



International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching

Volume 5, Issue 1, April 2017, p. 447-461

Received	Reviewed	Published	Doi Number
24.03.2017	08.04.2017	24.04.2017	10.18298/ijlet.1727

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN MEXICO

Maria E. Lemus-Hidalgo¹

ABSTRACT

The present article drew on a larger interpretivist case study research of the role of teachers' knowledge and beliefs in their teaching practices. It was constructed with the participation of four teachers that studied the same BA in ELT program and worked in the same state university in Mexico. The purpose of this article is to raise awareness of the role of learning and teaching experiences in the development of teachers' knowledge and beliefs and of their implications for language teacher education. Observations, interviews, conversations, class video recordings and teachers' journals were the methods used for the collection of the data. The case study not only shows that teachers' knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices inform each other persistently in a dynamic process but also illustrates the significant role that learning and teaching experiences seem to have in the development of teachers' knowledge and as sources of their beliefs. Teachers' teaching practices appear to be mainly supported by their experiential knowledge and driven by their core beliefs; beliefs that are grounded in experience. Awareness of these aspects in the BA in ELT curriculum and in its delivery would enhance the education of future teachers of English as a foreign language.

Key Words: Teacher knowledge, beliefs, teaching practices, learning and teaching experiences.

1. Introduction

There is a general assumption that BA in ELT studies make a significant contribution to teachers' knowledge. However, many teachers, as the participants in this study, consider professional experience as their actual source of knowledge development. This article is based on information given by a case study of the role of the teachers' knowledge and beliefs in their teaching practices. The results show that, according to the participant teachers' opinions, teaching and learning experiences are the main source of their knowledge and beliefs development. The article aims to raise awareness on this aspect and of its relevance for language teacher education in Mexico.

Historical background on English language teacher education.

The language centres of higher education institutions and private language schools such as the Anglo-Mexican Cultural Institute and the Mexican-North American Cultural Relations Institute (IMNRC) were mainly in charge of the training of English language teachers before the mid-80s; for example, the UNAM language centre offered the first course for language teachers in 1978 (Da

¹ Universidad Autonoma de Aguascalientes (University of Aguascalientes), mariesther.lemus@edu.uaa.mx

Silva et.al., 2008). English language teacher training essentially consisted of the study of some language teaching methods and approaches, techniques for the teaching of the four skills and some practice with real students. There were only three Bachelor's degrees in English Language Teaching program (BA in ELT) in Mexico at that time. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, a process of professionalization of in-service university English language teachers was encouraged by the British Council in Mexico since most of the teachers did not hold credentials on EFL teaching. In 1990, a first agreement between the University of London and state universities of the centre of Mexico was signed. It offered Mexican teachers of English who were working at the state universities the opportunity of doing diplomas and master studies of the University of London, in Mexico. Later, similar agreements with six other British universities were established as an attempt to cover the professionalization of language teachers of most of the state universities in Mexico. Additionally, national programs that supported the academic development of university teachers, such as PROMEP² that was created in 1996, also provided teachers with the possibility of doing master and doctorate studies in foreign universities. All of this contributed to increase the number of BA in ELT programs that took place in the last two decades and that were designed, in general, by teachers that studied in British universities. The BA in ELT programs increased from three in 1984 to more than twenty BA programs and ten MA programs in 2012 (ANUIES, 2012). In the university where the research was developed, the BA in ELT program was offered for the first time in the early 90s. A small group of Mexican university teachers, in which I was part, supported by British specialists, designed its curriculum.

English language teacher education

English language teacher education has been conducted from distinct approaches (Randall with Thornton, 2004; Diaz Maggioli, 2012) such as the craft model that focused on training student teachers on practical aspects of teaching such as presenting language structures, giving instructions, correcting errors and questioning techniques (Wallace, 1991). Consequently, becoming a teacher consisted of "acquiring a set of observable classroom behaviours" (Randall with Thornton, 2004, p. 35). A different approach is the applied science model. It centres upon providing student teachers with knowledge derived from empirical science in disciplines such as psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics (Wallace, 1991). It focuses on developing knowledge of theory to guide the teaching practice. There have been also attempts to develop English language teacher education from the reflective model. The reflective model encompasses received knowledge obtained from theoretical information as well as experiential knowledge developed from personal and professional experience (Wallace, 1991).

