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Using Reverse Mentoring to Transform In-Service Teachers' Beliefs About How to Teach English

Transformación de las creencias de los profesores en ejercicio acerca de la enseñanza del inglés mediante la mentoría inversa

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This qualitative research study delves into elementary school teachers' beliefs and the potential contribution of reverse mentoring to improve English language teaching for children. The purpose was to explore how elementary in-service teachers' beliefs could be transformed after participating in a reverse mentoring experience. A group of in-service teachers from two public elementary schools and a group of student-teachers from Universidad de Córdoba (Colombia) were the research participants. Data were gathered through a questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations. Findings showed that reverse mentoring played an important role in transforming in-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English to children regarding the difficulties of language learning, communicative strategies, motivation and expectations, foreign language aptitude, and the nature of language learning.

Keywords: beliefs, in-service teachers, student-teachers, reverse mentoring, teaching English

Este estudio exploratorio indagó cómo las creencias de profesores en ejercicio sobre la enseñanza del inglés a niños eran transformadas después de participar en una experiencia de mentoría inversa. Participaron un grupo de profesores de dos escuelas públicas de primaria y un grupo de practicantes de la Universidad de Córdoba (Colombia). La información se recolectó mediante un cuestionario, entrevistas, notas de diarios de campo y observaciones de clase. Los resultados mostraron que la mentoría inversa jugó un papel importante en la transformación de las creencias de los profesores sobre la enseñanza del inglés, con respecto a dificultades en el aprendizaje, las estrategias comunicativas, la motivación y expectativas, la aptitud hacia la lengua extranjera y la naturaleza del aprendizaje de lenguas.

Palabras clave: creencias, enseñanza del inglés, mentoría inversa, practicantes, profesores en ejercicio

Introduction

Beliefs are inextricably tied to human nature. They represent the accumulation of social interactions and life experiences from different sources. They are conceptualized as preconceptions people have internalized; for instance, in the education context, teaching beliefs can be the starting point for teaching-learning decision making that also determine certain academic actions and intentions (Ferguson & Bråten, 2018). Following Khader (2012), "teachers' beliefs are a set of ideas rooted in the psychological and mental content of the teacher and play a central role in guiding his/her teaching behavior" (p. 73). Teachers hold different beliefs about teaching which guide their actions in classroom practices. These beliefs may benefit or hinder teachers' performance and ultimately influence the quality of their instruction, thus, to explore the beliefs about teaching English to a group of elementary teachers with little or no knowledge of that language, and who lacked the pedagogical tools to effectively teach it, we outlined a research project to provide them with strategies to help them improve their English teaching practices. Hence, the participants were a group of student-teachers from the foreign language teaching program at Universidad de Córdoba and a group of in-service elementary school teachers from two public schools in the department of Córdoba, Colombia. The school teachers were responsible for teaching all school subjects, including English. McNulty-Ferry and Quinchía-Ortiz (2007) have analyzed the lack of expertise in the English instruction of many teachers in Colombia. Some of their findings conclude that teachers at the elementary school level do not have enough training and preparation to teach English. In recent studies, Chaves and Fernández (2016) describe a similar experience by mentioning that, since they are homeroom teachers, they do not have any specific training for teaching the language. Furthermore, Porras (2007) states that in Colombian elementary schools "there is a shortage of qualified teachers who have been trained as English teachers" (p. 8).

This project is a response to the concerns linked to this lack of training in English language instruction and aims at improving English teaching practices in elementary schools through a reverse mentoring experience. At the beginning of this study, the group of in-service teachers expressed serious concerns in terms of their limitations regarding teaching English to children. At first, a variety of beliefs and assumptions, which had hindered their teaching of English, were identified. Consequently, a process of reverse mentoring was implemented between student-teachers and in-service educators. Once the reverse mentoring stage finished, new data were collected and analyzed to determine how the teachers' beliefs could have been transformed and to provide them with strategies to better cope with English teaching constraints due to their lack of expertise on the subject.

