Periñán-Morales, Abel Andrés; Viáfara-González, John Jairo; Arcila-Valencia, José Alexander
Triggering Factors that Reinforce or Change EFL Preservice Teachers' Beliefs during the Practicum

Triggering Factors that Reinforce or Change EFL Preservice Teachers' Beliefs During the Practicum

Factores que refuerzan o cambian creencias en futuros maestros practicantes de inglés

Abel Andrés Periñán-Morales
Institución Educativa Juan Bautista la Salle, Florencia, Colombia

John Jairo Viáfara-González
Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, Tunja, Colombia

José Alexander Arcila-Valencia
Institución Educativa Sagrados Corazones, Florencia, Colombia

This exploratory case study seeks to examine the role that specific factors exert on the evolution of beliefs in preservice English teachers during their final teaching practicum. Data were collected through reflections, interviews, focus groups, and observations. The findings revealed that three groups of factors affect belief evolution during the practicum: participant subjectivity, contextual circumstances, and university support community. Subjectivities encompassed preservice teachers' fears, reactions to real-life teaching challenges, and enthusiasm to become teachers. Contextual circumstances incorporated classroom circumstances and cooperating teachers. The university support community concerned their peers and the university tutor. Implications discuss the relevance of curricular and reflective agendas that enrich the education of future teachers through beliefs exploration.

Keywords: English teaching, preservice teachers, teachers' beliefs, teaching practicum

Este estudio exploratorio examina el papel de factores específicos en la evolución de las creencias de futuros maestros de inglés sobre su práctica pedagógica. Los datos se recolectaron mediante observaciones, entrevistas, grupos focales y reflexiones. Los hallazgos develaron tres grupos de factores que afectaron la evolución de las creencias: la subjetividad involucró el temor de los estudiantes para desarrollar su práctica, reacciones a los retos y entusiasmo por convertirse en profesores. Los aspectos contextuales implicaron las circunstancias en las aulas y relaciones con profesores titulares. La comunidad de apoyo en la universidad incluyó a compañeros y tutor. Las implicaciones discuten la relevancia de agendas curriculares, reflexivas y colaborativas que enriquezcan la educación de futuros maestros a partir de la exploración de sus creencias en la práctica pedagógica.

Palabras clave: creencias de maestros, docentes en formación, enseñanza de inglés, práctica docente

Abel Andrés Periñán-Morales ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9434-9849 · Email: aperinan@juaanblasalle.edu.co
John Jairo Viáfara-González ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8409-6016 · Email: john.viafara@uptc.edu.co
José Alexander Arcila-Valencia ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8473-599X · Email: jarcila@udla.edu.co

Introduction

This study examined what factors, if any, tended to shape the beliefs five English preservice teachers (hereafter PST) exhibited while engaging in their final teaching practicum (hereafter TP) and how those factors influenced those conceptions. The study took place during the participants' second TP at public schools in southern Colombia.

There is disagreement in English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL) and other education areas regarding the effect of TP experiences on PSTs' beliefs, with contending findings being yielded. Various studies have determined that practicum experiences cause little or no transformation in prospective teachers'[1] beliefs (e.g., Çapan, 2014; Mattheoudakis, 2007). However, the results of other research in the area indicates that TP does, in fact, influence PSTs' pedagogical conceptions (Barahona, 2014; Debreli, 2016a; Durán-Narváez et al., 2017; Özmen, 2012; Sheridan, 2016; Suárez-Flórez & Basto-Basto, 2017). Indeed, the amount of research with findings that indicate TP experiences have an impact upon PSTs' beliefs is progressively increasing. Some of these studies have also indicated that the nature of teacher education programs (hereafter TEP) may affect the initial beliefs and resultant evolution of PSTs' beliefs during the practical phase of their education (Debreli, 2016b; Mattheoudakis, 2007). As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising that TEPs are giving increasing importance to the consideration of teacher candidates' pedagogical beliefs. Thus, whilst there may be competing results in the literature, there is a forming consensus that the TP is an ideal scenario within which prospective teachers' beliefs may be explored. This would allow for a substantial amount of information to be collected which can contribute to the improvement of pedagogical dynamics in TEPs.

There is recognition among scholars about the need for further studies in the field that are focused on PSTs' beliefs in a variety of different contexts, cultures, and countries (Biesta et al., 2015; Özmen, 2012). The multiple contextual variables that affect the evolution of teachers' beliefs may mean that TEPs' curricular plans, which are based upon the findings from local research. could be more effective. As such, it is noteworthy that despite the history of continuous governmental foreign language education reforms in Colombia in the last few decades, coupled with the diversity of the regions and the sociocultural particularities of individuals, there are just a handful of published studies that have tackled the issue of changes in the pedagogical conceptions of PSTs (Durán-Narváez et al., 2013, 2017; Gutiérrez, 2015; Suárez-Flórez & Basto-Basto, 2017).

Similar to international studies, where local studies have been carried out, national scholars have concentrated on identifying the beliefs that participants hold before and after their practicum experience (Aguirre-Sánchez, 2014; Suárez-Flórez & Basto-Basto, 2017), describing specific belief transformation (Durán-Narváez et al., 2013; Suárez-Flórez & Basto-Basto, 2017), delving into the connection between pedagogical approaches or reflective strategies and their pedagogical convictions (Castellanos-Jaimes, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2015), and understanding how stated beliefs were not coherent with pedagogical actions (Fajardo, 2013). Given this, we believe that there is a gap in the literature concerning the factors that drive the transformation of beliefs in PSTs and consider the issue to be worthy of further examination. Due to the complexity and breadth of circumstances and elements that shape PSTs' beliefs, studies often fail to explore the nuanced nature of these factors, which, in addition, are context-bound.

