

## Emotions Attributions of ELT Pre-Service Teachers and Their Effects on Teaching Practice

Atribuciones de las emociones de los profesores de inglés en formación  
y sus efectos en el desarrollo profesional

**Mariza G. Méndez López\***

Universidad Veracruzana, Veracruz, Mexico

This article presents the results of a qualitative study which aimed to develop an understanding of the emotions experienced by pre-service English language teachers during their teaching practicum and the emotions' effects on instructional teaching. Attribution theory was used as a framework for analysing the results, while the data were gathered through classroom observation, reflection journals, and semi-structured interviews. Results revealed a need for language teaching programmes to include classroom management strategies; however, there is also evidence of the urgent need for socio-emotional support to be provided to pre-service teachers to help them shape their teaching practice through reflection. Providing a space for pre-service teachers to reflect on their beliefs and discuss the emotions experienced during practicum may help to instil commitment and responsibility in future teachers.

*Key words:* Attributions, emotions, English language teaching, pre-service teachers, teaching practice.

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio cualitativo cuyo propósito fue entender las emociones experimentadas por futuros maestros de inglés durante su práctica docente y los efectos de éstas en su enseñanza. La teoría de atribución se utilizó como marco para el análisis de resultados. Los datos se recopilaron a través de observaciones de clases, diarios de reflexión y entrevistas semi-estructuradas. Los resultados revelaron la necesidad de que los programas de prácticas docentes incluyan estrategias para el manejo de clases. Sin embargo, también hay evidencia de la necesidad urgente de proporcionar apoyo socioemocional a los estudiantes para que puedan moldear su práctica docente a través de la reflexión. Al proporcionar un espacio para que los maestros en formación reflexionen sobre sus creencias y discutan las emociones experimentadas durante su práctica docente, se puede ayudar a inculcar el compromiso y la responsabilidad en futuros maestros.

*Palabras clave:* atribuciones, emociones, enseñanza de inglés, maestros en formación, práctica docente.

---

\* E-mail: [marimendez@uv.mx](mailto:marimendez@uv.mx)

How to cite this article (APA, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.): Méndez López, M. G. (2020). Emotions attributions of ELT pre-service teachers and their effects on teaching practice. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 22(1), 15-28. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v22n1.78613>.

This article was received on March 21, 2019 and accepted on October 15, 2019.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons license Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. Consultation is possible at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

## Introduction

The role of emotions in language learning and teaching has gained importance in the last decades through studies aiming to understand the role played by emotions in learning to teach (Golombek & Doran, 2014), teachers' burn out (Vaezi & Fallah, 2011), self-efficacy (Wyatt, 2018), and language learning motivation (Méndez López, 2016a), among other variables.

In the Mexican context, research on emotions has been developed about the emotional experiences of language learners on their motivation (Méndez López, 2011b), emotions experienced by English language teaching (ELT) students (Méndez López, 2015a, 2015b), and the emotions of experienced ELT teachers about the implementation of educational policies and their working conditions (Méndez López, 2016b). Although there has been progress in the understanding of the role played by emotions on these aspects, very few studies have addressed the emotions experienced by pre-service ELT teachers during the final year of their degree programme, in which they have to complete a practicum period teaching students at different levels. Therefore, research on the emotions attributions of pre-service teachers during practicum is needed.

In Mexico, where Spanish is the official language and English as a foreign language is a compulsory subject beginning with elementary school, the students tend to exhibit certain reluctance to learning the latter. In addition, some students who enrol in ELT programmes do not have the calling for teaching (Méndez López & Fabela Cárdenas, 2014). Such lack of motivation, stemming from previous scholastic experiences or from an absence of vocation, may affect the performance of pre-service teachers during their practicum, originating diverse emotions in them. Besides, factors such as the lack of resources and materials, number of students per class, and the lack of appropriate conditions in schools have been highlighted as affecting the teaching of English in Mexico (Ramírez Romero, Olave Moreno, & Villalobos, 2015).

This article presents the results of a qualitative study researching both the emotions Mexican pre-service ELT teachers experience during their practicum and the attributions they give to them. The emotions originated from the interactions of pre-service teachers with students, materials, and supervisors are analysed in order to understand to what they attribute those emotions and the effect of those emotions on their teaching practice, if any.

## Literature Review

### Emotions of English Language Teachers

Emotions are individually experienced by teachers (Hargreaves, 2001; Zembylas, 2005) and are social constructions mediated by their interactions with educational policies, authorities, colleagues, parents, and students (Nguyen, 2018). Although teachers' experience of an emotion is unique, this experience is shaped by the context in which it happens. Thus, the contexts in which emotions are experienced are important to understand not only the emotion itself, but also the reaction and behaviour after it.

Various studies have explored the diverse range of emotions experienced by teachers (Golombek & Doran, 2014; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) with some finding that the three emotions most frequently reported by teachers are enjoyment, anxiety, and anger (Chang, 2013; Frenzel, Becker-Kurz, Pekrun, & Goetz, 2015). Emotions have been revealed as having positive and negative effects on students and teachers as well (Méndez López, 2017; Méndez López & Peña Aguilar, 2013). Regarding pre-service teachers, whose lack of experience may be seen as an additional source of emotions, some have been willing to improve their teaching practice thanks to the emotions originated in interactions with their students, colleagues, or institutional authorities. However, the same situations have made other pre-service teachers feel angry and frustrated. Pre-service teachers who do

not regulate these negative emotions develop stress that is damaging for their teaching practice.