Literature Review

Reverse Mentoring

Traditional mentoring is a relationship between a more experienced individual, generally an experienced/senior (mentor) and a younger one, with little or no experience (mentee). Reverse mentoring is an approach characterized by mutual trust and cooperation whose goal is to facilitate learning and the academic development of senior colleagues (Ziegler, 2009). Additionally, Zauchner-Studnicka (2017) explains that reverse mentoring is a process in which the traditional roles of mentoring—experienced/inexperienced—are reversed. In this case, a less experienced person serves as a mentor to a more experienced learner who plays the role of the mentee. Reverse mentoring was first introduced formally by Jack Welch in 1999, a General Electric former chief executive officer, who asked 500 of his best managers to interact with competent internet workers (Greengard, 2002). This mentoring approach has been primarily used in the business field as one of the "best practice" entrepreneur strategies.

For example, Dell (Harvey & Buckley, 2002), Procter & Gamble (Greengard, 2002), Time Warner (Hewlett et al., 2009), and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (Lennon, 2019) are all examples of corporations which used reverse mentoring as a way of building intergenerational relationships, diversity on initiatives, and innovation. Reverse mentoring has been proven to be one of the most useful tools when it comes to widening perspectives and developing new trends while obtaining cross-generational and technical knowledge. This type of mentorship benefits leadership development as an effective strategy for mutual learning between mentors and mentees, which enhances teamwork and organizational environment.

Studies about reverse mentoring in the field of language teaching and education are scarce. The impact of this kind of mentorship for educational purposes has been researched in relatively few studies around the world. One has been that of Cotugna and Vickery (1998), who carried out a study where college students worked together with senior professionals to teach them internet use and technological skills. In a similar study, Leh (2005) conducted some research in a school of education at a state university which focused on training the university's president in college level initiatives to teach faculty members and graduate students how to use and integrate technology in their classes. Christie et al. (2004) have explored how reverse mentoring helped in the process of collaborative learning between high school students and graduates for the purpose of bringing technology into k–12 classrooms as well as to modify participants' perceptions and attitudes. Goossens et al. (2009) carried out a student-mentor project in the business school at the University of Hertfordshire with students who had some skills in technology, whose purpose was to improve staff skills in technology.

In more recent studies, Augustinienė and Čiučiulkienė (2013) focused on revealing some positive characteristics of reverse mentoring as an effective tool for novice teachers to build up their own self-authorship process in their professional development. Reverse mentoring in education is not only related to the roles of juniors and seniors, but is more a matter of reciprocal learning from/for both parties. Augustinienė and Čiučiulkienė claim that "effective reverse mentoring is based on the duality of roles and is always a two-way flow of learning which may be characterized as a boomerang effect" (p. 76). Likewise, Porras et al. (2018) affirm that the relationship between in-service elementary school teachers and student-teachers in a reverse mentoring experience was strengthened because the attitude of both sides was open and collaborative. This concept is coherent with Murphy's (2012), who points out that mentoring facilitates reciprocal gains for those involved in terms of learning, growth, and development Therefore, these aspects are clearly related to changes in assumptions and participants' preconceived notions of themselves as mentors and mentees. Preconceived ideas can constrain knowledge building since they are rooted in belief systems closely linked to efficiency, productivity, and personal and professional performance. According to Kato (2018), the importance of implementing a skill-based mentoring program for experienced advisors at a Japanese university evidenced professional development and growth for both mentors and mentees. This program relied on reverse mentoring as an effective approach which facilitated learning opportunities for both parties—mentor and mentee.

Conceptualizing "Beliefs"

Beliefs can be understood as something that is assumed as true. In social and academic settings what is usually true is contingent on the establishment of seniority, authorship, and research. In terms of English language teaching, it is sometimes assumed or believed that experienced educators have all the necessary tools to teach effectively. However, the idea or belief that teaching and learning is a one-way process where only experienced mentors are authorized to teach inexperienced mentees can be disrupted since merely having seniority may not

guarantee good teaching practices. Borg (2011) helps us re-assert that beliefs "are propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change" (p. 370). On the other hand, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) conceptualize beliefs as an important part of the process of understanding how educators shape their teaching practices. Consequently, understanding how different teaching practices are shaped by different sets of beliefs can also facilitate the re-conceptualizing of educators' teaching methods and their decisions in the classroom. Additionally, Richards et al. (2001) assert that understanding the beliefs and principles teachers operate on is part of the process of grasping how teachers conceptualize their work and how they approach it.