It could be said that, in Mexico, English language teacher education has been mainly approached from the applied science model since the professionalization of language teaching process initiated in the 1990s. Within this approach, the main role of the teacher educator is as an explainer of theories, a resources selector and a model while the student- teachers' main model is as reader and applier of theory (Diaz Maggioli, 2012). Most of the BA in ELT curricula has had a modularised

² Spanish acronym of a program for teachers' qualification improvement

structure; type of curriculum that appears to encourage the obtaining of pieces of information rather than the integration of knowledge (Korthagen, 2000). It seems that language teacher education in Mexico, in various cases, has tended to be based on providing theoretical information and setting prescribed practices of teaching without awareness that the language teacher knowledge base seems to have a process-oriented nature. This is to say, that teacher knowledge is developed through a process of understanding mainly based on narrative ways of knowing, as different studies (see for example Johnstone and Goetsch, 2000) illustrate.

Teacher Knowledge

Teachers possess different types of knowledge such as content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational ends and curriculum knowledge if Shulman's categories of knowledge (2004) are considered. All these categories compose the teachers' knowledge base that has been developed in different manners. Wallace (1991), Eraut (2000, 2004) and Richards (2008) have classified teacher knowledge reflecting how it is developed and exhibited. It could be argued that the different types of knowledge, summarised in the following table, share some characteristics.

Author	Knowing about	Knowing how
Anderson, 1982	Declarative	Procedural
Wallace, 1991	Received	Experiential
Eraut, 2000	Explicit	Tacit
Richards, 2008	Explicit	Implicit

Table 1: Classification of knowledge according to its type of construction and expression.

Wallace (1991) divided teacher knowledge into received knowledge and experiential knowledge. Received knowledge includes research base theories, techniques and skills while experiential knowledge refers to knowledge developed by the practice of the profession. From a different perspective, Richards (2008) classified teacher knowledge as *Knowledge about* and *Knowledge how*. *Knowledge about* is based on explicit knowledge whereas *Knowledge how* is supported by implicit knowledge. Implicit knowledge covers personal beliefs and theories that motivate teachers' practical actions (Richards, 2008). Eraut (2000, 2004) classified teacher knowledge into tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge could be compared to implicit knowledge and to experiential knowledge since tacit knowledge is also developed from personally experienced events within relevant contexts, and it must be inferred from teachers' behaviour through observations. Tacit knowledge also encompasses personal beliefs, perspectives and theories. Explicit knowledge can be articulated whereas tacit knowledge is exhibited (Kakabadse, et al., 2001). Nevertheless, tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge are divided to be understood better, however, they are components of teachers' knowledge difficult to differentiate in teaching practice (Eraut, 2000). Additionally, tacit knowledge could be comparable to procedural knowledge, knowing how, and explicit knowledge to declarative knowledge, knowing about. Procedural knowledge is knowledge displayed in action without awareness of its existence while

declarative knowledge is about issues people are aware they know and can describe (Kakabadase, 2001).

The above classifications of knowledge have been done considering mainly the way knowledge is developed and manifested. The types of knowledge below the *Knowing how* title are developed from personal learning experiences within relevant contexts whereas the ones below the *Knowing about* are developed in formal learning contexts from information mainly derived from research. Additionally, the knowledge types below the *Knowing how* title are generally inferred from teaching practices while the knowledge types below the *Knowing about* are commonly stated and discussed. Moreover, implicit knowledge (Richards, 2008) and tacit knowledge (Eraut, 2000) covers personal beliefs and theories.

Beliefs

Teaching practices also seem to be shaped by teachers' beliefs (Pajares, 1992). Language teaching practices tend to be enlightened by beliefs about the nature of language, the nature of the learning process and the nature of the teaching act (Nunan, 2004). This is to say, that teachers' practices seem to be informed by their beliefs about what it means to know a language, about how learners become speakers and about how best to teach learners to become speakers of the foreign language. The teachers' beliefs systems are constructed slowly and are composed of diverse types of beliefs such as peripheral and core beliefs. Peripheral beliefs are theoretically embraced whereas core beliefs are grounded in experience (Phipps and Borg, 2009).