Pre-service teachers are prone to experiencing both positive (enthusiasm, satisfaction, happiness, etc.) and negative (anxiety, anger, frustration, etc.) emotions during their teaching practicum due to the new experiences with which they are confronted (Martínez Agudo & Azzaro, 2018). Beliefs also play an important role in pre-service teachers' emotional experiences since beliefs influence teaching (Borko, Davinroy, Bliem, & Cumbo, 2000). During practicum, pre-service teachers may have conflicting beliefs about some teaching practices they are asked to perform by their supervisors and because of this belief mismatch, they can develop anxiety and stress as reported in Nguyen's (2018) study.

Different studies have reported that positive emotions emerge in interactions with students (Cowie, 2011; Gkonou & Miller, 2017; Méndez López, 2017; Nguyen, 2014). The establishment of positive interpersonal relationships with students is regarded as an important factor, not just for students' learning but also for teachers' emotional well-being (Mercer, Oberdorfer, & Saleem, 2016).

Negative emotions are usually experienced by pre-service teachers because of students' poor participation, passiveness, noisiness, lack of motivation, and tiredness among other aspects (Nguyen, 2018). Although Gu and Day (2007) found that pre-service teachers with a teaching vocation are more resilient to negative experiences, negative emotions are also experienced by pre-service teachers who have the calling for teaching (Arizmendi Tejeda et al., 2016). Nevertheless, pre-service teachers with a vocation tend to see negative emotions in an optimistic way, which prevent them from losing energy and motivation (Cross & Hong, 2012). This is an important finding for countries such as Mexico in which the access to university is limited (Méndez López & Fabela Cárdenas, 2014). Some students without the calling for teaching decide to enrol in ELT programmes because access is less difficult, or because their families cannot

afford for them to study their dream career in a different city. Thus, this lack of vocation may affect pre-service teachers' emotional experiences and consequently their motivation, responsibility, and commitment.

Furlong and Maynard (1995, pp. 73-98) identify five stages which novice teachers undergo: (1) early idealism, (2) survival, (3) recognising difficulties, (4) reaching a plateau, and (5) moving on. At the beginning of their career, novice teachers may have idealistic feelings and images of themselves. While they are primarily concerned with the application of the knowledge they have learnt in previous years, the demands of their new job can be a shock, as teaching is not simply a question of designing materials or applying a method or an approach. The same may happen to pre-service teachers during practicum since they may face difficult situations they may not be prepared for. It is important then, to provide them with the appropriate support so they can gain confidence not only on their teaching skills but also in other areas. Thus, it is important to provide pre-service teachers with sufficient assistance in order to minimise the effects of unfavourable experiences (Mercer et al., 2016).

According to Sutton and Wheatley (2003), teachers who experience positive emotions in the classroom are more likely to generate new ideas and strategies to help them better solve or cope with problems. However, it seems that the diversity of experiences that novice teachers face is more likely to produce negative emotions than positive ones. Britzman (2007), states that novice teachers' negative emotions are a result of their lack of confidence, meaning that pre-service teachers may be more prone to experience negative emotions that may negatively influence their teaching practice. In some cases, the frequent occurrence of negative emotions can encourage pre-service teachers to leave the profession, which has been reported in studies from all over the world (Hong, 2010).

Designing teacher education programmes based on knowledge of the range of emotions experienced

by pre-service teachers and an understanding of the meaning they ascribe to them can help to minimise their negative effects on future teaching practice (Mercer et al., 2016). Pre-service teachers need to be provided with a space in which they can undergo teaching experiences illustrative of the tribulations they may experience throughout their teaching career. They must also be given the tools and resources with which to overcome those experiences (Nguyen, 2018). As Furlong and Maynard (1995) state, the development of concepts such as identity enables pre-service teachers to “gain control over their own teaching” (p. 73). It is paramount, then, that they are provided a space in which to reflect on their beliefs and emotions, enabling them to begin to understand themselves better as future professionals.

### Previous Studies

Two studies focused on Mexican pre-service teachers were analysed. Arizmendi Tejeda, Gillings de González, and López Martínez (2016) investigated if novice teachers used strategies to regulate the negative emotions experienced during practicum. They used observations and semi-structured interviews to collect data. Results showed that participants used preventative and responsive emotional regulation strategies such as selecting situations and modifying their emotional expression. These authors found that pre-service teachers were influenced by their image and self-confidence when selecting a teaching level so as not to feel challenged or threatened. They also concluded that pre-service teachers did not use other regulation strategies, such as emotional understanding or masking their emotions, because they needed to be trained on how to apply these. Finally, they emphasised that a component about the emotions involved in teaching a foreign language should be included in ELT programmes so pre-service teachers can be better prepared when teaching.

