How are Experienced EFL Teachers' Beliefs Shaped by their Own Experiences Learning English at School?[1]

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Abstract

Research on pre-service and novice teachers shows that their school learning experiences play a role in developing their pedagogical beliefs. However, whether these experiences continue to influence teachers' beliefs as they become more experienced requires further investigation. This study aimed to examine how the school language learning experiences of four Ecuadorian EFL teachers may still guide their pedagogical beliefs after years of teaching experience and professional development. This qualitative multiple case study collected teachers' school stories via narrative frames and semi-structured interviews. Findings suggested that the participants' positive learning experiences still impact their pedagogical beliefs. Furthermore, their teaching experiences and professional development opportunities were found to play a significant role in reshaping participants' beliefs that were initially framed by their negative learning experiences. Implications for in-service teachers and pre-service language teacher education highlight the value of reflection as a life-long practice.

Resumen

Las investigaciones sobre profesores en formación y principiantes indican que sus experiencias de aprendizaje escolar contribuyen al desarrollo de sus creencias pedagógicas. Sin embargo, si estas experiencias siguen influyendo en los profesores con experiencia requiere mayor investigación. El objetivo del estudio fue examinar cómo las experiencias escolares de aprendizaje de idiomas guían las creencias pedagógicas de cuatro profesores de inglés ecuatorianos después de años de experiencia y oportunidades de desarrollo profesional. Este estudio de caso múltiple cualitativo recopiló las historias escolares de los profesores utilizando marcos narrativos y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los hallazgos sugirieron que sus experiencias de aprendizaje positivas aún impactan sus creencias pedagógicas. Sin embargo, su experiencia docente y sus oportunidades de desarrollo profesional aportaron a reestructurar las creencias inicialmente enmarcadas por sus experiencias de aprendizaje escolar negativas. Las implicaciones para la formación de profesores de idiomas en servicio y en formación destacan el valor de la reflexión como una práctica de por vida.

Introduction

Research in Second Language Teaching (SLT) has established that an important source of teachers' pedagogical decisions and classroom practices emerges from their cognition (Borg, 2003). Teacher cognition, as Borg defines it, is the "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching," which refers to "what teachers know, think, and believe" (p. 81). Thus, teachers' beliefs about language teachers and language teaching constitute important elements of teacher cognition, which may exert a strong influence on teachers' classroom practices (Borg, 2003; Crawley & Salyer, 1995). These pedagogical beliefs may be significantly influenced by teachers' experiences of second or foreign language learning at school (Borg, 2015; Golombek & Johnson, 2019). Because of this phenomenon, referred to as apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), prospective teachers enter their second language teacher education (SLTE) programs with pre-formed pedagogical beliefs (Pajares, 1992). According to Borg (2004), these beliefs could explain why teacher preparation has been found to have a "weak effect" (p. 275) on pre-service teachers' training process.

Although research into teacher cognition has improved understanding of language teachers' beliefs and classroom practices, current conceptualizations have taken a more inclusive approach, claiming that the social, emotional, and contextual dimensions of teacher cognition have been largely ignored (Cross, 2010; Kubanyiova, 2012, 2014; Kubanyiova & Feriok, 2015; Ngo, 2018). From this broader view of language teacher cognition, the working contexts, social interactions, motivations, and values that influence teachers' instructional practices play a relevant role as well (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, this more current perspective of teacher cognition describes learning to teach as "a long-term, complex, developmental process that is the result of participation in the social practices and contexts associated with learning and teaching" (Johnson, 2009, p. 10). Accordingly, teachers' engagement in different teaching and learning social contexts throughout their career may mediate their

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learning-to-teach process and in turn their cognition (Golombek & Johnson, 2019; Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Ngo, 2018).

There is evidence that language teachers' own experiences as language learners in school influence their pedagogical beliefs and practices (see Gray, 2019; Miller & Shifflet, 2016; Rosas-Maldonado et al., 2021; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Kaikkonen, 2009); however, further research on teacher cognition is needed, particularly in EFL contexts (Kubanyiova, 2014). Moreover, as research to date has been mainly focused on pre-service and novice teachers, there remains a need to examine the connection between school language learning experiences (SLLE) and teaching beliefs among more experienced in-service teachers (Kubanyiova, 2014). In this study, experienced EFL teachers are defined as teachers who have at least five years of English language teaching experience (Tsui, 2003). Experienced teachers are likely to have more stable and practical cognitions (Gatbonton, 2008) and have participated in varied professional development instances (Sun & Zhang, 2022).

In order to address this research gap, this study aimed to examine whether SLLE still guide teachers' pedagogical beliefs even after years of teaching experience and additional professional development opportunities. The social context and interactions that teachers have encountered throughout many years of experience in the profession may influence their cognition, including their teaching beliefs.