Teachers' beliefs have various sources (Borg, 2003; Senior, 2006). One of these sources is teachers own experience as language learners when their beliefs about teaching mirror their experience as language learners (Borg, 2003; Senior, 2006). For example, in Mexican university language classes, the use of some traditional techniques, such as reading aloud, can be observed because teachers were used to doing that when they were learning English, and those techniques worked for them. Teachers' experience of what works best is also a source of teachers' beliefs. Teachers tend to trust in the strategies that work well for them and avoid those that have not been successful (Richards and Lockhart, 1996; Senior, 2006). Breen, et al. (2001), in a study of eighteen ESL teachers in Australia, found that teachers' beliefs about language, educational process, language learning and teaching appear to be strongly influenced by experience. Moreover, Andon (2009), in a case study of four native speakers that teach English in private institutions in London, identified that the teachers' assumptions about teaching and learning had not evolved from education courses but from their learning and teaching experiences. Therefore, it could be argued, as Phipps and Borg (2009) state that teachers' beliefs are influenced by teachers' own experiences. Additionally, when core beliefs are firmly grounded in experience, they would exert most influence on teaching practices. However, peripheral beliefs may remain unimplemented ideals if they are not established through personal positive experience (Phipps and Borg, 2009). Therefore, personal and professional experiences appear to be central for embracing beliefs.

BA in ELT Program 2003 and its relation to types of knowledge

The BA in ELT program 2003 was the program studied by the participant teachers of this study. It aims to encourage teacher development rather than teacher training. Its purpose is that student-teachers develop the knowledge that would support their future teaching practice, as well as their development as English language teachers. Its curriculum has been modified three times with the purpose of responding to the changes of contextual needs. The 2003 program lasts eight semesters and is made up of eight strands. The following table presents these strands and the category of knowledge, according to Shulman's (2004), Anderson's (1982) and Wallace's (1991) classifications that each strand encourages.

BA in ELT STRANDS	CATEGORY / TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE
The Development of English skills strand	Content knowledge / Procedural knowledge /experiential knowledge
The English Studies strand	Content knowledge / Declarative knowledge / received knowledge
The Applied Linguistics strand	Pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of learners' characteristics / Declarative knowledge / received knowledge
The ELT Methods strand	Pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners' characteristics and curriculum knowledge / Declarative knowledge / received knowledge
The Practicum strand	Integration of the different categories of knowledge/ Procedural knowledge /experiential knowledge
The Education Studies strand	Knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values and their philosophical and historical grounds, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners' characteristics and curriculum knowledge / Declarative knowledge / received knowledge
The Study Skills strand	Content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of institutional contexts and knowledge of educational ends / Declarative knowledge / received knowledge
The Spanish strand	Pedagogical content knowledge / Declarative knowledge / received knowledge

Table 2: BA in ELT 2003 strands and the category of knowledge they support

For students to be able to start the first semester of the BA in ELT, they should demonstrate a 450 TOEFL score. If they do not possess this score, they are admitted in the propaedeutic year of the BA in ELT. This year aims to help students develop their English proficiency. It is composed of five subjects: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking and Grammar which are studied 25 hours a week.

The Eight Strands of the BA in ELT 2003 program

The Development of English skills strand consists of seven subjects focussing on the learning of the English language. These subjects support the development of procedural knowledge, defined as the ability to speak the language (Anderson, 1982) because language teachers need to be proficient speakers of the foreign language. *The English Studies strand* covers six subjects focused on the study of English at distinct levels: Phonetics, Grammar, Semantics and Culture. These subjects facilitate the development of declarative knowledge – knowledge about the language (Anderson, 1982). *The Development of English skills strand* encourages the experiential knowledge while *The English Studies strand* is based on received knowledge (Wallace, 1991). Both strands, Development of English skills and English Studies contribute to the development of the language teachers' content knowledge that covers knowledge about English and the English teacher's proficiency.

The Applied Linguistics strand is made up of five subjects centred on the knowledge of the English language from different perspectives: Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and Discourse Analysis. These subjects contribute to teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of learners' characteristics. *The ELT Methods strand* is composed of six subjects focused on the study of methods, techniques, materials as well as programs for English language teaching. This strand as in the case of the Applied Linguistics strand encourages the development of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), knowledge of learners' characteristics and curriculum knowledge. Both strands are based on declarative knowledge. The *Practicum strand* covers eight subjects that aim to support the student teachers in the integration of the diverse types of knowledge and their gradual application into their teaching practice. This strand encourages procedural or experiential knowledge. It could be said that teachers' peripheral and core beliefs would evolve from these subjects since they are mainly based on teaching experiences. Subjects such as Classroom Observation, Team teaching and Teaching Practice are part of this strand.

