate socio-cultural issues into preschool ELT. Most researchers support the idea that culture knowledge should be incorporated into the teaching of languages (Bell & Bogan, 2013; Harrer et al., 2015; Tazi & Wasmuth, 2015; Vaish, 2012). The earlier they become informed about another culture, the greater its influence on their memory development (Harrer et al., 2015). However, a study by Tazi and Wasmuth (2015) indicates that despite an effort to incorporate socio-cultural elements into the preschool ELT, national identity is perceived to be challenged. The role of socio-cultural issues in preschool teachers' beliefs may require further study.

This review also evaluated the belief of preschool teachers in executing ELT for young children. When discussing BE, most of the reviewed articles agreed that the important aspect of preschool teachers' beliefs in ELT should not be ignored. Preschool teachers believe that to teach English as a second language or foreign language, the importance of the home language must be maintained. A study by (Ramírez et al., 2020) found that, for Spanish-speaking ELLs, using Spanish in the classroom allows them to develop literacy and language skills that can be transferred to English. While most teacher training programmes do not emphasise BE in ELT, classroom experience, particularly dealing with children who speak different languages at home, suggests that BE may be an effective means of learning second languages (Vaish, 2012). However, it is not appropriate to design training programmes based on a one-size-fits-all approach. Special emphasis should be placed on teaching teachers language transfer theories and how this affects English acquisition (Vaish, 2012)

Subsequently, preschool teachers' beliefs in altering the curriculum are also highlighted. When teachers alter a curriculum, new teaching material, procedures, or teaching methods are usually incorporated into existing instruction. Most changes are minor, so teachers can easily incorporate them (Sulaiman et al., 2015). Considering the teacher plays the most important role in implementing the curriculum, it is critical to recognise teachers' knowledge, experience, and expertise in any curriculum development project (Alsubaie, 2016).

Furthermore, children's characteristic is listed in preschool teachers' beliefs in ELT. There are a few characteristics that preschool teachers need to understand regarding young children, including their ability to learn indirectly, their tendency to have fun, their sense of imagination, their delight in talking, and their short attention span (Puskás, 2016). As Sehan (2018) pointed out, teachers who are aware of the characteristics of young children may be able to make some creative attempts to teach ELLs.

Another essential aspect discovered in preschool teachers' beliefs in ELT is their experience. Based on the reviews, it appears that the more experience teachers gain in teaching English, the more effective they will be. There are some correlations between teaching effectiveness and teacher experience, however these might be conceptualized (Graham et al., 2020). The study by Haddad (2017) does not show any significant differences when referencing the years of experience. As the researcher points out, highly motivated teachers can make a big difference in the success of young children's ELL.

Preschool teachers believe in how ELT strategies and practices should be further developed. As previously discussed, aspects such as BE, curriculum alteration, children's characteristics and preschool teachers' experience need further investigation, listening, learning, modification, designing and execution.

In conclusion, this systematic review examined articles related to the issues and beliefs of preschool teachers in ELT. Three databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), were used, and 34 articles were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. A thematic analysis was performed, and eight issues and four beliefs were categorised for preschool ELT.

There are eight issues regarding preschool ELT in this review: (a) English language proficiency, (b) training, (c) curriculum, pedagogical skill, (d) teacher perception, (e) classroom (f) environment, (g) teaching resources, and (h) socio-cultural. The beliefs of preschool teachers on ELT focused on (a) bilingual education, (b) curriculum alteration, (c) children's characteristics and (d) teachers' experience.

The crucial issues of concern to researchers on ELT are preschool teachers' English language proficiency, lack of training, highly prescribed curriculum, and lack of pedagogical skills. Teacher training institutes, researchers and authorities involved in preschool education could collaborate with preschool teachers to bridge the gap between the expected 'bombastic' goals of preschool ELT and compare them with the actual reality. The actual reality of preschool ELT should be explored and studied to get an accurate picture of the situation, and thus recommend the best solutions to mitigate the issues.

On another note, the 'active practices' and 'real life experiences' from preschool teachers may be the best solutions to refine preschool ELT. Those beliefs of teachers need to be explored and studied to make them 'appropriate' for ELT teaching in preschools. This exploration and study of teachers' beliefs is a good resource for cultivating and developing action plans for continuous improvement in preschool ELT. Furthermore, future research can address uncertainty in preschool ELT by developing tools such as mobile learning that include bilingualism for ELT, specifically for preschool teachers and young children.