Literature Review

The Nature and Power of Beliefs in Preservice Teachers' Pedagogical Practice

Teacher cognition incorporates the body of research related to what teachers know, think, and

---

1 The terms prospective teachers, preservice teachers, and future teachers will be used interchangeably in this article.

believe and how these are related to what they do in practice (S. Borg, 2003). Within this field and under the umbrella term of "teacher cognition," we have seen an extensive body of literature emerge in the area of teachers' beliefs. Beliefs are intrinsically woven with other cognitive dimensions such as knowledge, perceptions, and decisions; thus, it can be hard to distinguish between these dimensions. Pajares's (1992) long list of terms associated with beliefs: "attitudes, values, judgments . . . opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions . . . personal theories" (p. 309) connotes how tricky it can be to identify the difference between beliefs and these other mental categories. M. Borg's (2001) definition of beliefs seems to capture the essence of the concept and may aid us with the challenge of differentiating beliefs from other cognitive dimensions: "Proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, that is evaluative because it is accepted as true by the individual, it has emotive commitment, it guides thought and behavior" (p. 186). As a working definition for this study, this concept embraces a holistic view of beliefs as it intersects epistemological, cognitive, and affective perspectives of teachers' thinking as they become involved in the sociocultural aspects of their jobs.

The powerful influence of beliefs on teachers' thinking and actions makes them resistant to change and persistent in the minds of teachers, despite the efforts of TEPs to change them (Richardson, 2003). Scholars have described various elements that explain the tenacity of beliefs. Kumaravadivelu (2012) and Pajares (1992) argue that these convictions are strong because oftentimes they form early in teachers' careers and their composition can integrate the ideological, cultural, and societal conceptions that educators have embraced throughout their lives. In addition, beliefs usually group together into systems or clusters which engage a vast array of episodic material and maintain internal coherence by supporting each other (Abelson, 1979; Green, 1971). Finally, Barcelos and Ruohotie-Lyhty (2018) claim that the emotional and affective atmosphere that envelopes the teaching exercise can reinforce educators' beliefs, which explains why these convictions might be more useful than theory for teachers when they face challenges at work (Nespor, 1987).

Research on Factors Influencing Prospective Teachers' Belief Change

The practicum experience may serve as an opportunity for PSTs to begin to understand the complexity of teaching and it may also challenge both their preconceptions and the beliefs they have developed in their TEP. Zeichner (1996) posits that "many of the ideas that student teachers bring to the practicum . . . are problematic (Calderhead & Robson, 1991), and unless re-examined, will interfere with teachers learning things during the practicum that will contribute to the accomplishment of the central purposes of schooling" (p. 124). Thus, the practicum experience may reveal valuable information for both PSTs and TEPs as they gauge the success of their pedagogical objectives. In addition, the practicum experience affords TEPs the opportunity to evaluate not only PSTs' performance and the role of TEPs in teacher education processes, but also future teachers' beliefs (Özmen, 2012; Zheng, 2009).

The evolution of PSTs' beliefs during their practicum has been examined in the literature on both a national and international level. Few articles have concluded that the practical experience in TEPs results in little to no change in PSTs' beliefs (Çapan, 2014; Gutiérrez, 2015; Mattheoudakis, 2007). The first two researchers suggest that the key factors for this lack of evolution in PSTs' beliefs can be related to the rigid mandatory curricula in teaching practicum institutions. This lack of flexibility may have discouraged participants from exploring a variety of different options and generating new ideas. Moreover, Çapan

(2014) conjectures that the alignment between psts' well-rooted belief systems and their tutors' beliefs may also explain the inflexibility of psts' personal pedagogical conceptions. Mattheoudakis (2007) also concluded that "stability in [participants'] beliefs might not indicate lack of change but a teachers' attempts to balance beliefs and reality" (p. 1282).

In contrast to these studies, additional research has established that teaching experiences do indeed influence psts' beliefs (Barahona, 2014; Debreli, 2016a; Durán-Narváez et al., 2017; Özmen, 2012; Sheridan, 2016; Suárez-Flórez, & Basto-Basto, 2017). As a result, the achievements and failures of prospective teachers during their TP lead them to adapt, reinforce, and transform their beliefs (Debreli, 2016a; Sheridan, 2016).

Yet more research has investigated the underlying factors that may trigger changes in psts' beliefs. Firstly, the evolution of psts' beliefs may be triggered by the challenges of real teaching circumstances (Barahona, 2014; Debreli, 2016a; Durán-Narváez et al., 2017; Sheridan, 2016), especially when the beliefs that psts hold upon starting their practicum are based on theory (Cota-Grijalva & Ruiz-Esparza-Barajas, 2013; Debreli, 2016a; Durán-Narváez et al., 2017). Secondly, the lack of teaching experience that psts possess may cause the specific viewpoints they adopt as a result of their university education to have an increased impact on their beliefs (Gutiérrez, 2015). Thirdly, the learning process and attitudes of their students can influence the beliefs of psts when their students exhibit learning limitations or misbehavior (Debreli, 2016a) and when students react positively to innovative teaching (Gutiérrez, 2015). Fourthly, the type of TEP is identified as a factor in the evolution of psts' beliefs, particularly in cases where reflective approaches are employed (Debreli, 2016b; Durán-Narváez et al., 2017; Gutiérrez, 2015). Reflection helps psts to "make sense of their teaching experience and build up their own style of teaching