Literature Review

Teacher cognition

In the present study, we were particularly interested in analyzing teachers' pedagogical beliefs; these perceptions are part of the psychological construct of teacher cognition, which includes teachers' beliefs, attitudes, theories, and perspectives regarding all aspects of teaching (Borg, 2003). This study also focused on uncovering the pedagogical perceptions that teachers might be unaware of, which might be guiding their classroom practices. Thus, for our purposes, a belief was understood to be a consciously or unconsciously held proposition which "serves as a guide to thought and behavior" (Borg, 2001, p. 186).

As part of teacher cognition, teachers' beliefs about teaching may have been shaped by their own school language learning experiences (Borg, 2003). The relevance of these pedagogical beliefs is particularly evident during initial teacher training, because pre-service teachers enter SLTE programs with preconceived perceptions on the teaching profession that may impact their training (Pajares, 1992). When these previously held pedagogical beliefs are not consciously analyzed in prospective teachers, the knowledge gained from SLTE programs has been reported to have minimal impact on teachers' practices (Borg, 2004). Reflecting on the sources of these preset beliefs about teaching may help future teachers to analyze their school learning experiences intentionally; otherwise, the conservative classroom practices they observed at school may influence their teaching for many years (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 2005). In other words, in-service teachers' SLLE may also impact their beliefs and practices at later stages of their career.

Sociocultural perspective

Studies on teacher cognition have helped language researchers understand teachers' beliefs and practices from a cognitivist perspective (Burns et al., 2015; Kubanyiova & Feriok, 2015; Ngo, 2018). However, the limitations of the cognitive view have prompted scholars to propose a more contemporary view of teacher cognition (Burns et al., 2015), inspired by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which acknowledges the social, emotional, and contextual dimensions of this construct (Cross, 2010; Johnson & Worden, 2014; Kubanyiova, 2012, 2014; Kubanyiova & Feriok, 2015; Ngo, 2018). From this perspective, human learning is a dynamic social activity that occurs in physical and social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Thus, learning is not the mere acquisition of skills or knowledge, but a process through which external activities are socially mediated until individuals can control them, resulting in the transformation of both the self and the activity (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to the social view of teacher cognition (see e.g., Cross, 2010; Johnson & Worden, 2014; Kubanyiova & Feriok, 2015; Ngo, 2018) and Golombek and Johnson's (2019) sociocultural perspective, student teachers learn to teach through proper mediational support within SLTE programs. Here, two types of concepts serve as mediational tools. *Everyday concepts* are the inaccurate, superficial, and unanalyzed observations about teaching that prospective teachers make throughout their daily experiences. *Academic concepts* are framed through a systematic study of the realities and circumstances surrounding them. The dialectic interaction between these two concepts in SLTE programs helps future teachers better understand

academic concepts, facilitating the reconstruction of their everyday concepts and thus enhancing their learning process.

Additionally, trainee teachers' SLLE, which probably framed their everyday understandings, also play a role in this interaction. Student teachers should be encouraged to externalize their everyday concepts and use their pedagogical and academic knowledge to challenge those unanalyzed perceptions, promoting the *conceptual thinking* required to achieve advanced professional expertise (Golombek & Johnson, 2019).

The learning-to-teach process is a "life-long enterprise" (Johnson, 2009, p. 10); it is not limited to initial teacher training, however, and it can also be developed through social negotiation throughout a teaching career (Golombek & Johnson, 2019; Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Ngo, 2018). In this respect, Johnson (2009) contends that their teaching experiences also shape the knowledge teachers acquire with students, parents, colleagues, and other educational community members. For example, by analyzing students' classroom learning outcomes, teachers learn and evaluate their pedagogical beliefs and practices (Guskey, 2002; Stergiopoulou, 2012). Additionally, teachers' in-service professional development opportunities may further contribute to (re)shaping their beliefs (Borg, 2011; Lo, 2017). Hence, classroom teaching experiences and professional development opportunities may constitute important tools for reshaping teaching beliefs, especially for experienced teachers (Guskey, 2002; Stergiopoulou, 2012). Based on these insights, we sought to examine how the experience gained through many years of teaching and engagement in professional development may serve to challenge the pedagogical beliefs formed by teachers' own SLLE.

SLLE and teachers' beliefs

Lortie (1975) first introduced the term *apprenticeship of observation* to describe the 13,000 hours that learners spend observing their teachers throughout their school years and which underlie their first understandings of the teaching profession. For pre-service teachers, these initial perceptions emerge from unanalyzed observations of schoolteachers' instruction, and they often imitate the teaching models they were exposed to at school. In addition, Lortie contends that prospective teachers may not consciously acknowledge the influence of the school learning experiences that shape their preconceptions on teaching and learning, although these perceptions "stand at the core of becoming a teacher" (p.79). As pre-service teachers have observed teaching personalities and methodologies for over a decade before entering teacher preparation programs (Fragnoli, 2005), their learning in this stage may be critically impacted (Lortie, 1975).