Ocampo Martínez (2017) conducted a study to identify the emotions experienced by first-year English teachers during their first year teaching and what

caused those emotions. With the use of semi-structured interviews done at three different moments in their teaching practice during a period of six months, the researcher found that first-year English teachers’ positive and negative emotions originated in their interactions with students, administrative duties, and the lack of classroom management skills. Interaction with students and administrative duties made them feel anger, frustration, and nervousness but also joy, confidence, and motivation. Whereas the emotions experienced because of the lack of classroom skills were negative, participants expressed they were positive at the end of the school year because these emotions allowed them to look for strategies to reverse difficult situations, such as talking to colleagues and previous teachers about ideas to control children. These studies show that a small but growing body of research on how Mexican teachers of English experience their work emotionally is being developed.

### Attribution Theory

Attribution theory assumes that “humans are motivated to know why an event has occurred (Weiner, 1980, p. 276). Thus, people usually attribute to someone or something the cause of a specific event or situation. The present study focuses on the attribution awareness process pre-service teachers go through when reflecting on their teaching performance during their practicum.

According to Weiner (1980, p. 393), “the most salient causal inferences are ability and effort, but many other factors are also influential”. Among the properties identified by Weiner for causal inferences are stability, locus, and controllability. Thus, people can attribute success or failure to stable or unstable causes and to internal or external forces. All these shape our attributions and the way we carry out future activities. For example, pre-service teachers can attribute their lack of teaching skills to their lack of vocation (a stable cause) or to an incomplete instruction received in an ELT programme (an unstable cause). Finally, causes can

be controllable or uncontrollable, which refers to the power we have to either control or not control certain factors in order to make them work to our benefit. For instance, if pre-service teachers attribute their lack of teaching skills to their lack of vocation, they will believe that no matter how many courses or how much training they take, they will not improve. However, if they attribute their lack of teaching skills to incomplete training, they will have the option to enrol in training courses to improve.

Weiner (1980) suggests that:

Reaching causal inferences, that is, deciding why one succeeds or fails, requires various sources of information to be utilized and combined. Some of this information will originate from the current situation, while other evidence is gleaned from memories of past events. (p. 329)

Although attribution theory was developed to interpret human behaviour (Weiner, 1992), its broad analytical lens has been applied to the analysis of students' performances in different subjects, such as mathematics (Baştürk & Yavuz, 2010) and technology (Maymon, Hall, Goetz, Chiarella, & Rahimi, 2018). The present study uses attribution theory to understand pre-service teachers' causal inferences about their teaching performances during practicum in the final year of their undergraduate ELT degree programme.

The present study is grounded in the attributions pre-service teachers make about the emotions originated during their teaching practice and the actions taken by them after reflecting on those emotions and their causal inferences. Pre-service teachers' attributions can shape not only their future teaching performances but also their professional development. For instance, if pre-service teachers consider that their undeveloped teaching skills caused some negative emotions to arise during teaching practice, they will enrol in training courses in order to acquire or develop those skills. However, if pre-service teachers consider that the sources of negative emotions are stable

(national educational policies, restrictions imposed by institutional authorities on the implementation of new ideas, the demands of the students' parents, etc.), and that they can do nothing to change that, they may leave the teaching profession, feel less motivated to continue trying new techniques, or they may develop resilience to deal with these negative situations. Thus, pre-service teachers' professional development is shaped by the outcomes of past events, by means of their awareness of the causes for the success or failure of teaching strategies in the present.

The attribution awareness process "is what moves us to pursue a specific course of action for new or future activities, or to stop doing certain things because we consider that we do not have the capacity to do them" (Méndez López, 2011a, p. 90). It is important to note that these attributions are subjective, as they are formed based on our experience of and reflection on past and current events. The present study links this attribution awareness to our beliefs. If, as teachers, we believe that someone or some external factor is the cause of our failure or success in language teaching (e.g., the students, the materials we are working with, classroom activities, the focus of the syllabus), our motivational intelligence will provide us with strategies to overcome such barriers in the event of failure. Thus, pre-service teachers' personal assumptions are the determinant factors behind action or inaction, with any actions taken resulting from their inferences about particular teaching situations. Understanding the actions taken by pre-service teachers after they have identified the cause of a particular situation can help teacher trainers to design activities that will enhance the teaching practice of the former.

## Method

In order to understand the emotions experienced by pre-service teachers during their practicum, it was necessary to provide a detailed account of their views and describe the context in which said emotions

originated. A qualitative approach was selected as the most suitable for the purpose of this research, as it was thought to facilitate a better understanding of the emotions experienced during practicum and the attributions given to these by pre-service teachers.

The following research questions were formulated for the present study:

1. What emotions do pre-service English language teachers experience during their teaching practicum?
2. What were these emotions attributed to?

### Setting

The setting of the study was a university in a city in the southeast of Mexico. The final year of the undergraduate ELT programme requires that pre-service teachers take two courses, *Práctica Docente I* (Teaching Practice I) and *Práctica Docente II* (Teaching Practice II), in which they must complete two teaching placements. Involving teaching children, adolescents, or adults in state educational institutions, these placements provide pre-service teachers with experience in teaching different ages and levels, which are beneficial for their future teaching practice and may lead to job opportunities.

