

Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs about Language Teaching and Learning: A Longitudinal Study

Creencias de profesores principiantes acerca de la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lengua: un estudio longitudinal

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This paper contains the description of a research project that was carried out in the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching program at a Mexican university. The study was longitudinal and it tracked fourteen students for four semesters of the eight semester program. The aim was to identify pre-service teachers' beliefs about English language teaching and learning at different stages of instruction while they were taking the teaching practice courses in the program. The instruments employed were questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The results demonstrated that students made links between theory and practice creating some changes in previous beliefs. The study revealed an increase of awareness and a better understanding of the complex processes involved in teaching and learning.

Key words: Learning beliefs, pre-service teachers, teaching beliefs.

En este artículo se describe una investigación que se llevó a cabo en el programa de Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Inglés de una universidad mexicana. El estudio fue longitudinal, el cual siguió la trayectoria de catorce estudiantes de la licenciatura durante cuatro de los ocho semestres del programa académico. El propósito fue identificar las creencias de estos maestros principiantes, quienes cursaban sus clases de práctica docente del programa, acerca de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés en diferentes etapas de sus estudios. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron cuestionarios y entrevistas semi-estructuradas. Los resultados demostraron que los estudiantes articularon la teoría con la práctica, lo cual incidió en sus creencias anteriores. El estudio también reveló que comprendieron mejor los complejos procesos involucrados en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: creencias sobre el aprendizaje, creencias sobre la enseñanza, profesores principiantes.

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Introduction

It is often assumed that teaching in higher education is the result of the subject-matter knowledge and intuitive decisions based on teachers' experiences and beliefs about how the subject-matter should be taught (Turner-Bisset, 2001; Shulman, 2005). However, beliefs are such powerful influences that affect the way teachers carry out every aspect of their work because they act as lenses which filter every interpretation and decision teachers make (Johnson, 1999). Teacher education programs are many times unsuccessful in helping pre-service teachers to develop modern approaches to pedagogy because these programs do not consider their beliefs (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Deng (2004) argues that pre-service teacher beliefs need to be transformed for pre-service teachers to teach in new ways. However, transforming beliefs is not an easy endeavor. Williams (1999) suggests that a socio-constructivist view of learning where teacher educators mediate between theory and practice through reflection will help learners reshape or construct new beliefs. Therefore, identifying pre-service teacher beliefs and making these future teachers aware of their own beliefs seem crucial for teacher education programs.

The present study took place in a Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching (BA in ELT) program which has as its main purpose to offer professional preparation for future teachers of English. Students in their last two semesters of the BA program are placed in institutions where they can practice teaching. Therefore, this context offers a great opportunity to find out these students' beliefs before and after the teaching stage to try to understand how their teaching beliefs work. For the purpose of this paper and, considering that the students of the program are first pre-service teachers and in the last years of instruction become in-service teachers, the students will be referred to as pre-service teachers or participants because they will not receive the degree until the fulfillment of the program.

This research aims to find out the pre-service teachers' beliefs about English language teaching and learning. It also focuses on whether those current beliefs were influenced by their teaching courses and the experience gained throughout the time spent during their academic preparation as English teachers. This research highlights the importance of not only raising the teacher educators' awareness of the pre-service students' beliefs about language learning and teaching but of making the participants aware of their own beliefs. It also stresses the crucial need for English language teacher educators and program designers to identify the pre-service students' beliefs at initial stages of instruction so that they can develop strategies to modify and understand those beliefs which hinder the efficacy of teacher instruction. This longitudinal study also aims to contribute to the theory about pre-service teacher beliefs and hopes to add to the literature that informs the practices of teacher education. Moreover, it also presents information about a context that has been scarcely explored, that of pre-service teachers of English in Mexico.

This paper is organized in the following way: First, some key aspects of the literature are presented followed by the context of the study. Then, the methodology and the data collection are explained, concluding with the presentation of results and discussion of the findings.