Pajares' (1992) seminal work on teachers' beliefs also reveals that pre-service teachers enter their training with already shaped perceptions on what teaching involves. He explains that the new information prospective teachers receive in teacher education programs is filtered through their belief system. Therefore, analyzing the school learning experiences that have shaped pre-service teachers' beliefs is critical for effective teacher training (Kagan, 1992; Vavrus, 2009). Indeed, research reveals the relevance of school learning experiences not only for pre-service teachers but also for novice and experienced teachers (see e.g., Davin et al., 2018; Gray, 2019; Moodie, 2016).

Research on pre-service and novice teachers' early school experiences reveals that they may exert a powerful influence on their pedagogical beliefs and practices in their "initial teacher training and beyond" (John, 1996, p. 91; see also Gray, 2019; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Kaikkonen, 2009). Ruohotie-Lyhty and Kaikkonen (2009) found that the impact of teachers' SLLE greatly influenced their pedagogical beliefs, regardless of whether they were conscious of these experiences or not. Gray (2019) also acknowledges the role of novice teachers' earlier language learning experiences, suggesting that these memories may influence their beliefs even more than the content covered in education programs.

As for studies focused on pre-service teachers, Johnson (1994) found that prospective teachers' histories as language learners may strongly impact their teaching beliefs and learning-to-teach process. Similarly, Miller and Shifflet (2016) concluded that pre-service teachers' SLLE may serve as models to construct "feared or desired visions of the teachers they wish to become or avoid" (p. 26).

Findings by Sanchez (2010) and Moodie (2016) are particularly relevant to the present investigation since their studies also focused on in-service teachers. Sanchez (2010) found that although his two EFL teacher participants had been exposed to vast amounts of teacher training, their experiences of learning the language at school continued to affect their current grammar teaching practices. Sanchez also noted that one participant was influenced mainly by her positive SLLE, while another was influenced by both positive learning experiences and her reflection on negative memories of learning the language at school.

This latter finding was echoed by Moodie (2016), who investigated the influence of prior language learning experiences on the beliefs and practices of South Korean in-service EFL teachers. He concluded that their negative experiences motivated them to undertake different actions from those they witnessed (i.e., the *anti-apprenticeship of observation*). Similarly, Davin et al. (2018) found that an in-service teacher with 25 years of teaching experience was influenced by her positive experiences as a French learner, while her negative memories of how she was taught the language at school served as models of practices to avoid.

Kuzhabekova and Zhaparova (2016) found that the extent to which teachers are influenced by their school learning experiences depends on other opportunities to re-assess their practices and develop self-reflection abilities (Farrell, 2015, 2018). Additionally, the authors explain that because experienced teachers have had more opportunities to assess their own practices and discover new methodologies critically, they are less influenced by their SLLE than novice teachers.

Professional development and teachers' beliefs

Another issue relevant to the present study concerns the potential impact of professional development opportunities in (re)shaping in-service teachers' beliefs. Borg (2011) conducted a qualitative examination of the impact of a Delta (Diploma in English language teaching for adults) program on six in-service teachers' beliefs. He found that the course helped them to become more aware of such teaching perceptions, focus on ways to apply those beliefs in the classroom and change some of their initially held beliefs. Similar findings were reported by Lo (2017), who explored the influence of a six-month professional development program on the beliefs of a group of CLIL teachers. The study suggested that participants experienced a change in their beliefs at several levels, possibly resulting from the impact of factors relating to school context, learning experience, and subject discipline.

The present study extends the work detailed above by analyzing the SLLE of four in-service teachers with many years of teaching experience and additional professional development opportunities. We were interested in exploring the extent to which English-related school learning experiences may still guide experienced EFL teachers' pedagogical beliefs. Additionally, we aimed to examine how teachers' knowledge, developed over years of teaching experience and professional development, may moderate this influence.

Methods

Design

The present study involved four in-service EFL teachers within a qualitative multiple case study design (Stake, 2006). The detailed exploration of participants' past learning experiences and perceptions of the teaching task through the use of two data collection tools promoted in this approach allowed an in-depth comprehension of how these aspects were connected (Merriam, 1998). Cases were studied individually and together to understand how teachers' pedagogical beliefs may be related to their SLLE even after years of teaching experience and professional development (Stake 1995; Yin, 2003).