Here, we may conclude that beliefs are connected to the way(s) in which the individual notions and personal judgement teachers have about themselves have an impact on their teaching practices in the classroom. Barrot (2016) theorizes that teachers' beliefs are also closely connected to cognition, which plays a crucial role in teachers' development and their classroom practices. Borg (2003) conceptualizes teacher cognition as "the unobservable dimension of teaching—what teachers know, believe, and think" (p. 81). Therefore, if beliefs are related to cognition, it can be argued that they are deeply internalized and assumed as general truths or common knowledge that is seemingly undisputable. Crookes (2015) insists that beliefs and cognition can be used interchangeably, which reinforces the notion that what we believe in is what we know and vice versa.

Barcelos (2000) identifies how beliefs can strongly influence teaching methods, behaviors, attitudes, and teaching decision-making processes in the classroom. She also mentions how beliefs are complex notions of what is assumed as true; therefore, it is also a complex process to change them entirely. Furthermore, Johnson (as cited in Cota-Grijalva & Ruiz-Esparza-Barajas, 2013) states 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" (p. 82). There is no doubt that teachers' beliefs guide and affect what teachers do in the classroom, so there is a close relationship between beliefs and actions.

Another element connected to beliefs is practical knowledge. Practical knowledge is developed when interacting through experience in the field. According to Ross and Chan (2016), the accumulation of teachers' life experiences such as schooling, upbringing, and so on, is unique and personal and shapes their teaching practices in the classroom as well as the way materials are designed to facilitate learning. Moreover, the classroom constitutes a space where practical knowledge is gained, and beliefs shaped. Consequently, the more practical opportunities teachers can have, the more actions can be taken to re-purpose beliefs and implement professional development programs (Richardson, 1996).

Research on changes in teachers' beliefs suggests that classroom and schooling experiences become strong influences on assumptions and knowledge formation. Not only are beliefs commonly associated with thought processes, but they are also related to the socio-historical contexts where human activity can be the object of study in terms of actions and how those contribute to shaping thought (Burns et al., 2015).

Based on the theoretical framework and the limited research done on the use of reverse mentoring in the educational field, we argue that reverse mentoring is a useful approach throughout the teaching process. Teachers' beliefs are likely to be modified and this can serve as a starting point to eventually provide in-service teachers with strategies to optimize their English teaching which would ultimately lead to the improvement of the teaching of English in elementary schools.

Method

This study utilizes qualitative methods of collecting information such as questionnaires, interviews, and class observations. We carried out an in-depth exploration

of participants' beliefs about teaching English to young learners and how those beliefs were modified after observing student-teachers' English teaching practices. The mentoring between English student-teachers (mentors) and in-service elementary school teachers (mentees) constitutes a reverse mentoring experience.

Participants

This study had two groups of participants: (a) Five elementary school teachers in Montería (Colombia) who were willing to participate in the project and who, despite lacking strong foundations in teaching English, had to teach it, and (b) a group of five eighth-semester undergraduate students from the English language teaching program at Universidad de Córdoba, who carried out their pedagogical practicum in an elementary school. We were the student-teachers' practicum advisors and were responsible for collecting and analyzing the information.

Data Collection

The data collection process was conducted in three stages. First, we identified the school teachers' beliefs and assumptions about learning and teaching English to children by using three data collection instruments: questionnaires, interviews, and class observations. The questionnaire was an adapted teacher version from the BALLI—Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory—by Horwitz (1988; some questions from the original version were modified and scale options were yes/no). In-service teachers were interviewed by using a semi-structured format. Also, we observed four lessons to determine the coherence between the teachers' stated beliefs (identified through the questionnaire) and their classroom practices.

During the second stage, or the reverse mentoring implementation, teachers kept journals to reflect on student-teachers' teaching practices. After the observations, there were feedback sessions whereby each student-teacher met the school teacher and the researchers, who acted as moderators, in one-hour sessions,

aimed at asking questions regarding the strategies and procedures in the student-teachers' lessons. We recorded and transcribed these conversations.