Teacher Beliefs

Teacher effectiveness depends on the conceptualization of all of the elements involved in teaching, although the personality and beliefs also influence their teaching practice. Theories have stressed the idea that most teachers guide their actions and decisions by a set of organized personal beliefs and that these often affect their performance, consciously or unconsciously (Johnson, 1999). It has also been discussed in the literature that teachers usually teach the same way they were taught since they tend to

follow the same rules and routines making reference to their learning experience (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001). Therefore, teachers' beliefs shape the world in which they and their students operate and these mental models of "reality" are highly individualistic since no two classrooms are, or can be, the same. In addition, Abraham and Vann (1987) explain that learners' philosophy of language refer to "beliefs about how language operates, and, consequently, how it is learned" (p. 95). This philosophy guides the learners approach to language learning. Ferreira (2006) claims that beliefs about second language acquisition will directly impact learners' attitudes, motivation and learning strategies. Thus, the authors state that beliefs are usually shaped by students' and teachers' backgrounds since they are formed through interactions with others, own experiences and the impact of the environment around them.

It has been difficult to establish a single definition for the concept of belief since different authors understand it from a personal perspective. Some authors refer to beliefs as cognition, knowledge, conceptions of teaching, pedagogical knowledge, practical knowledge, practical theories, theoretical orientations, images, attitudes, assumptions, conceptions, perspectives or lay theories to name some definitions (Borg, 2006). One of the authors who focused his attention on trying to explain the meaning of beliefs and search for a clear definition of the concept was Pajares (1992), who concluded that "The construct of educational beliefs is itself broad and encompassing" (p. 316). Therefore, as there is no clear cut definition about beliefs, for the purpose of this paper they will be defined as interactive networks of assumptions and knowledge about educational processes.

Finally, in the literature, Pajares (1992) says that "the earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure the more difficult it is to alter" (p. 317). Many studies have shown that beliefs are deeply rooted and

are resistant to change (Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001). However, Williams (1999) states that providing teachers with the link between theory and practice, which should be mediated by reflection in a socio-constructivist approach, change can be brought about. Therefore, because of the importance of beliefs about language learning and teaching for teacher educator programs, this study aimed to know more about the future teachers' beliefs. In addition, this research tried to find out whether the BA in ELT program is providing positive orientation and instruction as well as being successful in helping students to become better teachers of English.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

- What are the pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching in the 4th, 6th and 8th semesters?
- To what extent did the pre-service teachers' beliefs change?
- How did pre-service teachers' beliefs evolve?
- To what extent does the Teaching Practice strand influence pre-service teachers' beliefs?

Research Method

As the questions for this study are concerned with finding out pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, as well as understanding whether these beliefs changed and influenced their role as future teachers, its framework falls within a mixed mode approach to research. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) state that "Mixed methods research provides more evidence for studying a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative research alone" (p. 12). Relevant to the purpose of using a mixed mode approach in this study is that, among its benefits, qualitative data can help explain quantitative results (Cumming, 2004; Lazaraton, 2000). In this case, the research design used quantitative and qualitative

approaches aiming to support each other. The methodology and the approach to data collection warranted or called for questionnaires and interviews that provided a strong support for the study. As the questionnaire was applied at different times during the students' professional preparation, the study was a longitudinal one.

Context

This longitudinal study was carried out at the University of Sonora, which is in the Northwestern part of Mexico, in a BA in ELT program that offers professional preparation for students who want to become teachers of English. The program, organized in eight semesters, provides not only English language courses, but stresses a theoretical and pedagogical background for language teachers. It also places great importance on the relationship between theory and practice by helping students to develop their teaching techniques and skills in real teaching contexts.