Context and participants

The study was conducted in the context of EFL teaching in Ecuador, where reforms to English teaching and learning approaches are currently underway (Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017). Difficulties relating to initial teacher training quality, scarce professional development opportunities, and social, political, and economic issues have led to the adoption of a Grammar-Translation teacher-centered approach (Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017; Macías & Villafuerte, 2020).

Over the past decade, reforms to the national curriculum have established that English should be taught in primary school through a communicative, student-centered approach (Ministerio de Educación, 2014, 2016). Additionally, new approaches to training pre-service teachers have been adopted, aimed at providing teachers with both language and pedagogical training (Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017); these programs last 4 to 5 years and include around 1000 hours of teaching practice at primary and/or secondary schools (Consejo de Educación Superior, 2020).

In this context, in-service teachers have few opportunities for professional development, aiming mainly at improving their language proficiency (Kulman & Serrano, 2017). In 2005, for example, the British Council launched the Curriculum Reform and Development for Learning of English (CADLE) project to promote English language teacher training and improve education in public schools (Kulman & Serrano, 2017). However, most participating teachers achieved only an advanced beginner level of English proficiency in the

standardized evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2010. Some private institutions offer their teachers a variety of professional growth opportunities, including both pedagogical and language knowledge training, but this is not always the case for public school teachers.

Given the urgent need to improve EFL teaching, the *Go Teacher Program* was designed to train in-service teachers in English language proficiency and pedagogical practices (Kulman & Serrano, 2017). Between 2012 and 2014, the government provided 882 teachers from public and private schools with scholarships to study at US universities. The effectiveness of this initiative and the implementation of national curriculum reforms are still under evaluation.

Considering the main objective of this study and the context in which it was undertaken, two participant selection criteria were established: years of teaching experience (at least five years) and institution type (public or private). These criteria have been adopted due to the impact that contextual factors have been shown to have on framing teacher beliefs and classroom practices (Nishino, 2012; Richards & Pennington, 1998). Participants were recruited by contacting the English department's head teachers of two schools, who invited their colleagues to participate in the study. This purposeful snowball sampling helped us contact four experienced in-service EFL teachers from public and private schools (see Table 1).

Participants were briefed about the study and invited to participate voluntarily. Additionally, they were asked to read and sign an informed consent that outlined the aims of the study, the data collection stages, and how data would be used and stored, and it also assured that anonymity and confidentiality measures would be taken.

Participant	Age	Teaching experience (years)	School type	School level	CEFR level	Academic training
Lucy*	48	22	Private	primary	B2	BA ELT
Emily*	26	8	Private	primary	C1	BA Linguistics applied to English
Paty*	38	16	Public	secondary	B2	BA ELT, MA Education and Social Development
Marco*	46	21	Public	secondary	B2	BA ELT, MA Higher Education and Educational Management

*Pseudonyms

Table 1: Participant's relevant data.

Lucy and Emily work in a private school with groups of 25 to 30 students, teaching English and other subjects in English (e.g., science, phonics) in classrooms with varied educational resources (e.g., laptops, projector). Although they have not participated in the national initiatives of teacher improvement, they have received training in English language proficiency, classroom management, educational technology tools, pedagogical games, and CLIL.

On the other hand, Paty and Marco teach English at a public school with 40 to 50 students per class and limited technological resources. In addition to participating in national training programs to improve their language knowledge, they have also received training in methodological strategies, online education, and assessment tools.

Data collection

Data collection involved narrative frames and semi-structured interviews. First, an online open-ended questionnaire consisted of narrative frames (adapted from Moodie, 2016) (See Appendix). A narrative frame is a written story template with several sentences and blank spaces to be completed (Barkhuizen, 2014). The aim was to prompt participants to recall their language-related school experiences and identify their stated pedagogical beliefs relating to these experiences. This research instrument has been shown to "function as a powerful mediational tool that makes explicit, in teachers' own words, how, when, and why new understandings emerge" (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 490). Apart from encouraging participants to describe their experiences in detail (Barkhuizen, 2014), narrative frames enable them to connect diachronic experiences with their perspectives (Mackey & Gass, 2005) and thus explore the impact of their early experiences as language learners on their pedagogical beliefs.

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it was piloted with three Ecuadorian novice EFL teachers. Some prompts were subsequently adapted to the Ecuadorian context. Responses of at least 100 words were required to gather sufficient data. Prompts and responses were written in Spanish (teachers' mother tongue)

to help participants describe their SLLE and current beliefs. The questionnaire was emailed to participants via *Google Forms*.

The data obtained were analyzed to identify key aspects of participants' school experiences as language learners and declared pedagogical beliefs. The semi-structured interviews, designed based on these initial ideas, provided an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and significance (Seidman, 2006). The interviews served to identify and/or confirm the impact of participants' language-learning experiences on their pedagogical beliefs, which may have been challenged throughout their years of teaching experience and professional development. Interviews lasted 40–60 minutes, were conducted in Spanish via Zoom Meetings and were recorded and transcribed.