### Participants

The present study was conducted in 2015 with pre-service English language teachers from the undergraduate ELT degree programme at a south eastern Mexican university. The participants were fifteen pre-service teachers, eight female and seven male, whose ages ranged between 20 and 23 and who, during the study period, were teaching for the first time. The university assigned pre-service teachers to educational institutions in the city, where they taught for a period of between 8 and 12 weeks for an average of three hours per week, with some lessons designed in pairs and some individually. Journal entries describing their teaching performances and the emotions they experienced therein were written individually.

### Data Elicitation Procedures

Data were collected via classroom observation, pre-service teachers' reflection journals, and semi-structured interviews. Pre-service teachers were asked to write reflectively about their teaching sessions and describe the emotions they experienced during them. While the researcher did not specify a style, the pre-service teachers were asked to write a maximum of three pages per week as soon as possible after each teaching session and were provided with the following general guiding questions: (1) What emotions did you feel in your teaching practice? (2) To whom or what do you attribute those emotions? (3) What situations would you say caused those emotions? (4) What do you do about those emotions?

Semi-structured interviews were used at the end of the study period to clarify some of the issues expressed in the journal entries. The meanings the pre-service teachers gave to emotions and the situations in which they arose can only be understood through the lenses of their experiences. In addition, the researcher observed the participants twice during their teaching practicum, with the objective of understanding the context in which the emotions were experienced in order to aid the interpretation of the findings.

### Data Analysis

By the end of the study, 118 teaching journals entries had been collected, 15 semi-structured interviews conducted, and 30 practicum teaching sessions observed. The data set was analysed using content analysis, a method providing an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to data analysis (Patton, 1987). The data set was analysed in line with conventional content analysis in which "coding categories are derived directly from the text data" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1277). Moreover, manifest analysis was undertaken, in which descriptions of what participants said were presented using their own words (Bengtsson, 2016). Pseudonyms of pre-service teachers are used throughout the article to protect their identity.

## Results

Pre-service teachers experienced positive and negative emotions during their practicum. The most frequent positive emotions experienced were joy, happiness, and satisfaction and the most frequent negative emotions were despair, insecurity, frustration, worry, and stress. These emotions were attributed to three major themes: (a) Students' Behaviour and Attitudes, (b) Undeveloped Teaching Skills, and (c) Beliefs About Teaching and Learning. Although there was some overlap among the responses in each theme (e.g., between Theme A and Theme B, with some pre-service teachers attributing the indiscipline of their students to their own undeveloped teaching skills), each theme is presented separately here to aid understanding and clarity.

### Students' Behaviour and Attitudes

Most participants worked with children and adolescents and attributed negative emotions to students' undisciplined classroom behaviour and attitudes. Negative emotions attributed to students related to undisciplined classroom behaviour and a lack of motivation, while positive emotions were attributed to the level of student engagement, namely their interest and participation in class activities.

#### Attributions of Negative Emotions

Most pre-service teachers were overwhelmed by the students' undisciplined classroom behaviour and lack of interest in their classes, as some participants describe below:

It makes me feel frustrated that while some kids have shown improvement, others just study for the exam and then forget about what they have learned. I have tried to give them as much attention and help as possible, but it is not working. (Juan, Journal, Week 8) Then, students came back after the break, but they were a little impolite and showed no interest in the class. My peers and I realized how difficult it is to work with teenagers. Even if you create fun activities, they do not want to participate. (Patty, Journal, Week 6)

Having unmotivated and undisciplined students also affects pre-service and novice teachers' confidence and self-efficacy. Although some of the pre-service teachers participating in the present research described having difficulty interacting with students during class (for such reasons as a lack of familiarity, their lack of experience, or the students' response to their activities or classes), others described having no problem establishing a positive relationship with students. As one participant describes:

I know my students of third grade are rebellious, mischievous, and dynamic but as I have been saying in all my journal reflections...this is due to their age. Nevertheless, the more patient and tolerant the teacher is, the more effective the classes are. I really like giving my classes to them, and of course, I am going to miss them. (Angela, Journal, Week 6)

Furthermore, these negative emotions may be regarded as experiences pre-service teachers needed to go through or had to face in order to gain confidence and experience. As one participant expressed:

This situation [referring to a discipline event she had to face which involved the principal and a student's mother] was something I had not thought about when wanting to be a teacher. I had always thought in this profession as positive and full of nice moments... This was like a reality shock for me. It is not just me and the students... (a silent moment) it is not easy, but I think this kind of situations are the ones that can help you to be more experienced and secure. I hope that. (Luna, Interview)

Although Luna experienced negative emotions because of the behaviour of a student in class, she saw this experience as positive for their future performance as a professional. She also realized that being a teacher implied interactions with students' parents and she needed to be prepared for these situations in the future.