The series of the teaching practice courses in the program provides the link between theory and practice and a strong theoretical teaching background where students are familiarized with the elements, theories and methodologies for teaching a foreign language. These courses also provide a link with the other courses in the program since the practice they offer help students to make sense of the pedagogical, linguistic and cultural knowledge. It is during the third semester that students are introduced to the first teaching practice course where they learn and develop classroom management skills and become familiar with the basic elements of a classroom. The second course is Teaching Practice I in the fourth semester where they learn about lesson and unit planning and how to deal with the teaching of the four skills. In this course, the students carry out observations, but it is during the sixth and eighth semesters when they take Practice II and III that students practice in real contexts, that is, they are sent to different educational

institutions where they have the opportunity to practice teaching and learn from this experience. These opportunities provide them with the experience needed and help them gain more insights as to what this profession is about. Furthermore, by this time, many students also start working as teachers in different local institutions and start benefiting from this teaching experience.

Participants

The participants involved in this project were all Mexican students of this BA in ELT program; they were thirteen females and one male and all were non-native English speakers. It is important to say that seven of the fourteen students of this project started working while the project was in progress and the rest were full time students. They were all contacted when they registered for their second Teaching Practice course in the fourth semester and they all agreed to participate in this project until the conclusion of their studies.

Instruments for Data Collection

Two instruments were used: a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire was adapted from the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1988), who gave the researchers permission to adapt it. Seven out of the twenty questions were taken from it and the rest were adapted and developed by the researchers based on the context and the research needs (see Appendix A).

To answer the questionnaire, students had to choose from the five options presented following the Likert scale. The options ranged from those which (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, to the ones which they (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree. There is a neutral (3) element which provides the option to consider the belief in process of definition. That is, those responses which were not yet defined by the student. They were categorized as a position where the student was not certain of the belief in question and he/she was in the

process of agreeing or disagreeing with the statement. There was no right or wrong answer to the statements since they were designed to actually bring students' opinions about teaching and learning to the surface and to see if those ideas changed over a period of two years.

The interviews were semi-structured and were carried out just before the participants exited the program with the aim of verifying information and finding reasons for their responses. The interview consisted of six open-ended questions (see Appendix B).

Data Collection

The questionnaire was applied the first time to the students when they started the fourth semester of the BA in ELT program while they were taking the Teaching Practice I course. The students were tracked throughout the rest of their studies and the questionnaire was applied to them again when they were in the sixth and eighth semesters. Just before they exited the program, the interviews took place with the purpose of confirming and/or expanding the data collected from the written questionnaires. These interviews were recorded and transcribed following Jefferson's transcription conventions (in Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Data Analysis

Once the data were collected, the questionnaires were analyzed. The first step, the qualitative part, was to find out the students' beliefs about language learning and teaching. The statements which dealt with the same topic were grouped in order to verify if the participants contradicted or verified their own information. Then, the frequencies of their responses were analyzed. The data presented considered those students who started working while the project was in progress and those who did not work while they were studying. Although the responses ranged from those who strongly agree to strongly disagree, to make the results more transparent, the agreement responses

were collated as in the case of the disagreement responses. Therefore, data responses could be grouped into three categories –agree, neutral and disagree. The second step was to analyze whether the beliefs had changed. The researchers concentrated on finding out whether the original beliefs had changed and to see whether a pattern could be observed. The third and final step, the qualitative part, was analyzing the transcripts of the interviews to verify the information given in the questionnaires, to discover reasons for their responses and to interpret ways in which their beliefs, whether changed or maintained, influenced their practice when teaching.

Findings

There were two kinds of findings, one derived from the questionnaires and the other one from the interviews. For the questionnaires, the response frequencies of the beliefs are presented in tables and the most relevant findings are highlighted. The results of the interviews intended to clarify and expand the students' responses on the questionnaires and are explained following the questionnaire findings.

Findings from the Questionnaires

The information that is presented below shows the beliefs which emerged from the questionnaires applied to the students involved in this project. Each belief was organized and placed under the category response which showed the highest rating. Table 1A presents those beliefs participants agreed on most and that were maintained throughout the years of instruction, although the degrees for agreement for this category varied in the different semesters.