The Education Studies strand consists of a wide range of subjects. For example, subjects such as Introduction to Education and Sociology of Education and Development of Professional Values would support the knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values and their philosophical and historical grounds. In addition, the subjects of Teaching Approaches and Methodology of Education contribute to pedagogical content knowledge. The subject, Psychology of Learning, encourages the knowledge of learners' characteristics, and the Curriculum Design subject aims to construct curriculum knowledge. *The Study Skills strand* covers four subjects. The subjects Skills for Creative Thinking and Skills for Critical reading support the development of pedagogical content knowledge. Strategies for Foreign Language Learning would support the development of content knowledge, and the ELT Management subject contributes to curriculum knowledge, knowledge of

institutional contexts and knowledge of educational ends. *The Spanish strand* is composed of two subjects that attempt to raise awareness of the phonetic and grammatical characteristics of Spanish with the aim of facilitating the study of these aspects of the English language. It would contribute to pedagogical content knowledge. The review of the strands that composed the BA in ELT curriculum study by the participants in this research shows that most of their subjects are based on declarative and received knowledge. There are subjects that encourage procedural and experiential knowledge, however, they are a lot fewer in comparison.

Teachers' knowledge and beliefs have diverse sources; nevertheless, learning and teaching experiences seem to be central for their development (Eraut, 2000, 2004; Phipps and Borg, 2009). The purpose of this article is to raise awareness of the role of learning and teaching experiences in the development of teachers' knowledge and beliefs and of their implications for language teacher education since awareness of this may contribute to enhance the teacher education processes.

METHODOLOGY

The present article drew on a larger research on the role of teacher's knowledge and beliefs in their teaching practices that was developed through the construction of an interpretive case study of teachers of English working in a state university in Mexico. It was developed through multiple data sources including a focus group session, observations, interviews, conversations and teachers' journals, using a simultaneous data collection process with each participant. A qualitative analysis, where the teachers' talk and teachers' actions were the units of analysis, began with the collection of data. The intention was that both the data collection and data analysis processes informed each other.

Participants in the study

The participants in the study were four Mexican teachers that taught English language to undergraduates at a state university in Mexico. Their names for this case study were Paul, Pam, Keith and Karla. For the selection of participants, I took into consideration teachers' willingness to contribute to the study (Stake, 1995) since participating in the research would add more work to their already heavy schedule. I also selected teachers that followed the same BA in ELT 2003 curriculum. In addition, the four case study teachers worked for the same English teaching programme, and taught English at the same level to university students that study English as a university requirement, delimiting the case to teachers who shared these characteristics and context (Creswell, 2007). If teachers shared these characteristics, the differences or similarities would be more centred on their knowledge and beliefs that are the focus of this studied.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

I conducted the data collection process for the construction of the case study in four phases; I followed the same process with the four teachers simultaneously. I first conducted a focus group interview with the four participants. Then, I observed and had a short conversation with each teacher every week for four weeks. I observed all of them teaching the same topics to reduce the differences that the teaching of a distinct topic could cause. Then, for the fifth or sixth week, the

participant teachers chose a class to be video-recorded, a recording that was discussed with the teacher in the following week. I also arranged to have an individual interview with each teacher in the fifth week. The teachers also gave me a reflective journal every week, and I even had a phone interview with each participant to clarify aspects that came up in the writing of each participant case study. The process is summarised as follows:

Data Collection Activities	Frequency	Total
Focus group interview with the 4 participant teachers	Once at the beginning of the data collection	1
Observations of each teacher	Once a week	16
Pre or Post observation conversations	Once a week	16
Video-recording of a class of each teacher	Once in the fifth week	4
Interview on the video-recorded class with each teacher	Once in the sixth or seventh week	4
Interview on beliefs with each teacher	Once in the fifth or sixth week	4
Weekly pieces of journals of each teacher	Three times First three weeks	12
Weekly written reflections of each teacher	Two times Fourth and fifth week	8
Final interview with each teacher	Once at the end of the data collection	4
Participant check of his/her case study	Once when the case was written	4

Table 3: Data collection activities

The case study was constructed using seven different methods, methods that were selected with the purpose of obtaining rich information about teachers' knowledge and beliefs, directly given and explained by the participant teachers as well as from observing their actual teaching practices in their occurring context. Combining observations with conversations and interviews is essential for increasing understanding since neither observation nor interviews offer a complete picture of teachers' performance (Breen et al., 2001). Moreover, in my opinion, each of these methods expands, explains or confirms the information obtained with the other research method.