#### Attributions of Positive Emotions

Although participating pre-service teachers did experience negative emotions, they also described

positive ones, which functioned as scaffolding to help them endure and overcome negative emotions during their practicum. Most positive emotions were attributed to the students' active performance. As one pre-service teacher (Mary) wrote, "I was surprised that almost everybody followed the instructions correctly", while another (Ana) commented, "I was shocked to see that all children did an excellent job answering questions". Another pre-service teacher who had expressed some difficulties at the beginning of his teaching practicum stated that:

The experience of working with kids this semester was good because I could learn how kids learn better. Also, I could experience problems a teacher face with students of this age. This made me look for strategies to manage kids, I learnt some persuasion and control techniques that will help me in my career as a teacher. (Sergio, Journal, Week 8)

Thus, by finding ways to control students, Sergio was not only constructing his teacher identity, as he wanted to be seen as a teacher able to control his classroom, but also boosting his teaching practice by increasing his confidence and feelings of self-efficacy.

The literature on emotions reports that teachers' positive emotions are mainly caused by their interaction with students (Cowie, 2011; Méndez López, 2017). Participants of this study worked with children and adolescents; working with students of these ages requires a great deal of professional and personal commitment, to not only designing materials and activities suitable for students but also to showing a real interest in them as people.

As stated by Arizmendi Tejada et al. (2016), pre-service teachers who embrace teaching as a vocation tend to enjoy teaching, but this does not prevent them from experiencing negative emotions, which may affect their motivation (p. 40). In this study, having students who participated and showed interest in the activities designed for them motivated pre-service teachers to continue working. This finding concurs with Nguyen's

(2014) study which found that student engagement in class is a predictor of pre-service teachers' positive emotions and sense of fulfilment. This is an important aspect to consider, as classroom management and the forming of positive interpersonal relationships with students are regarded as important factors, not just for students' learning but also for teachers' emotional well-being (Mercer et al., 2016).

### Undeveloped Teaching Skills

Most pre-service teachers described realising that being in front of a group was not as easy as they had envisaged, enduring despair, insecurity, stress, worry, and frustration because of difficult classroom situations. The main difficulties reported by participants in this study were a lack of techniques for introducing a specific topic and a lack of strategies for disciplining students, as well as unmotivated learners and unforeseen problems during class. However, most pre-service teachers emphasized that the indiscipline of the children and teenagers in their classroom was their main concern during practicum.

#### Attributions to Undeveloped Teaching Skills

Most participants described how they possessed undeveloped teaching skills, which some of them attributed to their lack of commitment to the profession, stating that they did not really want to major in English language teaching. An important aspect to be considered when analysing the different emotions or feelings expressed by pre-service teachers is their sense of vocation or calling for teaching. As a lack of financial resources sometimes limits access to Mexican universities, students often find themselves enrolled in a degree programme very different to what they had envisaged. This can affect their motivation to teach, as expressed by one participant:

This week few students arrived to class. I felt sad because I thought that it was because they did not like the way I give the class. That makes me feel bad because I know it is my fault because I am a bad teacher. This major was not my first choice...is discouraging. I do

not really want to teach in the future. I want to work in tourism in Cancún or Playa del Carmen. (Tony, Journal, Week 4)

This lack of vocation is likely to become strongly evident when the pre-service teachers face their first teaching experiences, generating intense emotions that may cause them to lose the desire to teach completely. The pre-service teachers without a sense of vocation for teaching seemed to display more emotional intensity in response to the negative events they faced during their practicum which, thus, affected their motivation.

This week, discipline was a problem because when I arrived the kids were playing on the playground so when I started the class they were anxious and distracted. I found it very difficult to control them. (Gaby, Journal, Week 4)

Something I need to improve is child management. I have had moments in which I do not know what to do. I feel lost. (Sergio, Journal, Week 6)

These classroom events affected not only their motivation but also their confidence as teachers. Some realised they lacked strategies for teaching children, while others had to adjust their teaching practice to students with diverse learning needs.

Something caught my attention and I was shocked when I discovered that this special little girl was not able to speak or hear. I was worried about her because I did not know how to deal with that; I did not want to exclude her from class activities because of her physical limitations. (Reyna, Journal, Week 1)

I noticed that I have three students who are hyperactive and distract others. I have to think about a proper strategy to solve this. I did not get training for this type of students. (Jair, Journal, Week 2)

As we can see from the references above, the pre-service teachers' identities were being constructed through and shaped by their experiences in their incipient professional lives. Although these situations were difficult, they helped the pre-service teachers' teaching practice, as they were forced to consult their supervisors for ideas or approaches for fulfilling their students' needs.

The pre-service teachers not only asked their peers for advice or sought suggestions from more experienced teachers, but some also decided to enrol in further courses in order to better attend to their students' needs in their future practice. Thus, participants realised the necessity of developing specific skills for responding to their students' needs and interests and managing their classrooms more naturally.

I think that during this practicum, I improved my teaching skills because I improved on how to establish discipline to control the group. I consider myself more prepared to teach kids. I love to teach them but I am aware that I need more experience in other levels to develop certain skills. Teaching practice and some specific courses can help me to continue improving. (Reyna, Journal, Week 8)

Today was the last day of classes and I am happy because I have improved the way I give instructions, and the way I present some grammar rules. I feel more confident than before doing the practicum. This was a positive experience for me and I am not afraid of teaching teenagers anymore. I know that it is not easy but I am willing to be more prepared to face the diverse situations I am going to cope with in the future. (Juliana, Reflection Journal, Week 8)

Some participants expressed that they found teaching students at different levels burdensome, due to the fact that they did not really want to teach at all. They had enrolled in the course solely because it is a graduation requirement for the ELT undergraduate degree, with the expectation of subsequently finding work in tourism in the northern part of the state. This affected their teaching practice, as it meant they showed no disposition to improve.