Interviews' questions focused on 1) eliciting general information regarding participants' teaching contexts (e.g., In which type of school do you work and what are your job responsibilities?); 2) gaining an in-depth understanding of participants' stated pedagogical beliefs as influenced by their SLLE (e.g., Do you think that this school experience has influenced your understanding of what teaching means?); and 3) identifying the influence of their own teaching experience and professional development on their perceptions of teaching (e.g., Do you think that your teaching experience and additional training have influenced your teaching perceptions?).

Data analysis

After ordering the participants' responses to the questionnaire using a text editor, the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the first author to be analyzed through thematic analysis. To gain a general understanding of the data, two authors read it several times and then used memos to record and discuss their first interpretations. Initial codes (e.g., implicit grammar approach, emotional support, motivation, student-centered instruction) were assigned to relevant data, identifying similar codes to form patterns or categories. Finally, overlapping and repetitive categories were identified and organized into broader themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Study trustworthiness was achieved through two forms of data triangulation: congruent findings between two information sources and agreement among the three authors about the themes and categories that emerged from the data, as well as the interpretations of participants' responses (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings[5]

The categories that emerged from data analysis revealed three main pedagogical beliefs that participants hold: beliefs on teacher-student relationships, learners' engagement, and language teaching approaches. These beliefs were grouped in broad themes related to positive and negative school language learning experiences.

Positive experiences

Beliefs about teacher-student relationships (TSR)

Participants clearly remembered their former schoolteachers who continue to positively affect their beliefs and practices, even after many years of teaching experience. These meaningful language learning experiences have served as models to be replicated in their classrooms. Positive experiences were mostly related to their former English teachers' close relationships with students.

Participants acknowledged that caring, warm, and trusting TSR helped them to succeed in language learning. For instance, Lucy recalls a positive experience and acknowledges its considerable impact on her teaching beliefs:

> *She was like a mother to us; she was always interested in what was happening in our lives. When she realized we were sad she would ask what was going* on [...] *She always gave us advice.* [...] *This affected me a lot, as I said before, the emotional aspect is very important.*

Lucy recognizes that her positive memory of her schoolteacher's empathy and concern for her shaped her view that teaching is more than delivering knowledge. However, apart from what she experienced at school, she mentions the impact of her current school community on the priority she gives to students' emotional well-being:

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[5] Data were collected in Spanish thus for publication purposes excerpts were translated into English.

> *I believe it came a little bit from my past experiences **[...]** and also from my experience in the institution. All these years they have strongly emphasized the emotional aspect. If a person, especially a child, is not emotionally well, it is very difficult for them to achieve the outcomes expected of them.*

In Lucy's view, for students to achieve learning goals, it is first necessary to ensure their emotional well-being. The emotional support that Lucy's former teacher gave her while she was a student in school, was so meaningful that she now also prioritizes her students' emotional well-being. On the other hand, the values promoted in her workplace have also strengthened this belief. For many years, in the educational context where she teaches, Lucy has been encouraged to attend to her students' emotional needs, which has impacted her belief system as well.

Marco became aware of the relationship between the importance of connecting emotionally with his students and his own experience with a former schoolteacher:

> *My teacher at school* [...] *I think there was an excellent teacher-student relationship* [...] *I believe that the first experience that I had at school still endures: that one must empathize with students.*

> *We* [teachers] *must create a bridge between the teacher and the student. If that* [connection] *doesn't exist, learning won't occur* [...] *Empathizing with them* [students] *promotes learning, so this aspect is very important.*

Marco recalls his memories of his first English teacher at school. The excerpts above provide evidence for how the positive relationship he had with his teacher has considerably influenced his beliefs. Now, as a teacher, he strives to build an emotional connection with his students, perhaps even at the expense of the cognitive aspects of teaching, thus imitating his former teacher's behavior.

Paty also acknowledges the powerful impact that her schoolteachers' empathy exerted on her language learning process and how such meaningful experiences still influence her teaching perceptions:

> *I believe that the memories of all the activities and what they* [my schoolteachers] *told us: "you can do it, it doesn't matter if you are wrong, you will learn from those mistakes" is what prompted me to go on.*

> *I really like to worry about my students first* [...] *I'm a person who establishes limits but I try to help them* [...] *I am always close to them. I don't give them the confidence of establishing a friendship* [...] *but I help them to build their confidence in that they can do things and do them well.*

Paty clearly remembers how her former teachers' encouraging words helped her succeed as a school language learner. As an English teacher, she also establishes close relationships with her students and prioritizes the human aspect of teaching. Paty's empowerment from her schoolteachers made her think that helping students gain self-confidence is a classroom practice that could support their language learning process.