DATA ANALYSIS

The development of case studies involves some significant challenges such as being able to manage the large amount of data that an in-depth study produces; identifying the interactions between the different dimensions of the case, and describing it in detail to illustrate its complexity (Creswell, 2007). Table 4 presents the main steps in the analysis of data in the construction of the case study

in the teaching of English as a foreign language. These steps did not follow a consecutive order, nor were most of them undertaken only once. They were rather steps in a cyclical process (Borg, 1998).

- Teachers' observed classes were recorded through field notes that were descriptions and interpretations of teachers' actions and teaching practices
- Conversations and interviews were recorded and transcribed
- Teachers' journals, field notes and transcriptions were intensively read
- Teachers' journals, field notes and transcriptions were codified
- The codified data was categorised
- Each participant's data was constantly analysed (within-case analysis)
- Cross-case analysis was continually developed
- A case study of 6000 to 7000-word length of each participant was constructed
- A participant check of his/her own case was asked
- A cross analysis of the four case studies was developed

Table 4. Data Analysis

To ensure the plausibility and reliability of the research findings, I developed four case studies simultaneously to conduct constant within-case analyses, as well as a cross-case analysis. I used a variety of data collection methods which not only helped to obtain rich data but also to triangulate the information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' knowledge

The teacher knowledge of the participant teachers, as exposed in teaching practices, is a unit where the several types of knowledge are interrelated and support each other (Johnston and Goetsch, 2000 and Tsui, 2003). The teachers' knowledge seems to be both received and experiential (Wallace, 1991) and tacit and explicit (Eraut, 2000, 2004). They have explicit knowledge of theoretical aspects such as cooperative language learning, meaningful learning, learners and teachers' roles, which are all issues that the teachers discussed. In addition, from teachers' performance and words, it could be inferred that they also had experiential or tacit knowledge that was developed from personally experienced events within relevant contexts. Moreover, the participant teachers emphasised that they had developed real understanding of many teaching aspects through their actual professional teaching practice. For instance, Pam became aware of the importance of checking instruction comprehension, and Karla realised the importance of varying the interaction pattern through their teaching experience. Karla explained:

When I was in the BA, I started practicing different interaction patterns. Then, when I became a teacher, I got like very conscious about it (using different interaction patterns), and said "This topic is perfect to work individually; This is ideal for small groups or pairs". So, I think, through experience, I mean I learnt in

the major how important it was, but I really became aware of that when I was like in action.

Paul and Keith stated that they knew about the theory of different teaching techniques when they were students of the BA in ELT; knowledge that could be regarded as received knowledge. However, both stressed to consider their teaching practice the main source of their learning.

Keith said:

I learnt a lot of things in the major, but I think that when I started learning was when I started teaching... so practicing, and you know, facing troubles everyday with the students.

Therefore, it could be said that teachers' knowledge has been largely developed from teaching experiences through a gradual acquisition of understandings.

This case study identified that the participant teachers' knowledge tended to support their teaching practice. However, they made little reference to knowledge developed during their BA in ELT studies that could be considered received knowledge, whereas, they assigned a significant role to their teaching experience in the construction of knowledge about teaching as explained above. This aspect suggests that there is a dialectical relation between teachers' knowledge and their practice that facilitate new understandings to become part of their knowledge; knowledge that supports their future teaching practices as Tsui's comparative research (2003) of four ESL novice-expert teachers, teaching in secondary schools in Hong Kong also illustrated.

This aspect also appears to emphasise the experiential knowledge of the participants, knowledge that is developed from personal and professional experiences (Bruner, 1985 cited in Johnston and Goetsch, 2000). Moreover, teachers' knowledge seems to be predominantly tacit. It must be inferred from teachers' behaviour (Eraut, 2000, 2004) because, in contrast to explicit knowledge that can be articulated, tacit knowledge is manifested (Lam, 2000). In addition, teachers' experiences appear to contribute to the development of beliefs that tend to influence teachers' performance (Phipps and Borg, 2009).