In the third stage, we observed the teachers six additional times to confirm changes in their classroom practices after the student-teachers had finished their practicum process; a final interview was also applied with the same purpose. Table 1 presents a summary of the stages and different data collection procedures used in this study.

Table 1. Research Stages and Data Collection

Stage	Data collection instruments
Identification of in-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English	• Questionnaire • Interview • Observations
Student-teachers' teaching practicum (reverse mentoring process)	• In-service teachers' journals • Feedback sessions
Identification of possible changes in beliefs and improvement in the teaching practice	• Interview • Observations

Data Analysis

The first (diagnosis) and second (reverse mentoring implementation) stages of the research study played a crucial role in identifying teachers' beliefs and assumptions as well as their English teaching practices through the questionnaire, interviews, and observations. The data obtained were triangulated and analyzed, and the results presented following the categories in Horwitz's (1988) BALLI, to demonstrate how teachers' beliefs were either transformed or remained the same after the implementation of the reverse mentoring process.

Findings

Findings focus on the influence of the reverse mentoring relationship on in-service teachers' beliefs and practice toward teaching English to children.

Beliefs About Foreign Language Proficiency

Before the reverse mentoring process, a strong belief that teachers had was that English could be taught as any other school subject in the curriculum, so anyone could teach it; that is, they were convinced that teaching English did not require specific methodological knowledge. This perception was ratified through the answers collected in both the questionnaire and interviews: "The teacher of primary levels teaches nine areas at the same time, including English"[1] (Interview 1, Teacher 2). And then she added "I use the booklet and follow the pronunciation that appears there." Along the same lines, Teacher 4 mentioned: "I teach my English class as I teach the rest of the subjects" (Interview 1).

During the first stage, the collected information also reflected how this belief was evidenced in the classroom; for example, some teachers wrote decontextualized lists of vocabulary or grammar structures on the board and translated them into Spanish. Fajardo (2013) has reflected on English teaching practices and concluded that being unaware of recent methodologies to teach English is one of the main reasons why in-service teachers end up using their own set of beliefs to teach English to children instead of having a clear methodological approach in mind. It means that even though in-service teachers considered themselves capable of teaching English to children, their practice did not reflect the appropriate procedures to do so.

However, the teachers' beliefs about English language teaching were transformed during the second stage while the teaching practicum was in progress, as their reflections on what was observed from student-teachers were positive. For instance, Teacher 1 wrote in his journal entry:

> The methodology implemented is always very active and interactive; making use of mutual inductive and deductive activities, where the student is the center of the teaching process. The student-teacher always integrates abilities: writing, speaking, listening…she also uses pictures and interactive activities and this is why her classes are always fun and motivating.

Similarly, Teacher 2 showed a positive attitude towards the methodology implemented by student-teachers. As she expressed in her journal: "[The student-teacher] motivates her classes very well since the very beginning of the lesson (warming up, leading in, instruction, and so on), she is able to get students' attention so that they become interested in the topic and activities." This shows that being an English teacher at any school level requires not only a good command of the language, but also the use of a specific methodology. According to Porras et al. (2018), "it is paramount that teachers be sufficiently qualified since they play an important role as facilitators of the teaching and learning process, equally, [they] are a source of input for their students, especially at the elementary level" (p. 170). For this reason, the reverse mentoring stage was beneficial for the in-service teachers since they became aware of the importance of possessing knowledge as regards how to teach English to children.

Consequently, in stage three, when teachers were teaching their English classes, their effort to minimize the translation strategy was observed, especially in the leading-in activity. Instead, they encouraged learners to participate in class by asking questions to activate pupils' previous knowledge, imitating what student-teachers had done during their classes. Particularly, Teacher 2 changed the way she started her classes. The following excerpt of a conversation between Teacher 2 and her students evidences the students' engagement in the English class through the use of their background knowledge:

Teacher: Miguel, what is your mother's name? (in Spanish)
Student 1: Keila, teacher!
Teacher: Good! (with thumbs up)
The teacher pastes a chart on the board
Teacher: Okay. What is this? (pointing to the board)

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1 All teachers' excerpts have been translated from Spanish.