One of the limitations in this review is the strategy to resolve the issues faced by preschool ELT which should be highlighted. However, this limitation opens opportunities for new research in the future, especially in bridging the issues and beliefs of preschool teachers in ELT. Regardless of the limitation, this systematic review provides a reminder of the common issues and beliefs of practitioners for preschool ELT, which will benefit practitioners, researchers, teacher training institutes and authorities concerned in the relevant field.

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Mohamad Muar: Conceptualization, design, analysis, writing. Mohamed: Editing/reviewing, supervision, final approval, securing funding. Abu Bakar: Editing/reviewing, supervision, final approval.

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* An asterisk denotes studies included in the review.

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Appendix

Table A1. Summary of the Selected Studies

Study	Database	Aim	Samples	Findings
Pollard-Durodola et al. (2012)	Scopus	To investigate the shared book reading practices development.	Seven preschool teachers of Spanish-speaking ELLs	Preschool teachers may require more intensive guidance than others to improve vocabulary instruction.
Jawaid (2014)	Scopus	To gain an understanding of the extent to which TESOL practices in Britain are adapted in Malaysian preschools.	6 Malaysian private preschools	Benchmarks were drawn, leading to the development and codification of quality characteristics and standards of preschool education.
Alvira and González (2018)	Scopus	To determine the degree of difficulty pre-service teachers, perceive in teaching English and English content to young children.	14 early childhood education pre-service teachers	Pre-service teachers successfully learned vocabulary and concepts, but their perceptions about the difficulty of teaching EFL and FL content remained the same.
Prosic-Santovac (2017)	Scopus	To examine teaching using popular cartoons and branded toys that affect the level of second language (L2) knowledge and motivation for learning.	1 four-year-old children	Popular cartoons that were not created with the language learning curriculum in mind can be a powerful language instruction tool.
Qin and Md Nor (2018)	Scopus	To explore issues regarding teaching and learning in Malaysian private preschools.	3 in-service preschool teachers	A mismatch between teachers' beliefs of the ideal practice and actual practice.
Huang et al. (2019)	Scopus	To determine the expectations of preschool English curriculum and concerns about teachers' English ability.	102 parents and 78 preschool teachers in New Taipei City	Concern that preschool teachers may be teaching the wrong English.
Mustafa et al. (2019)	Scopus	To explore the English language acquisition of Asian immigrant English language learners (ELLs).	7 early childhood teachers and 6 Asian immigrant ELLs	Teachers used specific strategies to make interactions comprehensible to preschoolers.
Bernstein et al. (2021)	Scopus	To examine the language ideologies English-only to Dual Language Education (DLE).	28 preschool educators	Teachers generally held pro-multilingual ideologies, but that particular ideology correlated with different teaching experiences.
Milton et al. (2020)	Scopus	To investigate the factors that affect Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioners' ability to facilitate English Additional Language (EAL).	28 ECD practitioners	English proficiency, qualifications and the language of learning and teaching used in the classroom were among factors that impacted ECD practitioners' abilities to facilitate EAL.
Xiao et al. (2020)	Scopus	To investigate the current needs of student-teachers' professional development.	244 respondents	Four required transformations (linguistic bases, lesson design, teaching techniques and teaching demonstration).
Ping et al. (2020)	Scopus	To analyses the current situation of preschool EFL in the Region of Murcia.	106 preschools	Specific issues that require further attention include strengthening teacher training.
Fauzi et al. (2021)	Scopus	To report the rationale for digitising English language learning through the 'Kindy Talk' Application.	30 early childhood educators	The content was still quite limited.