Teachers' beliefs

The teaching practices of the case study teachers appeared to be driven by a variety of beliefs that the case study teachers hold. Teachers' beliefs about teaching and subject matter seem to have a leading role in the actual implementation of their teaching practices (Dunkin, 2002; Hativa, 2002). The teachers' beliefs had various sources, however, their teaching and learning experiences appeared to be their main source. For instance, Karla designed activities that were like the ones she carried out when she was a language student because she considered that if those activities were helpful for her, they were going to be beneficial for her students. Paul also said that he played music while students worked because listening to music when he was a student helped him focus his attention on the activity. Moreover, Keith explained that he believed in self-correction because

students' learning increased when they identified their own mistakes. Keith considered himself to have learned about self-correction in his BA in ELT studies. However, he developed a belief in this technique through his teaching experience. In an interview on this issue, Keith said:

I totally believe in error correction, but that's because I learned that in the major, so I think that in the major I got it like the theoretical part and since I have noticed it works and, it's very important, I truly believe in that (CS3-c2).

Keith's words suggest that knowledge seems to be internalised and to have become a belief through successful practice (Breen, et al., 2001).

All the four teachers tend to trust in teaching techniques that have worked well for them. It seems that teachers start believing in certain teaching practices when they experience that they work and their successful experience feeds their belief (Guskey, 2002). Therefore, teaching experience is not only a source of knowledge but it is also a central source of teachers' beliefs (Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Senior, 2006). Pam explicitly stated that she had developed a belief in using information gap activities because she identified students practicing and remembering language items straightforwardly through these kinds of activities. In the case of Paul, using a variety of interaction patterns is a teaching practice that he not only daily exploits in his classes but also recommends. For Keith, drills and repetitions have worked well, thus he applies them most of the time. In the case of Karla, using information students physically know has been particularly successful, so she employs this type of information to contextualise her teaching activities. Moreover, Karla emphasised that teachers teach according to their beliefs:

Even if something is good, but I don't believe in that, I won't teach like that, so think, each teacher teaches according to his or her beliefs.

Consequently, it could be argued, as Phipps and Borg (2009) state, that teachers' beliefs are influenced by teachers' own experiences. Moreover, pedagogical beliefs and teaching practices influence each other in teachers' daily work (Breen et al., 2001). When core beliefs are firmly grounded in experience, they would exert most influence on teaching practices; while, peripheral beliefs may remain unimplemented ideals if they are not established through personal positive experience (Phipps and Borg, 2009). Personal and professional experiences appear to be central for embracing beliefs as seen in some of the teaching practices of Paul, Pam, Keith and Karla in the present case study.

Therefore, it could be also argued that teacher's knowledge and beliefs feed each other through teaching practices, and they become daily teaching activities or even, teaching habits that are not questioned anymore. It also appears that teachers' beliefs have a predominant role in their teaching since the teachers have stated using only the knowledge in which they believe. Nevertheless, identifying where knowledge ended and beliefs started was highly problematic (Pajares, 1992) because knowledge and beliefs tend to be interlinked (Borg, 2003).

Implications for Language Teacher Education

It could be argued that, during their BA in ELT studies, student teachers develop their teacher knowledge base at different degrees. However, commonly, this knowledge appears to be at the level of being informed about language teaching issues that later, through teaching practice, would be understood since the case study teachers considered professional experience as their main source of knowledge development. They acknowledged the BA in ELT as an important base for language teaching. Nevertheless, they underlined that through their professional practice, they developed a better understanding of issues seen in their BA studies. Therefore, it could be stated that teachers' knowledge is mostly developed from personal and professional experiences.

Awareness of the fundamental role of teaching experience in the construction of knowledge about teaching would be important in teacher education as noted by Korthagen (2010). Therefore, offering student-teachers opportunities of learning through teaching experiences is important for teacher education since these experiences contribute to the development of their knowledge. Consequently, it would be important to reach congruence and balance between theory and practice in the BA in ELT curriculum in Mexico in relation to time spent and manners of approaching the different contents of the BA in ELT programs to encourage teacher education to be, from its beginning, a construction of understanding rather than only a transmission of theoretical information. Nevertheless, the ELT curriculum as most of the university curricula in Mexico commonly has a modularised structure that tends to emphasise received knowledge and makes language student teachers obtain fragmented information.