Student 3: A chart (in Spanish). A big tree!

Teacher: A family tree, repeat! . . . And what are there on those tree branches? (in Spanish) [*sic*]

Student 1: Pictures of people! (in Spanish)

Student 3: They are mom and dad. (in Spanish)

Teacher: Bravo! This is the father (pointing to the picture on the board) and this is the mother. Repeat!

After the reverse mentoring took place, the English lesson was delivered differently. Therefore, the class topic (i.e., the family) was approached in a more functional way. In previous observations, Teacher 2's lessons were more focused on grammatical structures and translation, but after the reverse mentoring her classes seem to be more communicative.

The collected data show all the biases teachers had about their own learning of English. During the feedback sessions, they mentioned being concerned about their inability to speak English well since they did not think they had the necessary skills to learn it. Teachers based their opinions on their previous schooling experience and all the barriers they seemed to have experienced when learning English. These perceptions about learning English confirm what Moodie (2016) has expressed about the impact of schooling on the shaping of English teachers' teaching practices and the development of communicative skills in the classroom.

From the gathered data, it can be drawn, for example, that unsuccessful English learning experiences have negatively influenced elementary school teachers' perceptions of their own learning abilities. These perceptions or beliefs have also hindered the way(s) in which English classes are planned and implemented since teachers rely on their limited knowledge to teach English and are unaware of language teaching approaches due to their lack of specific training. However, despite their English language limitations, teachers also showed a great deal of commitment and tried to re-evaluate, re-design, and re-think previous language teaching practices due to the effectiveness

in the implementation of reverse mentoring. Teacher 2 corroborates the positive impact reverse mentoring had on their teaching when mentioning that "observing student-teachers teaching English motivated her to start doing something to improve her English level as well as her own teaching" (Journal).

Beliefs About Learning and Communication Strategies

Regarding learning and communication strategies, two important aspects related to beliefs were evidenced. The first was linked to the slight importance given to teaching speaking to children since, as the participating teachers conveyed, their students would never use English in real life; therefore, exposure to the language was not necessary. It is evident that the teachers are not aware that learning a language implies being proficient in all skills, including speaking. Regarding speaking, Brewster et al. (2007) state that although children are not proficient in a foreign language, they always look for occasions to show others what they learn in their classroom. It is very common to find children who want to express themselves using the foreign language inside and outside the classroom since they feel proud of their new learning.

Another belief associated with the previous one has to do with practice and fluency. At the beginning of the process, the teachers believed that a lot of practice to develop fluency was not necessary at early ages. However, practice is fundamental for learning a second language: the more you use the language, the better. Practice helps learners to automatize the new language and, consequently, gain fluency (Jones, 2018). Even though children are beginning the language learning process, they can start their path towards fluency thanks to the different kind of practices teachers expose them to. That is why teachers should provide students with a lot of controlled and guided practices that will help them internalize the new language and prepare them for more demanding tasks.

Both beliefs mentioned above were confirmed in the class observations; however, after the reverse mentoring process, teachers expressed that their students needed to be exposed to the foreign language for its use both inside and outside the classroom. Teacher 3 mentioned that:

> They may use it inside and outside the class…because you can see them trying to use what the teacher has taught. Additionally, they see its use everywhere…in the games, in TV shows, and in announcements. People are always using English; it is an invasion of English words wherever you go. (Feedback session 3)

Even though at the beginning of the process the teachers thought children would not use English, they changed their mind once they observed children trying to use what they had learned in the class with student-teachers. The teachers became aware of the importance of using the language in different contexts, not only inside the classroom, but also outside it. Besides, they realized that the language can be practiced in other scenarios or through other means such as TV, music, and video games, among others Although they were not able to teach the whole class in English, a change in their attitude towards language learning was noticeable, especially in their willingness to do it in a different way, as evidenced in one of our observation entries:

> Teacher 3 began the class greeting students in English, followed by the sign of the cross in English. Then, she wrote on the board the word "star" and asked the students its meaning. Student said "no," and the teacher expressed "they shine at night sky" and immediately students said in Spanish that it was a star. The teacher called a student to go to the board to draw a star. The teacher continued writing other words on the board (sun, moon, cloud, and others). She used gestures and key words to make pupils guess the meaning.