Other participants, in contrast, found the practicum experience positive and gained confidence from noticing how basic their teaching skills were, in that they realized they just needed more practice and training. These students also showed evidence of their developing skills as language teachers, with some expressing the need to be trained to deal with special needs students and children.

Teaching those kids was an amazing experience. I was nervous and afraid at the beginning but I had a great time. I also realised

that I need to be informed in all the aspects related to teaching children in order to facilitate the acquisition of English because some children have special needs. (Diana, Interview)

Although, pre-service teachers with a strong inclination for teaching have been found to be more committed and resilient (Gu & Day, 2007), they are not excluded from feeling negative emotions. Most participants of this study did not express having a vocation for teaching which may have influenced the frequent experience of negative emotions due to their undeveloped teaching skills. Thus, the pre-service teachers' beliefs were hindering the improvement of their teaching skills, as they attributed their negative experiences to their lack of teaching abilities without intention or energy placed on improving these (Weiner, 1992).

On the other hand, when teachers have a calling for the profession, it has been found that they will regard negative experiences optimistically, thus benefitting their levels of energy and motivation (Cross & Hong, 2012). In this study, some participants that regarded negative experiences as events they had to go through also expressed this optimistic view.

As described by Nguyen (2018), pre-service teachers may experience different negative situations such as students' poor participation, passiveness, noisiness, uncooperative attitude and impoliteness, lack of motivation, and tiredness that can cause emotional crises. Participants of this study experienced some of the same situations that caused different emotions to emerge. Pre-service teachers expressed the need for more training in some aspects of classroom management, which is supported by studies done in the Mexican ELT context that have highlighted the neglect of classroom management skills for teaching children and adolescents (maintaining order, managing student behaviour, and overcoming unexpected events) (Ramirez Romero et al., 2015). In addition, pre-service teachers must be trained in socio-emotional competence, as it is a paramount skill for their teaching practice (Mercer et al., 2016). Thus, it

is important to dedicate space in ELT programmes not only for training in classroom management skills but also in socio-emotional skills so pre-service teachers will graduate as better-qualified professionals.

### Beliefs About Teaching and Learning

The pre-service teachers expressed their beliefs about teaching and learning in reflective journal entries. These beliefs could be the result of previous school experiences or the influence of a teacher they considered either good or not good, or one who provided them with positive experiences during their learning process.

The pre-service teachers participating in the present research expressed their belief that a teacher can play different roles in relation to their students. Rather than being simply a teacher who presents information and guides students in the construction of new knowledge, some teachers believe that they also must be a moral guide. Some of the pre-service teachers expressed concern about not only language content but also their students' more profound needs. Nancy expressed this as follows:

What I really want to do is to teach differently, not in the same traditional and boring way all teachers do. I want to go beyond that. I want to show students that I care for them not just for their learning but also for them as human beings. I want to teach values and things students can use for their life. (Nancy, Journal, Week 3)

Pre-service teachers also state that teachers need to be aware of their students' feelings to ensure that they are comfortable, patient, and tolerant. These beliefs are in line with the tenets of *humanistic language teaching*, an approach that places great importance on the development of students as human beings while at the same time developing language skills.

Moskowitz (1978) states that humanistic education's main concern is "educating the whole person—the intellectual and the emotional dimensions" (p. 11). For some participants in the present study, providing learners with a secure environment, in which they do

not feel intimidated when expressing their opinions, is paramount. Pre-service teachers expressed the idea that, to be considered good professionals, teachers needed to take their students' feelings into account and demonstrate patience, tolerance, and humour. Thus, some participants in this study show how they were constructing their identity as English language teachers from the meaning they made of the different positive and negative situations they encountered during their practicum. Although the task of helping students reflect on their identity is not included in most ELT programmes in Mexico, it is vital that students in the last year of their studies become emotionally prepared to endure the demands of teaching.

Pre-service teachers expressed beliefs about being good teachers. They expressed the idea that, to be considered good professionals, teachers needed to consider feelings and demonstrate patience, tolerance, and humour. This is in line with results of studies done in the Mexican context (Méndez López, 2011b, 2015b).

The literature on attribution reveals that students with fixed ability beliefs usually attribute their success or failure to an innate ability or talent (Weiner, 1992). Pre-service teachers may extrapolate this to teaching, believing that they will never improve their teaching skills no matter how many training courses they take. This can make the practicum period a difficult one, not only for pre-service teachers but also for supervisors, who may find themselves overseeing reticent and closed-minded pre-service teachers. Thus, it is important for supervisors and trainers to help pre-service teachers shape these beliefs so they can improve their teaching skills.