Therefore, in agreement with researchers such as Johnstone and Goetsch (2000) and Korthagen (2010), I would suggest a more integrated approach to language teacher education that highlights the process-oriented nature of teacher knowledge; an approach that considers that knowledge is not transmitted but created, that learning is a collaborative construction of meaning, and that teachers' mediation is vital for students' learning. Additionally, I would not only suggest an approach to integrate the different teacher knowledge categories, but I would also propose an approach that acknowledges the interconnectedness of teachers' knowledge, beliefs and their teaching practices and the processes they involve because the present case study identified that it appears to be that:

- A better understanding of ELT theory is developed through teaching experiences.
- Teachers use only the knowledge in which they believe.
- Teachers hold a variety of beliefs that inform their teaching practices.
- Beliefs derived from personal learning and teaching experiences have a major influence in teaching practices.

The four cases have helped to illustrate that learning and teaching experiences enhance teachers' knowledge because they help teachers develop new understandings. Moreover, teaching practices are, at the same time, supported by the teacher's knowledge which is implemented into teaching practices according to the teacher's beliefs. The teachers' beliefs are also informed by the teaching

practice itself, as well as by the teacher's knowledge. Therefore, a continuous interactive relationship takes place as *Figure 1* represents.

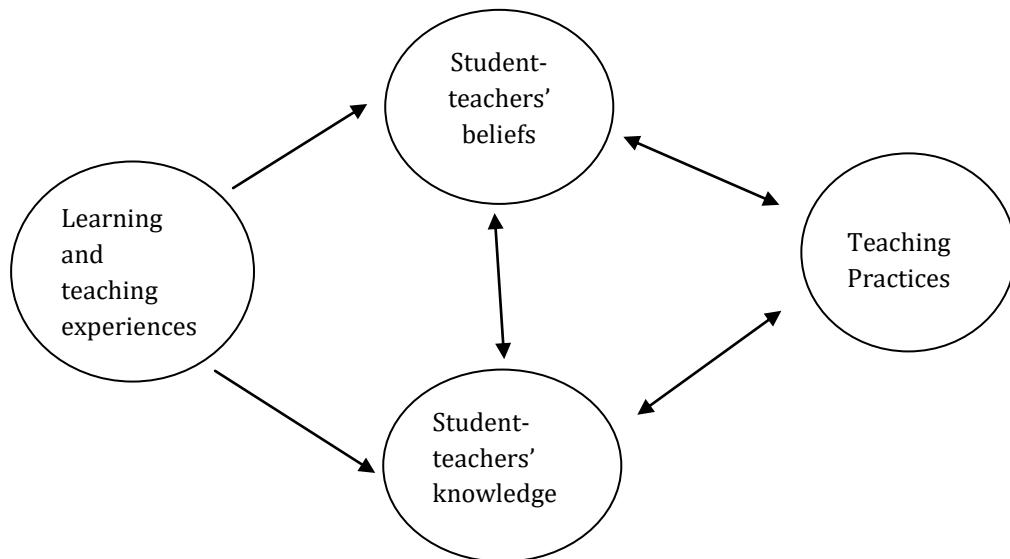


Figure 1: Teacher education model

Consequently, the language teacher education processes in Mexico could be enhanced through the awareness of the interconnected relation between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, teaching practices and their learning and teaching experiences. Learning and teaching experiences are an important source of teachers' knowledge and beliefs.

Therefore, it is important for the BA in ELT curriculum as well as for the language teacher educator to allocate opportunities for:

- Working on and raising awareness of the learning and teaching experiences of students-teachers as source of their beliefs and knowledge
- Working on and raising awareness of the interaction between students-teachers' beliefs and knowledge about language teaching.

The present case study illustrates that awareness of these aspects appears to be significant for the development of the education of teachers of English as a foreign language within the Mexican context.

Conclusion

The present case study has illustrated the significant role that personal and teaching experiences have in the development of knowledge and beliefs that shape teachers' teaching practices. Language teacher education processes could be enhanced not only through the awareness of the existence of a continuous interactive relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices but also of the importance of the development of teachers' experiential knowledge in the implementation of BA in ELT programs. Therefore, it is important to modify the BA in ELT curriculums, as well as to reconceptualise language teacher education to support future

language teachers to construct the knowledge they require for language teaching by providing them with experiences from which this knowledge can be developed. It could be said that transforming teaching into students' learning –considering the key role that teaching experiences play in the development of teacher's knowledge and beliefs-- appears to be an essential mission for teacher educators.