Table A1. Continued

Study	Database	Aim	Samples	Findings
Goh and Luen Loy (2021)	Scopus	To investigate Malaysian preschool teachers' self-efficacy and attitudes toward the use of the English language as a medium of instruction.	130 preschools teacher	Strong self-efficacy influenced preschool teachers' use of English in teaching.
Biricik and Özkan (2012)	WoS	To discuss the importance of motivation in teaching English to very young learners.	45 children (5-6 years)	Teacher's attitude towards learners has a significant role in children's feelings.
Slapac and Dorner (2013)	WoS	To examine the challenges and successes related to classroom management.	2 kindergarten teachers	Classroom management was strongly shaped by political context, curriculum policies and teacher experience.
Auleear Owodally (2015)	WoS	To find out the benefits, challenges, and limitations of designing and implementing an alternative EFL programme.	28 children (lower middle-class families)	Children improved significantly in the receptive English vocabulary programme.
Ng (2015)	WoS	To investigate how team teaching operates.	1 native-English speaker teacher	There were more obstacles than opportunities for successful team teaching.
Hegde et al. (2018)	WoS	To examine teachers' perceptions of their teacher education programme and professional development opportunities. regarding ELL instruction.	20 kindergarten teachers	Most of the teachers felt prepared to teach ELL students, were committed to work, and eager to attend professional training.
Mede (2017)	WoS	To examine EFL teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate and inappropriate practices.	158 EFL teachers	Future training for teachers is needed to enhance teachers' skills.
Ehri and Flugman (2018)	WoS	To examine the effects of a one-year mentoring programme.	69 teachers	Non-native-English teachers took longer to learn the English sound system.
Goh (2019)	WoS	To better understand teachers' language challenges.	204 preschool teachers (quantitative) 12 preschool teachers (qualitative)	Preschool teachers in general showed a positive stance about the decision to use English as part of instructional time.
Nafissi and Shafiee (2020)	WoS	To explore the beliefs of Iranian early childhood English teachers regarding their roles in teaching EFL.	13 Iranian EFL kindergarten teachers	Teachers perceived their role as leaders in teaching methodology and approaches despite institutional and social limitations.
Wang and Hou (2021)	WoS	To investigate how learning stories are used by in-service teachers with years of teaching experience.	43 Kindergarten teacher	While Chinese teachers tried to imitate the concept and form of learning stories from New Zealand, teacher-centred, negative, and untargeted evaluations frequently appeared in teachers' writing.
Lalani and Rodrigues, (2012)	ERIC	To explore some classroom-based assessment strategies to assess the reading skills of young children.	One teacher and four young children	Teacher applied multiple assessment strategies to assess reading skills of young children.

Table A1. Continued

Study	Database	Aim	Samples	Findings
Al-Darwish (2012)	ERIC	To identify the areas that need to be improved in the kindergarten teachers' programme at the College of Basic Education.	12 kindergarten teachers	Teachers need to have knowledge in English language curriculum, communication skills, classroom innovation, and be competent in teaching English.
Leung et al. (2013)	ERIC	To discuss the provision of bilingual in Hong Kong preschools.	276 respondents and 11 respondents	Teachers' views and practices can sometimes conflict with each other, and these beliefs as well as different preparations by teachers may lead to different classroom practices.
Huang (2014)	ERIC	To explore the understanding of early year teachers on language approach and its implementation.	169 respondents	Teachers prefer to use the whole language and skills-based approach.
Chu (2014)	ERIC	To explore the changes in teachers' beliefs before and after teaching.	Four preschool teachers	Inconsistent view in the belief of teacher-children interaction in classroom and curriculum planning.
Mahmoud Ghoneim and Abdelsalam Elghotmy (2015)	ERIC	To investigate the effect of the proposed multisensory phonics programme on the development of kindergarten pre-service teachers.	40 kindergarten pre-service teachers	Multisensory Phonics programme was effective in developing kindergarten pre-service teachers' EFL reading accuracy and phonemic awareness.
Baker (2019)	ERIC	To learn from exemplary teachers about their beliefs and practices for teaching young DLL children.	81 Preschool teacher	Preschool teachers engaged in various practices for teaching DLL children.
Lai-Reeve et al. (2018)	ERIC	To examine and analyse the characteristics of the English oral input of kindergarten teachers and the oral output of children in classrooms.	3 kindergarten teachers and 44 children	Learning activities did not seem to be hindered by the different pronunciation of NS (native speaker) and NNS (non-native speaker) teachers.
Jacoby and Lesaux (2019)	ERIC	To understand how preschool programmes such as Head Start meet the needs of DLL children.	20 Head Start teachers	Teachers believed developing social-emotional skills is an essential foundation for supporting DLL children's English language acquisition.
Wong and Russak (2020)	ERIC	To examine the knowledge of basic language constructs in English among kindergarten teachers.	96 Non-native-English-speaking (NNS) and 24 native-English-speaking (NS) teachers	NS teachers performed significantly better than NNS teachers.
Zucker et al. (2021)	ERIC	To examine teachers' barriers in the implementation of supplemental language curricula.	175 kindergarten teachers	Competing priorities for instructional time as well as limited teachers' knowledge and skills.