Beliefs on learners' engagement

Although most participants' positive SLLE concern their relationships with their schoolteachers, others recall teachers' learning activities to promote classroom engagement. For instance, Emily recalls the appealing activities she experienced at school:

> *She taught English using games* [...] *She encouraged us to use the language in the classroom. To improve our pronunciation, she made us all sing a song together* [...] *I had fun learning.*

These positive language experiences became a model for the kind of English teacher Emily wanted to be in the future (Miller & Shifflet, 2016). Now, as a schoolteacher herself, she tries to imitate her former teacher's practices:

> *Everything she did stuck with me. It's like seeing my teacher there in the classroom, moving and doing something* [...] *that captures your attention* [...] *You engage them* [children] *through music because that means moving, not only their heads, arms, and hands, but their whole body* [...] *they learn this way.*

Emily's positive memory of her schoolteacher's charisma and use of engaging activities shaped her belief about using music to motivate students to learn English while having fun.

Despite participants' years of teaching experience, the SLLE they remember as positive still exert a significant influence on their pedagogical beliefs (John, 1996), encouraging them to replicate the positive teaching models they observed in school (Lortie, 1975). Just as their schoolteachers maximized learning opportunities by building positive relationships, our participants believe that establishing emotional connections with their own students enhances learning (Hargreaves, 1998; Riley, 2011). Emily's case shows that teachers' beliefs concerning learner engagement may reflect the enduring influence of their 'ghost' teachers (Miller & Shifflet, 2016) even after several years of teaching experience. Additionally, as evidenced

in Lucy's case, teachers' prolonged interaction with their school community may also impact their beliefs and ongoing learning process (Johnson & Golombek, 2002).

Negative experiences

Beliefs in language teaching approaches

Most participants also recalled memories of English school teachers they disliked. These negative SLLE have served as teaching models to avoid in their classroom. Participants often mentioned the approach adopted by their former teachers in teaching grammar. Emphasis on sentence structure, discrete grammar points, or isolated linguistic elements were the main features of teaching methodologies experienced. The excerpts below illustrate how Lucy's perceptions of grammar instruction differ strongly from what she experienced at school as a language learner:

> *Our teacher only taught* [grammatical] *structures through repetition: subject plus verb, etc.* [...] *In the end I learned that way, but now I consider that it isn't the correct way. Today there are new methodological strategies for working with students.* [...] *I believe that now one should use it* [grammar], *for example, in conversations, looking for alternatives* [...] *so that learners become engaged and understand it* [grammar] *implicitly.*

Lucy acknowledges that she learned the language through methodologies focused on grammatical structures and repetition; however, her current beliefs reflect a more communicative language teaching approach. From her perspective, her in-service training has helped her to discover new teaching strategies:

> *I've attended many training courses at the institution and on my own* [...] *I've realized that there were many more options that I wasn't aware of* [...] *There are many alternatives for learning the language that I'm really fascinated by and I try to use them in the classroom.*

Lucy highlights how continuous professional development has aroused her awareness of innovative teaching strategies, which probably triggered her reflection process (van de Ven, 2009; Verloop, 2001). Lucy's analysis of the theoretical knowledge (theory) acquired during these development opportunities seemingly encouraged her to reflect on negative SLLE (philosophy), thus contributing to questioning her beliefs (principles) and ultimately reshaping them for better practices (Farrell, 2015).

Similarly, Marco recalls having learned the language mainly through grammatical rules:

> *At school, one acquired the language mostly through grammar; there was no* [emphasis on] *communication. There were just the verb 'To Be', the 'Do' verbs, subject, verb, and complement, etc.* [...] *For several years I taught using the grammatical aspect [of language] as reference. However, this has since changed and I'm now determined to teach the language with communication as the main goal.*

From Marco's perspective, the purpose of teaching English is to use the language in real communication. However, this perception has not always been part of his belief system. Because Marco learned English with an emphasis on discrete grammar points, he thought this was the best way to teach the language and began by imitating his schoolteachers. However, his subsequent training and experience have helped him to challenge this belief:

> *I've been fortunate to attend many teacher training courses and, well, as one learns daily, one becomes aware of the real purpose of the language* [...] *little by little one's mind changes.* [...] *One sees that students are learning and based on that one adapts as well.*

It is clear that his professional development and what he has learned from daily practice have played a role in Marco's beliefs changing process. His teacher training opportunities promoted his awareness of the communicative purpose of language learning and engaged him in different levels of reflection (i.e., theory, philosophy, and principles) (Farrell, 2015). Furthermore, his evaluation of students' learning outcomes throughout many years of teaching experience has helped Marco re-assess the beliefs initially shaped by his SLLE (Guskey, 2002).