a foreign language" (Özmen, 2012, p. 10) and to gain awareness of their own conceptions (Cota-Grijalva & Ruiz-Esparza-Barajas, 2013). Finally, the interaction that psts have with their learning support network may also affect the evolution of their beliefs. Durán-Narváez et al. (2017) determined that the teaching style, strategies, and character of psts' cooperating teachers (CTs) may influence their beliefs. Moreover, Özmen (2012) highlights the importance of teacher educators' humanism, encouragement, and the nature of their feedback as influences in how psts' beliefs are shaped.

Research Design

This qualitative study was conceived as an exploratory case study (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative studies make use of natural environments to understand the way people make sense of their actions (Hatch, 2002). This case study explored the experiences lived by five psts during their second practicum course and intended to discover how those experiences impacted their beliefs about teaching.

Participants and Setting

The participants were four women and one man, all in their twenties and in their 8th semester of the program where this study took place. They were taking a secondary education practicum course, after having already participated in the first elementary education practicum course. They were placed in four different mixed-sex, urban, public educational institutions, located in Florencia (southern Colombia). These institutions had an average of 800 secondary school teenage students from diverse religions, ethnic groups, and social classes, predominantly from low-income families. Purposive sampling (Kumar, 2011) was employed to select participants who also signed a consent form to be part of the study. Details regarding participants' profiles and their school contexts can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Personal Information

Participant	Age	Grade teaching	# of students in classroom	School population
#1	22	9th	32	Approx. 1,450 primary and secondary school students from low- and middle-income families
#2	25	9th	33	Same as Participant 1
#3	22	7th	38	Approx. 1,530 primary and secondary school students from low- and middle-income families
#4	24	8th	35	Approx. 1,400 primary and secondary school students from low-income families
#5	22	9th	34	Approx. 1,200 primary and secondary school students from low-income families

Data Collection Instruments

Two personal, semi-structured, one-hour interviews were conducted at the beginning and middle of the practicum with each participant. Open-ended questions were employed to identify psts' teaching beliefs and their evolution in the tp. Upon completion of the tp, four psts participated in a one-hour focus group in order to explore their beliefs, belief changes, and the reason behind leading to belief evolution. Travel issues prevented the participation of the final participant in the focus group. All interviews and the focus group were conducted by two researchers and were both audio and video recorded for reliability purposes and to allow for body language analysis and transcription.

Classroom observations were conducted to identify whether the actions that participants took in practice were in accordance with the beliefs they expressed. They consisted of two one-hour lessons per participant, one at the beginning and one at the end of the tp. Participants were directly observed and video recorded by a researcher, who also took field notes.

Class reflections and teaching reports were utilized as a fourth data source, with psts reflecting upon each lesson and completing a final question-guided reflection report. This report explored the particularities of their teaching contexts, the stakeholders involved, the challenges their teaching experience brought, and how their preparation and counselling contributed towards facing those challenges and developing professionally as teachers. These documents allowed us to triangulate our data and contrast, confirm, and analyze the observation and interview data. This helped to shed light onto participants' beliefs and their evolution during the tp.

Data Analysis and Findings

Our data analysis used a grounded theory approach (Creswell, 2012). Data were analyzed through the codification of relevant information aided by the software Atlas Ti. Extensive examination and refining of codes allowed categories and subcategories to emerge from the data. These categories facilitated our comprehension of the factors that contributed towards the ratification and evolution of psts' beliefs during their tp.

The validity of our findings was ensured through investigator triangulation (Merriam, 2009) to support the veracity of our claims and methodological triangulation (Creswell, 2012) to corroborate evidence through different types of data. As a result, the codification of commonalities among different participants' statements found in the data helped establish the three categories we shall discuss below. Findings will be illustrated with excerpts from observation, interviews, and focus groups.

Participants' Embodied Subjectivities Acting Upon Their Beliefs

The first factor that was identified as an influence on PSTs' beliefs was participants' subjectivities. The subjectivity of a person regards the unique personal characteristics that allow an individual to make sense of reality in their own particular way, informing their judgements and decision making. Thus, the same event can be experienced in different ways as the individual attitudes, dispositions, and other psychological traits influence each individual's interaction with reality. Teachers experience this subjectivity as a result of their "family patterns, educational histories, personal character traits, national and regional affiliations, social class background, and a lifetime of social encounters" (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 36). Consequently, PSTs begin their TP with subjectivities that have been constructed throughout their life, mediated by feelings, emotions, memories, and desires that are immersed in social interactions (Kramsch, 2012). These experiences include high school and college education (Lortie, 1975) and life events such as motherhood, as is the case for one of the participants.

The first subjectivity trait that emerged from the data was participants' desire to become a teacher. Despite all participating in a TEP, by the onset of the TP, two of the participants expressed their intention not to work as a teacher upon graduation.

> I used to tell my mother: "I will graduate, and I will join the police," because I've always liked what has to do with the army and all that. But my aunt Mary told me, "María, you cannot do that. You already have a child and you will not be accepted. You have to focus on your degree" ...and I said, "No! I do not like that." (P1, Int. 1, August 2018)[2]

The second subjectivity trait to emerge concerned fear of the TP itself. One of the participants manifested a negative perception regarding the experience of teaching that had stemmed from interactions with previous student-teachers.