As can be observed in Table 1A, belief number 14 is related to the role of methodology and shows that the rating of agreement is higher for the sixth semester. It is interesting to note that it is precisely in that semester where students have just finished taking the methodology courses and have been practicing

Table 1A. Response Frequency for Agreement

Beliefs	Rating 4th Sem	Rating 6th Sem	Rating 8th Sem
#6 It is necessary to know about English speaking cultures in order to speak a foreign language.	42.8%	49.9%	71.3%
#9 Language is learned subconsciously in non-academic social situations.	42.8%	49.9%	64.2%
#11 English should be taught only through the use of English.	49.9%	50%	42.8%
#13 If EFL students understand some of the basic grammatical rules of the language, they can usually create lots of new sentences on their own.	78.5%	78.5%	71.4%
#14 Methodologies play an important role in second language learning.	85.6%	99.9%	92.7%
#16 Usually it is more important for EFL students to focus on what they are trying to say and not how to say it.	64.2%	57.1%	49.9%
#17 English is better learned when teachers implement different activities for different learning styles.	92.8%	99.9%	92.7%
#20 Everyone can speak a foreign language.	85.6%	92.8%	92.8%

Table 1B. Response Frequency for Disagreement

Beliefs	Rating 4th Sem	Rating 6th Sem	Rating 8th Sem
#4 Students only learn what teachers teach them in class.	92.8%	85.7%	99.9%
#7 You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	71.4%	92.7%	99.9%

Table 1C. Response Frequency for Neutral

Beliefs	Rating 4th Sem	Rating 6th Sem	Rating 8th Sem
#8 It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	50%	50%	50%
#19 It is better to learn English through content rather than language courses.	57.1%	57.1%	64.2%

using the variety of methodologies in the Teaching Practice course. Therefore, it is suggested that the students from the sixth semester were influenced by the courses taught in the program. In addition, belief number 6 shows the highest increase of responses. It is important to mention that the students take two courses on the culture of English speaking countries and two other courses for the learning of American literature. Hence, this might also suggest that there is an influence of the teaching preparation received from the program in these two students' beliefs.

Table 1B represents those beliefs which students disagree on most. Students seem to see learning as a more flexible and personal process.

It is clearly seen by the end of the eight semesters that students strongly believe it is the learners' responsibility to take control of their learning. They seem to have reinforced these beliefs since the rating is higher. These beliefs reflect the emphasis on promoting learner responsibility carried out by the teachers of the program. This situation recalls Ruiz-Esparza's (2009) findings in which she was investigating teacher beliefs about assessment in this same context and found out that the teachers had one main goal: to make students more autonomous and responsible of their own learning.

Table 1C presents beliefs that were kept neutral throughout the years of instruction. It is interesting to note that the rating for belief number eight was kept the same.

As some of the students in the program come from bilingual schools and others have done part of their schooling in the United States, the beliefs in Table 1C could reflect what was stated in the literature section of this paper. Students' responses may be influenced by their own experience as second language learners since students tend to agree on ideas based on what has worked for them and believe that the same way will work for other people (Bailey et al., 2001). The program did not seem to exert any influence on those beliefs.

Table 2A shows one belief which students changed from agreement to disagreement keeping the same percentage. This is belief number two, which although the percentage is not the highest, students began to disagree on it in the sixth semester.

Belief 2 in Table 2A is related to theories of language learning and modern pedagogy which are studied in the program and practiced in the Teaching Practice courses. Therefore, the change in this belief might be a direct influence of the program.

Table 2B presents three beliefs that during the fourth semester were ranked high by most of the students. However, by the end of the eight semesters, students did not consider them to be in the same category.

Beliefs number one and ten had a strong position of agreement at the beginning of the study, but students began to change by the sixth semester as can be deducted by the decrease in their degree of agreement. The reason for the change in belief 1 is clarified in the interview section of this paper and concerns their experience in learning. The result for belief number 12 might have its roots in the students' knowledge of the different methodologies seen in class and experienced in their Teaching Practice courses where they need to teach using different methodologies and to reflect on the results.

Table 2C evidences the evolution of a belief which drastically changed from disagreement to agreement. It can be observed that students disagreed in the fourth semester with belief 18; they then changed to neutral in the sixth to finally agree in the last semester of the program.