Marco also remembers the role he played as a school student and compared it to what he believes about his own students' roles in the classroom:

> *The teacher gave the lesson and the students had to be completely quiet in every subject, including English; today it shouldn't be like that* [...] *we aren't delivering knowledge, we're trying to get students to acquire a language* [...] *To do that they have to make a noise, stand up, jump* [...] *creating totally different experiences so that the language stays with them.*

Although Marco experienced a passive, teacher-centered approach as a language learner, he now thinks students should participate actively in their learning process. Indeed, he describes several activities that he believes help students learn the language. Marco further elaborates on this by explaining how his teaching

experience has contributed to changing his perspective on the varied activities that students should engage in during language instruction:

> *My experience* [...] *has really helped me to appreciate this* [...]. *We aren't teaching just one kind of student—we must include many students with different abilities.*

His experience over the years has provided him with opportunities to interact with different students, encouraging him to reflect on the importance of attaining students' particular learning needs. Marco's vast teaching experience has helped him to broaden his understanding of the classroom context, which enabled him to reevaluate his beliefs through reflection (Fives et al., 2015). Marcos' reflection on daily teaching experiences (practice), interrelated with his professional development (theory) and SLLE (philosophy), seems to have promoted a change in his beliefs (principles) (Farrell, 2015).

Paty also recalls traditional teaching methodologies; her teaching experience has served as a means of self-reflection, contributing to reshaping her pedagogical beliefs:

> *Maybe at the beginning, when I began my teaching career, I always remembered how my teachers gave lessons* [through traditional methodologies], *and I did it the same way. But then, over time, I realized that my students were getting bored. So, I thought 'what's happened? My teachers taught me that way; what's going on with my students?'* [...] *So I changed my approach and made my lesson more communicative and participative.*

As Paty gained experience throughout the years, her students' negative responses to her approach to teaching English (i.e., replicating the teaching models from school) gradually engaged her in the complex process of self-reflection (Švec, 2005). She first analyzed her classroom practice and then examined her SLLE (philosophy) as a potential influencer on her teaching approach. Perhaps, this analysis helped her to become aware of her beliefs (principles) and started a process of critical reflection, which probably led to a change in her teaching perceptions.

All participants recalled what they perceived as negative experiences learning English at school. Their teaching experience and knowledge acquired through in-service training played a significant role in challenging the beliefs influenced by these experiences. Consequently, they decided against replicating the teaching models they disliked, thus developing an *anti-apprenticeship of observation* (Moodie, 2016). From the participants' perspective, these learning experiences were detrimental to their learning process; hence, they believe that adopting opposite teaching practices in their classroom will promote their students' learning.

Our participants' considerable teaching experience and constant interaction with students have inspired them to socially negotiate their ongoing learning process to teach (Johnson, 2009). Their active participation in continuing professional development has helped them build awareness of new teaching methodologies. Likewise, our participants' opportunities to try these methodologies out in the classroom and evaluate students' learning outcomes have encouraged them to analyze the impact of their negative SLLE on their beliefs. This analysis engaged them in a reflection process at different levels (i.e., theory, practice, philosophy, principles) (Farrell, 2015), which finally contributed to challenging their beliefs.

Discussion

Participants' experiences of learning English at school seem to be closely related to their beliefs about teaching. Their positive SLLE appear to have significantly influenced their pedagogical beliefs, encouraging them to replicate positive teaching models, while their teaching experience and professional development have clearly contributed to reshaping those beliefs formed by negative SLLE.

Unlike other studies focused on pre-service or novice teachers (e.g., Gray, 2019; Johnson, 1994; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Kaikkonen, 2009), our participants stated that they replicate only the teaching models corresponding to positive SLLE. Davin et al. (2018) found that experienced teachers' beliefs are mainly influenced by the positive teaching models they observed at school. Similarly, our participants' pleasant experiences were mainly related to their positive relationships with their teachers. Just as their former teachers were concerned with the affective dimension of the classroom (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014), our participants perceived teaching primarily as an emotional task. This finding suggests that the positive emotions of these enjoyable experiences made them so meaningful that participants continued replicating aspects of those teaching models (Johnson & Worden, 2014).

Similar to what Sanchez (2010) and Moodie (2016) found, the experienced teachers in this study used negative teaching models as examples of practices to avoid, but only after the experience of imitating these practices and subsequently seeking out training opportunities to change them. Although they learned English

mainly through grammar-focused methodologies, our participants' continuing professional development and assessment of students' responses to their teaching practices have helped them to appreciate the communicative purpose of language teaching. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Deglau & Sullivan, 2006; Levitt, 2002), findings indicate that teachers' engagement in in-service training and the experience of evaluating students' learning outcomes for many years may contribute to shifting beliefs (Guskey, 2002; Stergiopoulou, 2012). Moreover, these findings suggest that as teachers gain experience, the negative effects of their SLLE may be reduced due to the greater opportunities they have to re-assess their beliefs and teaching practices (Kuzhabecova & Zhapavora, 2016).