Most teachers' beliefs and attitudes were re-shaped due to their interest to improve their teaching practices and make the language learning process more meaningful for children. Thus, they started implementing strategies and steps used by the student-teachers, such as greeting students and praying in English at the beginning of each lesson. Based on our observations, four of the five teachers used body language and were engaged in urging learners to guess the meaning of the words and associate them with pictures. The use of reverse mentoring as a language teaching approach for experienced teachers to learn from student-teachers encouraged them to re-think and re-purpose their beliefs and teaching practices so that the learning of English resulted in a more meaningful experience for their learners.

Beliefs About the Nature of Language Learning/Teaching

The information gleaned from the questionnaire and interviews during the first phase of the project revealed three aspects related to beliefs or assumptions about the language teaching process. Firstly, there is great concern about pronunciation since it is seen as a relevant element when it comes to the teaching of speaking. As Teacher 4 commented:

> We have the topic…the days of the week…I write Monday in Spanish and in English, then we read the word and we pronounce it in English…do you understand me? Having them pronounce since that is the important thing about English. (Interview 1)

Teacher 4 considers pronunciation to be an important aspect of learning and speaking English as well as having an "excellent" accent. Teachers are aware of the importance of pronunciation when learning another language. According to Levis and Grant (2003), pronunciation plays a vital role in communication. It is essential to recognize the influence pronunciation has on the speaking skill: pronunciation may block or permit oral communication.

The second belief teachers reflected on was related to the idea that a child who has not firmly learned his

mother tongue cannot learn a foreign one. According to Teacher 2, "children that already have strengthened their mother tongue…we say…it becomes easier for them to learn any foreign language" (Interview 1). In fact, there has been a long discussion about the influence of L1 in L2 learning. L1 can serve as a support system in L2 learning since it is the language that children already know. However, it can also have a negative impact as some of the mistakes might be linked to the interference of the students' L1.

A third aspect related to beliefs and/or assumptions discussed by teachers has to do with the importance of teaching English with a different theoretical or methodological approach. Teachers 1 and 2 did not agree that there is the need for a specific approach to teach English to children. Teacher 1 supported this belief by saying, in the initial interview: "I do not see any difficulty in teaching English orally…at least at primary level… because in high school things are more advanced. At primary I do not think it is difficult to learn [English], nor to teach it."

After the reverse mentoring process, Teacher 3 expressed in her journal her overemphasis on pronunciation and the work student-teachers did in her lessons. Although at the beginning of the process teachers believed that English can be taught as any other subject, after observing student-teachers, they recognized the importance of being a professional in this field and acknowledged that student-teachers had a good methodology for teaching English to children. Likewise, they were aware of the need to have a good command of the language since they might have been teaching pronunciation mistakes.

Regarding the use of the mother tongue, teachers agreed that learning and teaching a foreign language was similar to learning and teaching the mother tongue, and they agreed on the need for using it in communication. Teacher 2 wrote:

> When the student-teacher arrived, the children and I were blown away. He entered the classroom speaking in English, kids remained very quiet listening to him… that is what makes us be concerned with their [children] speaking in English. I do not say they do no use Spanish in class, but they use English more frequently now. (Journal)

The exposure children get in the L2 is beneficial for their learning. The more the students are exposed to the new language, the more they will become familiar with it. Along the student-teachers' practicum, children became accustomed to communicating in the English language as they used it most of the class time. This implied the limitation of L1 and the need to communicate in the foreign language, so children started to use it. Likewise, after observing student-teachers, the participating teachers could recognize that this kind of classroom practices are possible and favorable for the children's language learning process. Teacher 3 also commented on the benefits of mentoring: "I think it would be beneficial to have a teacher who could implement new strategies because, maybe, I am making mistakes" (Interview 2).

Furthermore, their belief related to methodology for teaching English was also altered. As Teacher 4 expressed in her journal: "I teach my English class as I teach the rest of the subjects…but now I believe there is a special method for teaching English to children." Furthermore, Teacher 2 mentions: "The student-teacher brings materials and incorporates information and communication technologies, games, and so on. The classes are very dynamic, and I try to put that into practice."