### **Conclusion**

This article explores the emotions experienced by pre-service teachers during their practicum period in order to understand the influence they have on their teaching practice. Results show that pre-service teachers experience positive and negative experiences; however, negative emotions predominated during the practicum

period. Participants in the study were reacting to the *reality shock* of the classroom and felt overwhelmed by its complexity. Thus, both their idealized images of being a teacher and the survival strategies they were forced to employ were at play when recognizing the difficulties they faced. This is understandable due to the idealism of pre-service teachers at the beginning of their teaching career (Furlong & Maynard, 1995). The situations they experienced helped the future teachers understand the complexities of the teaching profession. Thus, some of their ideals had to be readjusted in order for them to adapt better to the particular contexts in which they were teaching. This process of adaptation also helped them to reshape their incipient identities as language teachers, which, as shown by their reflective journal entries, the pre-service teachers were constructing from the meaning they made of their emotions and experiences during practicum. This adaptation period also showed how the pre-service teachers' previous experiences affected their current experiences and teaching practice. Those pre-service teachers participating in the present study that showed a strong desire to be teachers expressed a positive attitude towards negative experiences. On the other hand, those pre-service teachers enrolled in the teaching major for other reasons expressed negative emotions more intensely, which affected their classroom performances. This indicates that pre-service teachers' supervisors should be careful when working with students that state that they have no vocation for teaching, as they may be more prone to experiencing negative emotions, perceiving only the negative aspects of any classroom situation and, consequently, not being open to receiving appropriate support from peers or advice from supervisors.

The attributions pre-service teachers give to their emotions are important since, by knowing those, supervisors can help them modify those through reflection. In this study, reflecting on their journal entries helped pre-service teachers to realize that some strategies may have not worked because the context in

which they were teaching was not the same as that in which they were taught. Journal writing helped them to identify their strengths and weaknesses as teachers. Given that resilience and commitment have been identified as two features teachers need in order to maintain their levels of energy and motivation (Gu & Day, 2007), it is paramount that course designers and trainers provide relevant support to pre-service teachers in order for them to be able to deal with the diverse situations they face. It is also important to help pre-service teachers shape their teacher identity, as some may not have a clear teaching philosophy at this stage. Although some pre-service teachers may not have an inclination for teaching, it is argued that commitment and responsibility can be instilled through reflection (Mercer et al., 2016). Thus, knowing the attributions pre-service teachers give to their emotions can help trainers and supervisors help them modify these and make some changes to their teaching practice. If pre-service teachers continue attributing negative emotions to their lack of vocation or previous learning experiences, no room for improvement is left.

The present research obtained and examined pre-service foreign language teachers' emotional experiences during practicum, revealing the emotions, embedded in the teaching process, that influence novice teachers' identities and professional development. The study's results indicate a definite need for language teachers' trainers to include such aspects as maintaining order in the classroom, the appropriate management of student behaviour, and approaches for dealing with unexpected events to ensure that pre-service teachers' needs at the end of any teacher-training programme have been met. However, there is also evidence of the need to provide socio-emotional support to help pre-service teachers construct their teacher identity through reflection. Thus, pre-service teachers' cognitive and emotional needs will be catered for, which can definitely contribute to their professional growth and, consequently, increase teaching quality.

## References

- Arizmendi Tejada, S., Gillings de González, B. S., & López Martínez, C. L. (2016). How novice EFL teachers regulate their negative emotions. *HOW*, 23(1), 30-48. <https://doi.org/10.19183/how.23.1.299>.
- Baştürk, S., & Yavuz, I. (2010). Investigating causal attributions of success and failure on mathematics instructions of students in Turkish high schools. *Procedia: Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2(2), 1940-1943. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.260>.
- Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open*, 2, 8-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001>.
- Borko, H., Davinroy, K. H., Bliem, C. L., & Cumbo, K. B. (2000). Exploring and supporting teacher change: Two third-grade teachers' experiences in a mathematics and literacy staff development project. *The Elementary School Journal*, 100(4), 273-306. <https://doi.org/10.1086/499643>.
- Britzman, D. P. (2007). Teacher education as uneven development: Toward a psychology of uncertainty. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 10(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120600934079>.
- Chang, M.-L. (2013). Toward a theoretical model to understand teacher emotions and teacher burnout in the context of student misbehaviour: Appraisal, regulation and coping. *Motivation and Emotion*, 37(4), 799-817. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-012-9335-0>.
- Cowie, N. (2011). Emotions that experienced English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers feel about their students, their colleagues and their work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(1), 235-242. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.08.006>.
- Cross, D. I., & Hong, J. Y. (2012). An ecological examination of teachers' emotions in the school context. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(7), 957-967. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.05.001>.
- Frenzel, A. C., Becker-Kurz, B., Pekrun, R., & Goetz, T. (2015). Teaching this class drives me nuts! Examining the