> There are many myths about the practicum: that it is very hard, that the university teaching advisor will not help you with anything, that you cannot use the whiteboard, that teachers will leave you on your own...I used to say one of my most terrible fears was how I could put together a lesson, I mean, the rules to put together my lesson, the topics I have to cover, the subjects I have to teach, to contextualize. Preparing a lesson was a terrible fear for me. (P2, Int. 1, August 2018)

Finally, participants' attitudes towards the challenges of their specific teaching contexts and the collaborative work with their university teacher advisors (UTA) and CTs emerged as a subjectivity trait.

> I consider myself to be well prepared. Obviously, there are going to be hard days, and there are going to be students that, honestly, make you wonder what's wrong with them, but that is not difficult, and you have to read because more students and large courses will come, and sometimes you might crash. (P2, Int. 1, August 2018)

Each of the participating PSTs arrived with their own particular set of subjectivities that would collide with the teaching reality they faced in their specific school. We acknowledge that other factors may have affected them, however, we postulate that their subjectivity had a significant influence on the development of certain beliefs. To exemplify this, we shall consider the case of P5. Prior to the TP, P5 expressed the belief that classroom management is more difficult for short teachers. She worried that students in public schools were hard to deal with and that being short was a weakness.

> Those are bad schools, where there are children who know more about life than you, who know about vices, like marijuana, who know about everything. I knew that

---

2   Excerpts from the participants' interviews and documents presented in this paper were translated into English by the researchers, trying to keep the most accurate representation of the participants' meanings. Participants will be identified as P1, P2, and so on, as they appear in their personal information chart.

Int. = Interview, Obn. = Observation notes, FG = focus group.

there was going to be a time when I would have a large class, and it would be hard for me because I am very short and those children are very tall. (P5, Int. 1, August 2018)

Macías and Sánchez (2015) indicate that classroom management is a constant challenge for PSTs in their initial lessons, whilst PST classroom management beliefs focus on student behavior (Wolff et al., 2015, as cited in Kwok, 2020). Through the practical experience the TP provided, we evidenced a change in P5's classroom management beliefs.

> I can be very short but they cannot mess with my class, or, well, unless you let them do it...you change your mind. There are thugs, in all schools there are thugs; You always have to be good with them, but also put on your big girl pants and be strong. (P5, Int. 2, October 2018)

Later in the interview, when asked about her drive to change, she made reference to herself. She reasoned:

> One becomes fearful due to previous PSTs. Being short, I ask myself, and "what if they don't have the respect I want?" But you face that and everything [previous PSTs] say is a lie. You just have to face that and know the context in which they are and that's it, adapt to that context. (P5, Int. 2, October 2018)

The second observation allowed us to observe the evolution of P5's beliefs in practice as her classroom management resulted in the emergence of a stricter and demanding teaching behavior. One of the field notes reads:

> During the class, the students show misbehavior. Therefore, the teacher raises her voice and tries to get the attention of a group of students who are in the back of the room. The teacher says again, "pay attention." She raises her voice and students seem to calm down...The teacher is constantly monitoring the students. Finally, the teacher gets angry and tells them that if they don't keep quiet, she will register their names in the misbehavior book. After this warning, the room remains silent, working on the activity. (Obn., October 2018)

P5's initial fear about how to handle student misbehavior was a strong influence on her beliefs, however, after several months of practical experience in the TP, she seemed to embrace new beliefs and actions, allowing her personal self-determination to guide her classroom management.

The results shown in this section align with those in Kalaja et al. (2015). The findings discussed above are closely related to these authors' discussion about how the individual processes of interaction between novice teachers and the context, as well as the challenges of their first teaching experiences, facilitate the modification or continuance of their beliefs surrounding what constitutes good and innovative teaching. Similarly, these findings connect with Barcelos and Ruohotie-Lyhty's (2018) as the connection between emotions, affect, and beliefs have a strong influence on how these relate to PSTs' cognition and can be subject to change or not. Therefore, the influence exerted by PSTs' subjectivity can become a determinant factor in the development of certain beliefs.

The Potential of the Practicum Context to Affect Beliefs

The second factor to come out of the data that demonstrate that the TP exerts an effect on PSTs' beliefs relates to the multiple intertwined features of the teaching context. Two types of contextual factors arose: physical and human. Physical contextual factors concerned the facilities, resources, commodities, and environmental conditions. Human contextual factors referred to the relationships PSTs established with people within the context of the practicum, for instance, CTs and students.

Classroom observation provided us with the primary data necessary to appreciate the context that each PST faced in their TP, along with its nuances. One such observation note reads:

> The room has three fans, but it's small and hot. There are some posters on the wall. There is a video projector and speakers . . . students work in a photocopy activity among the noise of students speaking, misbehavior,

bullying, and heat. . . . The PST ignores some of the noise and students' behaviors in the classroom. Some students' lack of attention persists, and some throw objects at classmates. (Obn., October 2018)

The physical features of a classroom merge with the heterogeneous nature of its students in every lesson and create a scenario which demands teacher action. In this study, classroom events caused PSTs to confront and, indeed, challenge their own teaching perceptions. This was the case with lesson planning. Within their TEP, participants received methodology courses and a teaching seminar prior to the initiation of the TP, which resulted in some PSTs' fixed conceptions about how a lesson should be planned and developed.