It could be hypothesized that as the students were receiving information about the role of mistakes in language learning, they started doubting their belief by the middle of the program and then changed their belief after experiencing teaching. Although the percentages are not very high, they were the highest rankings for the sixth and eighth semester. This result evidences that not all of the students have a strong

Table 2A. Response Frequency for Agreement that Changed to Disagreement

Belief	Agreement Rating 4th Sem	Disagreement* Rating 6th Sem	Disagreement* Rating 8th Sem
#2 EFL students generally need to understand the grammatical rules of English in order to become fluent in the language.	42.8%	35.7%	42.8%

*The cells where the responses changed are shaded.

Table 2B. Response Frequency for Agreement Which Changed to Neutral

Beliefs	Agreement Rating 4th Sem	Agreement Rating 6th Sem	Neutral Rating* 8th Sem
#1 It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	78.5%	42.7%	50%
#10 It is best to learn English in an English speaking country.	78.5%	49.9%	50%
#12 EFL students learn better if teachers implement cooperative learning.	57.1%	64.2%	57.1%

*The cells where the responses changed are shaded.

Table 2C. Response Frequency for Disagreement Which Changed to Agreement

Belief	Disagreement	Neutral	Agreement
	Rating 4th Sem	Rating 6th Sem	Rating 8th Sem
#18 When EFL students make oral errors, it is best to ignore them as long as you can understand what they are trying to say.	57.1%	50%	50%

Table 2D. Response Frequency for Neutral That Changed to Disagreement

Belief	Neutral Rating 4th Sem	Neutral Rating 6th Sem	Disagreement Rating* 8th Sem
#15 The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	64.2%	50% (Neutral)	78.5%

*The cells where the responses changed are shaded.

Table 2E. Divided Opinions for Belief 3

Belief	Neutral Rating 4th Sem	Disagreement Rating 6th Sem	Neutral Ratings 8th Sem*	Disagreement Ratings 8th Sem*
#3 Language can be thought of as a set of grammatical structures which is learned consciously and controlled by the language learner.	64.2%	49.9%	42.9%	42.9%

*The cells containing the divided responses are shaded.

conviction that oral errors are part of learning, and as Table 2D seems to suggest, students seem to be more flexible in seeing mistakes as part of the learning process. This also suggests that the students are more aware of the importance of meaning instead of form.

Table 2D corresponds to a belief that changed from neutral to disagreement and it is related to the importance of grammar. The reason for the change in this belief is clarified in the interview section.

Belief 15 seems to contradict the students' response in the fourth semester about the role of mistakes observed in Table 2C for belief 18. Although they had disagreed that it is best to ignore students' oral errors when they speak, they were neutral to the importance of grammar in their responses for the 4th semester. Moreover, there is not much difference in the degree of response for belief 15 which is neutral

in the 4th and 6th semesters but by the end of the 8th semester, this belief changed. It could therefore be moot that most students felt that grammar may not be that important when learning a foreign language because of the change in category and the high increase of the percentage.

The last two tables, 2E and 2F, show interesting results for two beliefs because the pattern of responses was different to the one analyzed before. Table 2E shows the ratings for the frequency responses for belief 3.

As can be observed in Table 2E, 64 percent of the students in the 4th semester were neutral for belief number 3 and then changed their responses to disagreement in the sixth semester. Finally in the eighth semester, the majority of responses were divided between the previous responses of neutral and disagreement.

Table 2F. Divided Opinions for Belief 5

Belief	Disagreement Rating 4 th Sem	Disagreement Rating 6 th Sem	Agreement Rating 8 th Sem*	Disagreement Rating 8 th Sem*
#5 It is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation.	50%	42.7%	50%	49.9%

*The cells where the responses changed are shaded.

Table 2F shows the frequency of responses for belief number 5. This table also evidences that the eighth semester students were divided in their opinions.