- person and context specificity of teacher emotions. *PLoS ONE*, 10(6). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0129630>.
- Furlong, J., & Maynard, T. (1995). *Mentoring pre-service teachers: The growth of professional knowledge*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Gkonou, C., & Miller, E. R. (2017). Caring and emotional labour: Language teachers' engagement with anxious learners in private language school classrooms. *Language Teaching Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817728739>.
- Golombek, P. R., & Doran, M. (2014). Unifying cognition, emotion, and activity in language teacher professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 39, 102-111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.01.002>.
- Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2007). Teacher's resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Educations*, 23(8), 1302-1316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.06.006>.
- Hargreaves, A. (2001). The emotional geographies of teachers' relations with colleagues. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 35(5), 503-527. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355\(02\)00006-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355(02)00006-X).
- Hong, J. Y. (2010). Pre-service and beginning teachers' professional identity and its relation to dropping out of the profession. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(8), 1530-1543. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.003>.
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>.
- Martínez Agudo, J., & Azzaro, G. (2018). Emotions in learning to teach EFL in the practicum setting: Facing the emotional dilemmas and challenges associated with professional practice. In J. Martínez Agudo (Ed.), *Emotions in second language teaching* (pp. 365-384). Cham, CH: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75438-3\\_20](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75438-3_20).
- Maymon, R., Hall, N. C., Goetz, T., Chiarella, A., Rahimi, S. (2018). Technology, attributions, and emotions in post-secondary education: An application of Weiner's attribution theory to academic computing problems. *PLoS ONE*, 13(3), e0193443. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0193443>.
- Méndez López, M. G. (2011a). *Emotion and language learning: An exploration of experience and motivation in a Mexican university context* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK.
- Méndez López, M. G. (2011b). The motivational properties of emotions in foreign language learning. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, 13(2), 43-59. <https://doi.org/10.14483/22487085.3764>.
- Méndez López, M. G. (2015a). Emotional experiences of Mexican language learners: A qualitative study of their effects on motivation. *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, 15(3), 809-837. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-639820155183>.
- Méndez López, M. G. (2015b). *Emotions reported by English language teaching major students in Mexico*. Chetumal, MX: UQROO.
- Méndez López, M. G. (2016a). Las emociones en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera: su impacto en la motivación. *Revista Internacional de Lenguas Extranjeras*, 5, 27-46. <https://doi.org/10.17345/rile5.27-46>.
- Méndez López, M. G. (2016b). Language teachers become researchers: Emotions and workload intensification in Mexican higher institutions. *Mextesol Journal*, 40(4), 1-16.
- Méndez López, M. G. (2017). Labor intensification and emotions of Mexican language teachers: A case study. *Innovación Educativa*, 17(75), 31-48.
- Méndez López, M. G., & Fabela Cárdenas, M. (2014). Emotions and their effects in a language learning Mexican context. *System*, 42(2), 298-307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.12.006>.
- Méndez López, M. G., & Peña Aguilar, A. (2013). Emotions as learning enhancers of foreign language learning motivation. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 15(1), 109-124.
- Mercer, S., Oberdorfer, P., & Saleem, M. (2016). Helping language teachers to thrive: Using positive psychology to promote teachers' professional well-being. In D. Gabryś-Barker & D. Gałajda (Eds.), *Positive psychology perspectives on foreign language learning and teaching* (pp. 213-229). Cham, CH: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32954-3\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32954-3_12).

- Moskowitz, G. (1978). *Caring and sharing in the foreign language classroom*. Rowley, US: Newbury House.
- Nguyen, M. H. (2014). Pre-service EAL teaching as emotional experiences: Practicum experience in an Australian secondary school. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(8), 63-84. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n8.5>.
- Nguyen, M. H. (2018). ESL teachers' emotional experiences, responses and challenges in professional relationships with the school community: Implications for teacher education. In J. Martínez Agudo (Ed.), *Emotions in second language teaching* (pp. 243-257). Cham, CH: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75438-3\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75438-3_14).
- Ocampo Martínez, D. (2017). *Emotions of first-year English teachers* (Unpublished master's thesis). Universidad de Quintana Roo, Chetumal, Mexico.
- Patton, M. Q. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation*. Newbury Park, US: Sage Publications.
- Ramírez Romero, J. L., Olave Moreno, I., & Villalobos, L. (2015). *What is really happening with PNEB? Programmes, curriculum and practices*. Paper presented at the 42<sup>nd</sup> International MEXTESOL Convention, Cancun, Mexico.
- Sutton, R. E., & Wheatley, K. F. (2003). Teachers' emotions and teaching: A review of the literature and directions for future research. *Educational Psychology Review*, 15(4), 327-358. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026131715856>.
- Vaezi, S., & Fallah, N. (2011). The relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout among Iranian EFL teachers. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(5), 1122-1129. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.2.5.1122-1129>.
- Weiner, B. (1980). *Human motivation*. New York, US: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Weiner, B. (1992). *Human motivation: Metaphors, theories, and research*. Newbury Park, US: Sage.
- Wyatt, M. (2018). Language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs: A review of the literature (2005-2016). *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4). <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43n4.6>.
- Zembylas, M. (2005). Discursive practices, genealogies, and emotional rules: A poststructuralist view on emotion and identity in teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 935-948. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.005>.

### About the Author

**Mariza G. Méndez López** holds a PhD in education (University of Nottingham, UK). She is a member of the Mexican National Research System. Her areas of research are affective factors in foreign language learning and teacher professional development.