> Even before I knew there were teaching practices, I already knew how to design a lesson plan, which should have a start, a middle, and an end...In the previous courses we studied the pre, while, and post...It was when the teacher [his UTA] said, "next week you have to send me your first lesson plan. Plan the pre, the while, and the post." (P4, Int. 1, August 2018)

The number of variables that may affect a lesson means that the lived reality of teaching EFL in Colombian public schools is complex in nature. As Sánchez-Solarte and Obando-Guerrero (2008) describe, the number of students, language instruction time, and mix of students' ages and language proficiency result in a challenging EFL teaching environment. Moreover, John (2006) affirms that lesson planning models do not consider the contingencies of teaching, nor the uncertainties of the lesson such as "time-pressures, organization issues, attitudes, moods, emotions and serendipity" (p. 487). P4 experienced a variety of the natural circumstances that can arise inside the classroom during the development of his TP. These circumstances caused him to challenge his beliefs concerning lesson plans and created conflict in his practice as these evolving beliefs clashed with the requirements of his UTA to plan each class and fully develop this plan.

I think the lesson plan is important because it helps you better structure the class and everything, but it should not become like a regime that you have to reach the "post" in all classes, because the class varies a lot, the pace of the class and the students, and many times you only have time to get to the "while"... one has to carry out a plan B and change many ideas, and turn the class around because the boat is sinking. I cannot let myself sink for the sake of the lesson plan. (P4, FG, February 2019)

The above excerpt demonstrates how the participant's lesson planning beliefs evolved as a result of classroom particularities. This developing comprehension of lesson planning concurs with John's (2006) argument that lesson planning is affected by endogenous and exogenous forces, where both contextual and personal teaching factors, such as spontaneity and improvisation, converge in the course of the development of the lesson.

Having explored some of the physical factors that affect beliefs, our discussion shall now turn to the human factors. The beliefs of PSTs were affected by the relationship they had with their CTs, which was also closely linked to the teaching context and resulted in significant experiences. CTs, as PSTs and students, possess their own individual qualities and beliefs, which underlie their decisions and actions. Thus, the various aspects of teaching, and indeed education itself, can be perceived by CTs in different ways. Their level of participation in the PSTs' preparation process can vary depending on their conception of cooperation (Clarke et al., 2014) and this generates an "uneven quality of practicum supervision or mentoring" (Zeichner, 1996, p. 132). As a result, CTs provided differing levels of support to PSTs, with some CTs controlling all aspects of the teaching process, such as evaluation and grading, whilst others would delegate control of these elements to PSTs.

Along with CT beliefs and actions, the relationships PSTs established with their CTs were varied. Some of these relationships were based on respect and cooperation, whilst others reflected distrust and miscommunication.

P2 experienced difficulties regarding contradiction and underestimation from her CT. One observation note read:

> The PST set a time to complete the activity. The students were working well, but the PST noted time was running out, so she began rushing the students to finish the activity to start concluding the lesson. At that moment, the cooperating teacher interrupted the PST and said out loud, "can you wait for the students to finish that activity first?" (P2, Obn. 2, October 2018)

When questioned about the event during an interview, P2 stated:

> The attitude of the CT can benefit or affect both the development of the practices and the disposition of the students before the PST. In my particular case, my CT initially saw me as an assistant and not as the teacher in charge. On many occasions she disavowed me in front of my students and underestimated my methods. (P2, Int. 2, October 2018)

This negative experience is balanced by the case of P3, who experienced a more positive learning environment, looking up to her CT:

> The teacher has a lot of experience, a lot, in everything about teaching; and I probably adapted to her. She already had many forms of teaching that were more advanced... She gave me suggestions, and she lent me a book. She taught me how to do it and we worked together...we both planned. (Int. 2, October 2018)

The CT's perception of her, coupled with the cooperative relationship they established was a significant factor in the construction and reinforcement of her beliefs. In this case, this manifested itself regarding the use of worksheets. In her first and second interview she revealed that she believed worksheets to be useful teaching materials. First, she said, "I always search the Internet...you find a lot of material, worksheets, but you adapt them…I work my own adapted worksheets" (P3, Int. 1, August 2018). Later, when describing one of her lessons, she added, "I had a worksheet and in it there were many places they had to look for. After, we reviewed their answers; some were wrong, others were not" (P3, Int. 2, October 2018). The admiration and respect that P3 had for her CT meant that the validation of her work by this mentor seemed to strengthen the collaborative relationship between the two of them and help to reinforce her belief in the use of worksheets. In the final group interview she commented:

> The material that I prepared helped me a lot, because she [referring to her CT] implemented it with almost all the sixth grades. . . . I sent her everything I did. If I made slides, if I played a song, a video, she implemented all that with Sixth A and Sixth C. This means that during the whole practicum she worked with almost all my worksheets for the sixth grades. (P3, FG, February 2019)

The positive regard in which P3 held her CT, coupled with the implicit validation of her work that stemmed from its continued usage by the CT, resulted in a positive reinforcement in P3's belief about the use of worksheets as classroom material. Therefore, a positive or a negative relationship between PSTs and CTs can affect the PSTs' teaching conceptions.