Table 2F indicates that the students did not change their belief in the fourth and sixth semesters and that in their last semester only half of the participants changed their belief drastically from disagreement to agreement. Therefore, half of the participants consider excellent pronunciation important.

Although not all of the beliefs presented here changed, it is interesting to note the change of perception, especially in beliefs numbers one, two, ten, twelve, eighteen and fifteen.

Findings from the Interviews

By the end of the participants' academic preparation, the semi-structured interviews were carried out with the purpose of expanding and finding out more information about the reasons which influenced their teaching and learning beliefs. The questions addressed their own English learning process to know about the different stages they went through when learning English and to contrast them with their actual view of such process. Most of the pre-service teachers came to discover their learning beliefs and how some of them have changed with time and experience.

In relation to the first question about how English is learned, most of the pre-service teachers answered that it is learned by practicing the language and carrying out different learning activities. Participant

1 (P-1) added "motivation" while Participant 2 (P-2) mentioned the use of "different methods, strategies and activities." These two answers are linked to beliefs #14 and #17. The second question about how English should be taught is closely related to the first question and the same beliefs, although students added that they "Now need to have different methods and to observe what students like" (P-2). Another participant stated, "Teaching should be based on the needs of the students, the different learning styles and the variety of strategies" (P-5) which supported both points of view.

The third question about how they learned English gave the information that half of the group interviewed had close contact with the American culture since they studied in bilingual schools or lived for a period of time in the United States. It was interesting to note that although they agreed on the importance of the context, they were more open to accept that the use of appropriate methodology is as important as exposure to the language. Participant 1 said, "I had a private teacher and with practice, I suddenly began to speak." Therefore, the student practiced the target language with the teacher. Another student said, "I don't know how I learned, but I used to watch TV or movies in English" (P-5). None of them mentioned that age determined their learning of English as belief #1 states. They were more concerned with receiving enough practice than living in an American context as belief #10 suggest, in which

case they changed from agreement to neutral as was manifested in the responses from the questionnaire.

The fourth question about how they were taught made them reflect on their own learning process. Some of them said, "I was never taught because I lived in the United States" (P-6). In contrast others said, "With practice" (P-10), "Little by little we formed sentences" (P-4) or "Repeating and repeating sometimes the same things over and over" (P-9). They reported different approaches and experiences.

The fifth and the sixth questions related to whether their perspectives on how English is taught and learned generated many comments considering that, as in-service language teachers, they were very much aware of the second language learning processes. As Participant 2 said, "I thought all of the students learned the same, but now I know they don't." Participant 3 stated, "I used to think everything came from the book, now I know the book is not all" while Participant 5 added, "I thought that the way we were taught was the correct one, now I know that we all have different learning styles." This last comment reflects the claim of Bailey et al. (2001) that teachers usually teach the same way they were taught making reference to their own learning experience. The comments from participants 2, 3 and 5 also indicate that as they received information from the teaching courses, they modified their perception as well. All of the participants were conscious of their own experiences as language learners and understood the importance of such experience as language teachers. Their perspective of how English should be taught changed and they affirmed that "There are other factors, such as the affective one, that it's very important" (P-1); "It shouldn't be a lonely process but a collaborative one where the teacher and students must interact and learn" (P-3). They seemed to be more open and receptive to other factors.

The interviews shed light on where most of their beliefs come from and also provided interesting

information about how they were modified and why. All of the pre-service teachers were conscious of their own experiences as language learners and understood the importance of such experience as language teachers. They were confident in the changes of perceptions, agreeing that the knowledge of grammar is not the only important element when learning a foreign language (belief #15).