REFERENCES

- Andon, N. (2009), *What roles do theory and research play in language teaching: A case study on the task base approach in language teaching*, unpublished PhD thesis, King's College London.
- ANUIES (2012), Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior, Catálogo de Carreras de Licenciatura y Posgrado, http://www.anuies.mx/servicios/c_licenciatura/index2.php Accessed 4, February 2013.
- Borg, S. (1998), *Teachers' Pedagogical Systems and Grammar Teaching: A qualitative study*, TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 32, No. 1, Spring 1998.
- Borg, S. (2003), *Teacher Cognition in Language Teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do*, (United Kingdom: CUP).
- Breen, M., Hird, B., Milton, M., Oliver, R. and Thwaite, A. (2001), Making Sense of Language Teaching: Teachers' principles and classroom practices. *Applied Linguistics* 22/4: 470-501 OUP.
- Cresswell, J. (2007), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research design: Choosing among five approaches*, (Second edition) (USA: SAGE Publications Inc.).
- Da Silva, H. (2008), *La Investigación-acción y la Formación Teórico-crítica del Docente de Lenguas Extranjeras*. (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México).
- Díaz Maggioli, G. (2012), *Teaching Language Teachers: Scaffolding Professional Learning*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield).
- Dunkin, M. (2002), Novice and Award-winning Teachers' Concepts and Beliefs in N. Hativa (Ed.), *Teacher Thinking and Knowledge in Higher Education*, (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers).
- Eraut, M. (2000), Non-formal Learning and Tacit Knowledge in the Workplace, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70, 113–136.
- Eraut, M. (2004), Informal Learning in the Workplace, *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 247-273.
- Freeman, D. (1996), Redefining the Relationship between Research and what Teachers Know in K. Bailey and D.
- Nunan (Eds.), *Voices from the Language Classroom*, (USA: CUP).
- Guskey, T. (2002). Professional Development and Teacher Change. *Teacher and Teaching: theory and practice*. Vol. 8 Number 3/4.
- Hativa, N. (2002), Becoming a Better Teacher: A case of changing the pedagogical knowledge and beliefs of Law professors in N. Hativa and P. Goodyear (Eds.), *Teacher Thinking, Beliefs and Knowledge in Higher Education*, (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers).

- Johnston, B. and Goetsch, K. (2000), In Search of the Knowledge Base of Language Teaching. *The Canadian Modern Language Review* 56 (3) 437-468.
- Kakabadase, N., Kouzmin, A. and A. Kakabadase, (2001), From Tacit Knowledge to Knowledge Management, *Knowledge and Process Management* Volume 8, No. 3 pp. 137–154, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Korthagen, F. (2010), Situated Learning Theory and Pedagogy on Teacher Education: Towards an integrative view of teaching behaviour and learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education Journal* 26 (2010) 98-106
- Lantolf, J. and Thorne, S. (2006), *Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development*, (China: OUP).
- Nunan, D. (2004), *Task-Based Language Teaching*, (United Kingdom: CUP).
- Pajares, M. F. (1992), Teachers' Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning Up a Messing Construct. *Review of Educational Research*: Fall 1992, Vol. 62, No. 3, pp. 307-332.
- Phipps, S. and Borg, S. (2009), *Exploring Tensions between Teachers' Grammar Teaching Beliefs and Practices*. Elsevier Ltd. www.sciencedirect.com
- Randall, M. and Thornton, B. (2001), *Advising and Supporting Teachers*, (United Kingdom: CUP).
- Richards, J. (2008), Second Language Teacher Education Today, *RELC Journal*, 39:158.
- Richards, J. and Lockhart, Ch. (1996), *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*, USA: CUP. (9th printing, 2002).
- Richards, J. and Rodgers, T. (2001), *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, (Second edition) (USA: CUP).
- Senior, R. (2006), *The Experience of Language Teaching*, (United Kingdom: CUP).
- Shulman, L. (2004), *The Wisdom of Practice*, (USA: Jossey-Bass).
- Stake, R. (1995), *The Art of Case Study Research*, (USA: SAGE Publications, Inc).
- Tsui, A. (2003), *Understanding Expertise in Teaching*, (USA: CUP).
- Turner-Bisset, R. (2001), *Expert Teaching*, (Great Britain: David Fulton Publishers Ltd).
- Wallace, M. (1991), *Training Foreign Language Teachers: A reflective approach*, (United Kingdom: CUP). Widdowson, H. (1978), *Teaching Language as Communication*. (Oxford: OUP).