We have thus established the influence of contextual particularities on PSTs' beliefs, predominantly in relation to lesson planning and development, and the use of teaching material. These findings align with those of Barahona (2014), Debreli, (2016a) and Durán-Narváez et al. (2017) in regard to the transformative potential that the real circumstances of teaching have on prospective teachers' beliefs. They also align with the notion that PSTs' beliefs can evolve as a result of the interactions with people who support their learning (Sheridan, 2016; Yuan & Lee, 2014).

Advisor's and Peers' Encouragement Influence PSTs' Beliefs

Though the prior section discussed the role of the CT as part of the practicum school context, the following lines delve into the impact the UTA and participants'

peers exerted, as a university learning community, on the psts' beliefs. The uta provided mentoring which afforded the psts the emotional support they needed to transform their beliefs reflecting uncertainty and doubt about teaching into empowering personal pedagogical conceptions. As well as contributing towards participants' consolidation of their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the uta also cultivated an enriching bond with the psts.

Based on a reflective standpoint (Farrell, 2017; Yalcin-Arslan, 2019), the uta continually guided the psts through the teaching planning and implementation process. Weekly encounters on the university campus provided spaces where encouragement and group reflection could take place and raise awareness of the methodological decisions made before, during, and after the classes oriented by psts. The uta served as the initial guiding voice in group discussions, providing tips and recommendations and fostering a family-like environment, allowing the psts to feel secure and motivated. Learning was scaffolded through the employment of a variety of reflective activities that potentiated participation and analytical skills as psts assessed their own and their peers' claims.

> He [the uta] made an overall reflection about everybody's performance, and sometimes María [another pst] would intervene to talk, and she would share her experiences. Then, he was always like, "Come one guys! Let's continue, you can do it! You are good!" I mean, things that encourage us to carry on. Then, another partner talked. There was always a reflection at the end. (p5, Int. 2, October 2018)

The uta's approach to guiding the psts' education had a profound impact on producing a change in p1's initial beliefs concerning her previously expressed disregard for the teaching profession, allowing her to believe in her ability to become a teacher.

> Teachers are more than guides, they become mentors... Therefore, seeing that a teacher can achieve that, I realized "well, I can do it too." Having that teacher who is there giving you feedback, who really cares and takes time for

you to be a good teacher is very important. So, listening to the uta, and his interest and willingness to look for activities motivated me to continue researching to do a good job. (p1, fg, February 2019)

Thus, the work of the university advisor guided the transformation of the beliefs of the teacher candidate. p1 emphasized the role of her uta as a provider of socioemotional support, resources, and assistance. This finding concurs with conclusions in other studies that highlight the impact utas can have on psts' personal beliefs when employing reflective approaches (Debreli, 2016b; Gutiérrez, 2015; Durán-Narváez et al., 2017). In general, the quality of teps, the humanistic and encouraging approaches of mentors, and the nature of feedback may be influential factors on the evolution of psts' beliefs (Özmen, 2012; Sheridan, 2016).

Peers also provided a valuable source of support for psts in their weekly encounters. Cooperation and collaboration within the group fostered a comfortable and trustworthy environment. This, in turn, encouraged the development of new attitudes and behaviors towards the tp in general by participants. Several psts' beliefs about the challenges of classroom management and lesson planning appeared to be favorably modified through interaction with their peers.

> It helped a lot in my case, for example, I was very scared because I was going to face a large class...and some children were already adults...So, when I had to face that challenge, I listened to what happened to my peers in their reflections, and took some ideas from the group. It was very helpful since their experiences enriched me...I think the meetings and your guidance [referring to her uta] were great and contributed to our tp...we got the strength to continue...especially because I did not want to be a teacher. (p5, Int. 2, October 2018)

This can be further exemplified by the case of p2, who stated in her first interview: "One of my most terrible fears was my not being able to put together a plan, how

to put together a class, I mean, what laws or procedures are there for me to put together my class?" (P2, Int. 1, August 2018). The evolution of her lesson planning beliefs as a result of peer discussion and UTA mentoring was then evidenced in her final interview, as she affirmed:

> For me, the academic meetings were very good…even if I had time in my house, I waited for them to be held, to sit down with my partners and listen to our advisor's suggestions to put together my lesson plan. Obviously, I brought my draft, but in the end I thought, "I prefer to put it together there because I know it will look good, because it will be something concise where my peers or the UTA can contribute with their ideas or I can contribute with my ideas to another peer's plan." Therefore, I think the idea I had regarding how to teach changed a lot. (P2, FG, February 2019)

Therefore, we postulate that participants' pedagogical conceptions can be favorably altered through peer collaboration during weekly encounters. The participants were able to enhance their professional preparation as interaction with their peers contributed towards the confrontation and transformation of unfounded beliefs. In addition, they became more accountable and committed to both their own and their peers' education, echoing Anderson et al. (2005) and Vacilotto and Cummings (2007). Thus, PSTs evidenced feelings of increased relaxation, comfort, and confidence when they shared their emotional dimension, becoming more aware of the transforming value that seeking peer support entailed.

Conclusions and Implications

The aim of this study was to examine what factors, if any, tended to shape the beliefs that English PSTs exhibited while engaging in their final TP and how those factors exerted an influence on those conceptions. This section summarizes the evidence-based interpretation of findings previously discussed and foregrounds recommendations for practice and further research. The first of three groups of factors we detected related

to PSTs' subjectivity. This encompassed their personal characteristics, which are rooted in the sociocultural traits and personal history they have experienced in their lives, causing each to have unique reactions to different situations. These subjectivities were most evident as participants' beliefs evolved according to their varying aspirations to become teachers, their peer-instigated fear of the TP, and how they responded to the teaching challenges they encountered. This finding agrees with Barcelos and Ruohotie-Lyhty's (2018) considerations that connect emotions and beliefs.