Teaching English to children requires special methodologies and teaching strategies since children have particular features and characteristics. It was rewarding to observe that teachers' beliefs about this category were transformed after observing lessons carried out by the student-teachers. Besides, observations after the practicum finished counted for the teachers' endeavors to improve their practice, as it was registered in their journal. Teacher 1 said: "For me this has not been easy. This has been a challenge for me. I am learning with

the kids. I am trying to learn English with them, too." It was evident that after the reverse mentoring stage, these teachers grasped some new knowledge about how to teach English to children, as well as strategies that they consider might be useful in their teaching practice.

Beliefs About Motivation and Expectations

In terms of desires and opportunities, the teachers had the idea that if they learned to speak English very well, it would help them or other people to get better job opportunities. Along these lines, Teacher 4 mentions: "It is important to learn this language well. Because of jobs opportunities…and, you know, it is the universal language and a lot of information today is written in English." This was also identified in some of the answers that teachers provided in other data collection instruments and remained the same after the reverse mentoring process. Additionally, the teachers' awareness as related to foreign language learning really changed after the reverse mentoring experience since they acknowledged the importance of improving their English level, not only for job opportunities, but also to be able to verbally interact with other people and understand a lot of information they need for their current jobs and daily lives. During one feedback session, one teacher mentioned that one of the main lessons she had learned from student-teachers was the improvement of her speaking skills and the satisfaction of having enhanced her teaching practices as well. Nevertheless, she said that time was not enough to gain more knowledge from student-teachers. These changes in awareness about the teaching process was also evidenced during stage two of the process while Teacher 3 was observing student-teachers. She looked satisfied when her students were interacting with the student-teacher and describing some images. In another feedback session and after having observed one lesson by the student-teacher, Teacher 4 showed his concern towards his language teaching practices and the little

interaction he offered his students. He stated: "This is one of my weaknesses, I only concentrate on the topic I'm going to teach [referring to the grammar topic]."

After analyzing the findings, it is important to mention that not only did reverse mentoring transform teachers' beliefs about teaching English to children, but it also encouraged them to improve their teaching practices through the implementation of strategies used by the student-teachers. After the reverse mentoring process ended and teachers began teaching their classes again, we observed that they increased their use of English inside the classroom: They asked their students questions in English, gave instructions in English more frequently, and encouraged students to participate in communicative activities, as evidenced in the following observation excerpt:

> Teacher 3 greets students as usual in English, she decided to start the class with a song about animals in English, through that song the teacher introduced the topic. She wrote on the board "the animals" and asked students which animals were mentioned in the song, and she wrote them in English. While she was writing, she asked children to repeat the words and, at the same time, she asked the student-teacher if pronunciation was good or wrong. Next, the teacher read and pronounced each word and asked the students for repetition. (Observation 5)

Discussion

This study explored the ways reverse mentoring contributes to transforming teachers' beliefs about teaching English to children. The findings revealed that teachers' beliefs about language teaching are closely tied to their self-image and their teaching skills based on their experience as teachers of other subject areas. Therefore, they just used their previous teaching experiences to teach English and assumed that the most important aspects when teaching English was to focus on vocabulary, basic grammar rules, and meaning. That is, the lack of knowledge in English teaching meth-

odologies and strategies allowed for teachers to make overgeneralizations about the things they thought were important, leaving speaking and communication out of their teaching practices since they did not think it was important to emphasize those areas.

The teachers' previous approach to teaching is coherent with the skills segregation view (Harmer, 2015); for instance, lists of words written in English with the corresponding translation in Spanish. The teachers' focus on translation was tied to the background experience they had had as learners; using L1 and translating from Spanish into English and vice versa (Prator & Celce-Murcia, 1979). Teachers also seemed to reproduce the same teaching techniques with which they were once taught (Lortie, 2002). However, they believe that speaking should be taught by a proficient teacher, which is connected to their own anxieties due to their lack of proficiency to do so. To elaborate, the teachers' background knowledge might have played a role in the way(s) they thought about their own English teaching practices. Burns et al. (2015) have discussed how the cognitive view of language teaching combines internal and external cognitive constructs—especially beliefs, assumptions, and previous experience—which is at the center of how teachers make certain teaching decisions and approach various subjects differently depending on their prior knowledge. Similarly, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) have stated that "beliefs are part of the process of understanding how teachers shape their work, which is significant to the comprehending of their teaching methods and their decisions in the classroom" (p. 78).