Compared to novice teachers, who may struggle to change the beliefs shaped by their SLLE (Golombek, 1998; Pajares, 1992), experienced teachers seemingly have obtained additional tools to revisit their beliefs and improve their practices. However, changing beliefs is a complex, lengthy, and multidimensional process that requires more than participation in teacher continuous training and classroom practice: it also requires teacher reflection (Levitt, 2002; Richards et al., 2001).

As our participants explained, what they learned from professional development courses partially developed their awareness and eagerness to change their teaching methodologies. Also, their opportunities to try out these new strategies throughout many years of teaching experience have engaged them in reflection processes at different levels. As Farrell (2015) contends, the cyclical process of teacher reflection may occur at five levels: philosophy, theory, principles, practice, and beyond. Reflection on these different factors continually influences each other, ultimately leading to reflective practice.

Our participants' analysis of the theory provided in professional development courses and the feedback received from students in daily practice has helped them to become aware of their SLLE and its influence on their beliefs and practices. This examination process has enabled them to question their beliefs and critically reflect on all these aspects.

From a sociocultural stance, teacher learning is understood as a "long-term, complex, developmental process that is the result of participation in the social practices and contexts associated with learning and teaching" (Johnson, 2009, p. 10). Accordingly, it is not limited to what teachers experience as language learners or student teachers but is also concerned with their daily experiences as practitioners in their educational community (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Such arguments may explain why our participants' many years of teaching experience and professional development contributed to reshaping their pedagogical beliefs, facilitating their growth as teachers (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Lo, 2017).

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that although experienced teachers have spent many years practicing their profession, their positive SLLE still affect their pedagogical beliefs. However, their teaching experience and professional development seem to help them re-assess beliefs initially shaped by negatively perceived SLLE. Reshaping such strongly held beliefs seems to occur mainly through self-reflection (Farrell, 2015, 2018; Farrell & Ives, 2014). Therefore, this study strengthens the idea that in-service teachers must be encouraged to reflect critically on the theory provided in teacher training courses, their daily practice in the classroom, their experiences as school language learners, and the beliefs they have developed throughout their careers (Farrell, 2015).

A relevant implication of this study concerns the role of reflection in teachers' in-service training. Extensive teaching experience and engagement in professional development opportunities are insufficient to change teachers' beliefs (Levitt, 2002; Richards et al., 2001). The conscious examination of these factors and reflecting on the possible influence of their earlier language learning experiences would promote the process of reshaping beliefs (Farrell, 2015, 2018). These reflective practices will enable teachers to become aware of the need to change and eagerly seek tools to help them in this long and complex process. Additionally, their reflection at different levels would mediate their learning-to-teach process and increase their opportunities for professional growth (Johnson & Golombek, 2016).

This study also highlights the need for reflection opportunities in language teacher education programs. Pre-service English teachers must be encouraged to critically analyze their past language learning experiences and reflect on how such memories may have shaped their beliefs regarding their role as future teachers (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Maldonado et al., 2021; Wright, 2010). Teaching student teachers the value of reflection may help them to see it as an ongoing practice that will lead them to analyze all the learning opportunities they will have throughout their professional journey.

A limitation of this study concerns the number of participants involved. Given that this was an exploratory case study, a larger-scale study with a greater number of participants in diverse contexts (i.e., private/public schools; rural/urban contexts, novice/experienced teachers) might shed more light on how experience, professional development, and other possible factors, influence teachers' beliefs.

Finally, future research should compare the impact of novice and experienced teachers' school language learning experiences on their beliefs and practices. As this and other issues relating to ELT training have received little attention in the context of Ecuador (Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017), this comparison could provide further guidance on promoting the development of teachers' self-reflection skills at any stage of their career.

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Appendix: Narrative Frames (Open-ended questionnaire)[6]

1. My best memories of English lessons at [primary school/secondary school/university] are...

2. My worst memories of English lessons at [primary school/secondary school/university] are…

3. The English teachers that I remember most clearly are from [primary school/secondary school/university]. They were...

4. The student experiences from [primary school/secondary school/university] that have positively and negatively influenced the way I teach today are… (mention the most significant ones).

5. As a teacher, I think that nowadays, English lessons at [primary school/secondary school/university] are...

6. I have had some successful teaching experiences in the classroom. I think that the main reasons for this success are...

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[6] *Data were collected in Spanish thus for publication purposes narrative frames were translated into English.*