The second group of factors that shape PSTs' beliefs are the interrelated contextual circumstances found in the schools of the TP. This finding coincides with studies conducted by Barahona (2014), Debreli (2016a), and Durán-Narváez et al. (2017) and suggests that these contextual circumstances may favor the alteration or reinforcement of beliefs. These factors incorporated both physical resources and conditions as well as the interactions participants had with members of the school communities. Specifically, our findings uncovered how real classroom circumstances may challenge beliefs developed in university; furthermore, CTs' assessment of PSTs' pedagogical work could shape participants' conceptions.

The third group of factors concerns the mediation and interactions of UTAs and fellow PSTs. A collaborative environment grounded in reflective dialogue seemed to be the precursor of participants' transition from uncertainty to confidence in their understandings, having consolidated or confronted their beliefs. PSTs developed this confidence in areas encompassing classroom management, lesson planning, significance, and motivation to become teachers. The role of reflection and practicum advisors was also highlighted in studies conducted by Debreli (2016b), Durán-Narváez et al. (2017), Gutiérrez (2015), and Özmen (2012).

As scholars have insisted for many years, our findings demonstrate the need to strengthen the initial curricular structure and pedagogical plans of TEPs. Prospective teachers require specialized guidance to help them

inquire into their beliefs during the practicum (Yuan & Lee, 2014; Zheng, 2015). A focus on PSTs' beliefs may allow TEPs to foster awareness; facilitating PSTs' realization of the benefits and inconveniences their personal notions may have in their teaching practices, and allowing unfavorable beliefs to begin to be transformed.

Reflective approaches consistently emerge from this study and others (Debreli, 2016b; Prilop et al., 2019; Shooshtari et al., 2017), along with critical perspectives to teacher education, as suitable options with which to approach the subjective and deeply rooted nature of beliefs. The decontextualized information studied in university is often integrated as a fundamental component of PSTs' beliefs. Orienting prospective teachers with regard to their understanding of how and why their personal conceptions are the product of university instruction, and thus may be lacking context-sensitivity, may mitigate any potential dismay PSTs' face when reality forces them to confront such beliefs. This may also empower them to shape their personal teaching beliefs according to the relevance and needs of their particular teaching contexts.

A limitation of this inquiry is the small number of PSTs in just one TP. Although a reduced number of participants does facilitate a deeper exploration of their teaching beliefs, a wider sample size, including more range and diversity of both participants and universities, could provide valuable data. Similarly, as this study focused on a single academic term, further longitudinal studies are needed in order to monitor belief evolution over a more prolonged period. Further research could explore the evolution of participants' beliefs in both university's stipulated practicums: elementary and secondary.

References

Abelson, R. P. (1979). Differences between belief and knowledge systems. *Cognitive Science*, *3*(4), 355–366. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog0304_4

Aguirre-Sánchez, I. (2014). Exploring pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about their roles in an elementary school classroom in regard to pedagogical and emotional aspects of students. *HOW*, *21*(1), 26–41. https://doi.org/10.19183/how.21.1.13

Anderson, N. A., Barksdale, M. A., & Hite, C. E. (2005). Preservice teachers' observations of cooperating teachers and peers while participating in an early field experience. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *32*(4), 97–117. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23478748

Barahona, M. (2014). Pre-service teachers' beliefs in the activity of learning to teach English in the Chilean context. *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, *10*(2), 116–122.

Barcelos, A. M. F., & Ruohotie-Lyhty, M. (2018). Teachers' emotions and beliefs in second language teaching: Implications for teacher education. In J. Martínez (Ed.), *Emotions in second language teaching* (pp. 109–124). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75438-3_7

Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), 624–640. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325

Borg, M. (2001). Teachers' beliefs. *ELT Journal*, *55*(2), 186–188. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/55.2.186

Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, *36*(2), 81–109. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444803001903

Calderhead, J., & Robson, M. (1991). Images of teaching: Student teachers' early conceptions of classroom practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *7*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X(91)90053-R

Çapan, S. A. (2014). Pre-service English as a foreign language teachers' belief development about grammar instruction. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *39*(12), 132–152. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n12.9

Castellanos-Jaimes, J. (2013). The role of English pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching in teacher education programs. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, *15*(1), 195–206. https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/37878

Clarke, A., Triggs, V., & Nielsen, W. (2014). Cooperating teacher participation in teacher education: A review

of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, *84*(2), 163–202. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313499618

Cota-Grijalva, S. D., & Ruiz-Esparza-Barajas, E. (2013). Pre-service teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning: A longitudinal study. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, *15*(1), 81–95. https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/37866

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Danielewicz, J. (2001). *Teaching selves: Identity, pedagogy and teacher education*. State University New York Press.