When it comes to methodology, the teachers believed that English should be taught in the same way they teach in other subject areas, which is also linked to the notion that there is one method to teach all disciplines across curriculum. This idea was significantly challenged when they recognized—through reflection and involvement—the need for a special approach when teaching English. Therefore, getting teachers involved in re-thinking their own teaching practices

and reflecting on new approaches to teach English seemed to be a fruitful process. Their classroom practices positively changed, and they became interested in using more up-to-date teaching methods and being lifelong learners as well.

Reverse mentoring contributed to the progress of teachers' knowledge of English while their teaching practices benefited from the observation of the student-teachers' teaching strategies. Teachers were able to reflect on their own teaching practices and improve them, which implies that the reverse mentoring experience urged them to reshape the pre-conceived ways of teaching English to children. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) also mentioned that "teachers' beliefs are affected by training courses, learning experiences, professional development, teaching experiences, and teaching practices" (p. 82), an opinion which supports the notion that reverse mentoring could provide teachers with tools for them to grow and upgrade their own teaching methodologies.

Conclusions

After the implementation of reverse mentoring as a process and approach to improve teaching practices in the English classroom, we can conclude that this process was helpful in that teachers became more aware about the development of their teaching practices, and consequently, the learning of English for their students. Through this professional development experience, the in-service teachers showed a better understanding of the need to use different teaching strategies according to the expected outcomes from their students. Also, teachers were able to challenge themselves and their pre-conceived notions that have been created and reinforced through their own learning experiences. Hopefully, they changed their beliefs in understanding English teaching as an opportunity for developing elementary students' English skills based on their cognitive levels. The improvement of English teaching practices should remain a constant concern so that the teaching of English

starts becoming a meaningful experience for both teachers and students. Although reverse mentoring may become a helpful and effective strategy to reduce the harmful impact of non-proficient English teachers in class, this does not constitute the only way in which English teaching practices can be enhanced.

This study has also contributed to the improvement of English teaching practices via the implementation of a reverse mentoring plan with meaningful steps that can transform teachers' sets of beliefs, which ultimately lead teachers to take action to effectively upgrade their classroom practices. The new teaching practices and knowledge were the result of an apprenticeship of observation and the reflections prompted by the reverse mentoring process. Different scholars prioritize different steps during the teaching-learning process. For Moodie (2016) and Lortie (2002), the apprenticeship of observation is the first step, while Schön (1983) and Fenstermacher (1994) focused on reflection, and Clandinin (1986) on practice. On the other hand, Carter (1990) and Fenstermacher (1994) mentioned that experience in the classroom is also thought to shape beliefs and practical knowledge. Once teachers incorporate new information into their daily practice and knowledge, getting a better and informed understanding of the learning process and teaching methodologies is quintessential.

Limitations and Implications

One of the limitations was that the researchers were responsible for both the implementation of reverse mentoring by student-teachers and observing the progress teachers were making. Although we tried to distance ourselves from our roles as advisors and researchers, it is also likely that participants were biased since they were trying to present a positive view of the program and its results. On the one hand, student-teachers were interested in earning a passing grade. On the other hand, the teachers wanted to show progress and professionalism. A second limitation we experienced was the hours of English instruction per week. Since there are very few hours of English teaching every week, reverse mentoring, observations, and the analysis of results took longer.

An important implication that comes from the implementation of reverse mentoring for the improvement of English teaching practices is that student-teachers are seen by the teachers as a credible source of knowledge and as possessing expertise. In other words, student-teachers became role models for elementary school in-service teachers. Hence, this study opens up the possibilities for further research with a focus on using reverse mentoring to develop different language skills and improve teaching practices. Finally, although reverse mentoring might have contributed to the improvement of the teaching practices of those teachers whose area of expertise is not English teaching, this is neither the only possibility nor the most efficient way to solve English teaching difficulties.

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