During the interviews, the participants often emphasized the importance of the information received during the Teaching Practice Courses throughout the program. There were beliefs which were often discussed in class and were very common such as the popular idea that children learn better than adults (belief #1). Their responses on the questionnaires were probably neutralized by the fact they learned that "adults proceed through early stages of syntactic and morphological development faster than children do" (Collier, 1995, p. 18). Another insight was related to the learning of English through content and in an English speaking context. Participants reflected on their personal experiences of English learning (half of the participants interviewed learned English in American contexts as mentioned earlier) and confirmed the idea that we tend to believe in learning strategies that are familiar to our experience. What became evident from the interviews was that the participants were very much aware and concerned about the language processes and their implications in teaching and learning. They all agreed that teaching and learning is much more complex than they thought they were. They agreed that the academic preparation they received made them learn and know about the implications of becoming good language teachers.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to identify the beliefs future teachers hold toward teaching and learning, how these evolved and to what extent the impact of the Teaching Practice courses have on

them. The results highlight the finding that 40 percent of the beliefs changed while 60 percent remained the same. It can be hypothesized that the teaching preparation received in the program along with the Teaching Practice courses where the pre-service teachers experience and reflect on teaching, may have influenced the changes presented. The methodology followed in the program recalls Williams' (1999) claims for teacher educators to help learners reshape their beliefs by mediating between theory and practice through reflection and the awareness of learners' own beliefs. During the interviews, some of the pre-service teachers said that they were in the process of changing some of their practices and it can be suggested that such change is the result of changing beliefs (Richards et al., 2001). It is true that more research needs to be done because what pre-service teachers say and what actually happens in the classroom have not been observed. However, this awareness about their own beliefs may lead to change since it involves trying to do things differently (Freeman, in Richards et al., 2001).

The results highlight the pre-service teachers' concern for becoming good teachers of English as they expressed a deep comprehension of the teaching-learning process. The longitudinal study suggests that they gradually became aware of the complexities involved in teaching and were "more aware of the elements involved in the process of learning" as one of the students said. They all agreed that the process of second language acquisition is complex, takes time and requires a lot of effort to be completed successfully. They also agreed that the teaching preparation received in the program gave them the tools and theoretical basis to understand and be aware of their own teaching and learning beliefs.

It is important to add that one of the limitations of the research is that it started at the beginning of the fourth semester and thus, the question arises as to whether the beliefs of the pre-service teachers were

the same as when entering the program. Another limitation can be that the study is self-reported, thus a new study is being conducted which includes classroom observation. In spite of the limitations found, this study was successful in identifying the pre-service teachers' beliefs, which is a first step in the process of learning to teach as Wideen et al. (1998) declare. Moreover, the research was able to track these beliefs and to recognize how they influence the teaching practice views.

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Appendix A: Language Learning and Teaching Questionnaire

Name _____ Semester _____ Date _____

Are you currently working as a teacher? _____ If yes, which level(s) _____

Have you had any prior teaching experience? _____ For how long? _____

Levels taught _____

Read the following statements about language learning. For each statement indicate if you agree or disagree with the statement.

1=strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=neutral; 4=disagree; 5=strongly disagree

Statements about language learning	1	2	3	4	5
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.					
2. EFL students generally need to understand the grammatical rules of English in order to become fluent in the language.					
3. Language can be thought of as a set of grammatical structures which are learned consciously and controlled by the learner.					
4. Students only learn what teachers teach them in class.					
5. It is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation.					
6. It is necessary to know the foreign language culture in order to speak the foreign language.					
7. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.					
8. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.					
9. Language is learned subconsciously in non-academic situations.					
10. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.					
11. English should be taught only through the use of English.					
12. EFL students learn better if teachers implement cooperative learning.					
13. If EFL students understand some of the basic grammatical rules of the language, they can usually create lots of new sentences on their own.					
14. Methodologies play an important role in second language learning.					
15. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.					
16. Usually it is more important for EFL students to focus on what they are trying to say and not how to say it.					
17. English is better learned when teachers implement different activities for different learning styles.					
18. When EFL students make oral errors, it is best to ignore them as long as you can understand what they are trying to say.					
19. It is better to learn English through content rather than language courses.					
20. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.					

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How is English learned?
2. How should English be taught?
3. How did you learn English?
4. How were you taught?
5. Has your perspective about how English is learned changed? How? Why?
6. Has your perspective about how English is taught changed? How? Why?