Debreli, E. (2016a). Pre-service teachers' belief change and practical knowledge development during the course of practicum. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, *4*(7), 37–46. https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v4i7.1513

Debreli, E. (2016b). Pre-service teachers' belief sources about learning and teaching: An exploration with the consideration of the educational programme Nature. *Higher Education Studies*, *6*(1), 116–127. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v6n1p116

Durán-Narváez, N. C., Lastra-Ramírez, S. P., & Morales-Vasco, A. M. (2013). Autobiographies: A way to explore student-teachers' beliefs in a teacher education program. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, *15*(2), 35–47. https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/36319

Durán-Narváez, N. C., Lastra-Ramírez, S. P., & Morales-Vasco, A. M. (2017). Beliefs of pre-service teachers about English language teaching: Reflection and practice. *Folios*, *45*(1), 177–193. https://doi.org/10.17227/01234870.45folios177.193

Fajardo, A. (2013). Stated vs. enacted beliefs: Looking at pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs through classroom interaction. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, *18*(2), 37–57. https://revistas.udea.edu.co/index.php/ikala/article/view/15013

Farrell, T. S. C. (2017). *Research on reflective practice in TESOL*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315206332

Green, T. F. (1971). *The activities of teaching*. McGraw-Hill.

Gutiérrez, C. (2015). Beliefs, attitudes, and reflections of EFL pre-service teachers while exploring critical literacy theories to prepare and implement critical lessons. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, *17*(2), 179–192. https://doi.org/10.14483/udistrital.jour.calj.2015.2.a01

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. SUNY Press.

John, P. D. (2006). Lesson planning and the student teacher: Re-thinking the dominant model. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *38*(4), 483–498. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220270500363620

Kalaja, P., Barcelos, A. M., Aro, M., & Ruohotie-Lyhty, M. (2015). *Beliefs, agency and identity in foreign language learning and teaching*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137425959

Kramsch, C. (2012). Subjectivity. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics* (pp. 1–6). Blackwell/Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal1122

Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners*. Sage Publications.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). *Language teacher education for a global society: A modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing*. Routledge.

Kwok, A. (2020). Pre-service teachers' classroom management beliefs and associated teacher characteristics. *Educational Studies*, *46*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2020.1717932

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study* (1st ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Macías, D. F., & Sánchez, J. A. (2015). Classroom management: A persistent challenge for preservice foreign language teachers. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, *17*(2), 81–99. https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v17n2.43641

Mattheoudakis, M. (2007). Tracking changes in pre-service EFL teacher beliefs in Greece: A longitudinal study. *Teaching and teacher education*, *23*(8), 1272–1288. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.06.001

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Nespor, J. (1987). The role of beliefs in the practice of teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *19*(4), 317–328. https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027870190403

Özmen, K. S. (2012). Exploring student teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching: A longitudinal study. *Current Issues in Education*, *15*(1), 1–15. https://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/819

Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, *62*(3), 307–332. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543062003307

Prilop, C. N., Weber, K. E., & Kleinknecht, M. (2019). How digital reflection and feedback environments contribute to pre-service teachers' beliefs during a teaching practicum. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *62*, 158–170. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2019.06.005

Richardson, V. (2003). Preservice teachers' beliefs. In J. Raths & A. C. McAninch (Eds.), *Teachers' beliefs and classroom performance: The impact of teacher education* (pp. 1–22). Information Age Publishing.

Sánchez-Solarte, A. C., & Obando-Guerrero, G. V. (2008). Is Colombia ready for "bilingualism"? *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, *9*(1), 181–195. https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/10715

Sheridan, L. (2016). Examining changes in pre-service teachers' beliefs of pedagogy. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *41*(3), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2016v41n3.1

Shooshtari, Z., Razavipur, K., & Takrimi, A. (2017). Pre-service language teachers' cognitions about language learning/teaching and cognition refinements through a reflection-oriented practicum. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *20*(1), 185–217. https://doi.org/10.29252/ijal.20.1.185

Suárez-Flórez, S. A., & Basto-Basto, E. A. (2017). Identifying pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching EFL and their potential changes. *Profile: Issues in Teachers Professional Development*, *19*(2), 167–184. https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v19n2.59675

Vacilotto, S., & Cummings, R. (2007). Peer coaching in TEFL/TESL programmes. *ELT Journal*, *61*(2), 153–160. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccm008

Yalcin-Arslan, F. (2019). Reflection in pre-service teacher education: exploring the nature of four EFL pre-service teachers' reflections. *Reflective Practice*, *20*(1), 111–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2018.1564652

Yuan, R., & Lee, I. (2014). Pre-service teachers' changing beliefs in the teaching practicum: Three cases in an EFL context. *System*, *44*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.02.002

Zeichner, K. (1996). Designing educative practicum experiences for prospective teachers. In K. Zeichner, S. Melnick, & M. L. Gomez (Eds.), *Currents of reform in preservice teacher education* (pp. 123–144). Teachers College Press.

Zheng, H. (2009). A review of research on EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs and practices. *Journal of Cambridge Studies*, *4*(1). https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.1579

Zheng, H. (2015). *Teacher beliefs as a complex system: English language teachers in China*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23009-2

About the Authors

Abel Andrés Periñán-Morales holds a BEd in English language teaching, a specialization in pedagogy from Universidad de la Amazonia (Colombia) and an MA in English didactics from Universidad Surcolombiana (Colombia). Currently, he is an English teacher in the public sector.

John Jairo Viáfara-González holds a PhD in second language acquisition and teaching (University of Arizona, USA), an MA in applied linguistics (Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Colombia) and a BEd in English (Universidad Nacional de Colombia). He is an associate professor at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia and a co-researcher in the group RETELE.

José Alexander Arcila-Valencia holds a BA in English language teaching from Universidad de la Amazonia (Colombia) and an MA in English didactics from Universidad Surcolombiana (Colombia). He is a high-school EFL teacher.