Exploring the Formation of Methodological Beliefs among English Teachers in Chile

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Article Info	Abstract
	The purpose of this single-participant case study, conducted through purposeful sampling and semi-structured interviews, is to gain a deep understanding of how Chilean English teachers construct the beliefs that inform their methodology in disadvantaged contexts. The investigation was guided by the following questions: 1. How do teachers construct their beliefs about English language teaching methodology? 2. What types of factors are involved in the construction of those beliefs? The data were meticulously collected and subsequently thematically analysed. The analysis identified six themes: previous experience, social interaction, teaching materials, attitudes towards mistakes, teacher self-evaluation, and challenges outside the classroom. Although the study confirms the findings of previous studies, two relevant themes, attitudes towards mistakes and challenges outside the classroom, emerged to contribute to the theoretical development of teachers' methodological beliefs. These two themes stand out as they shed light on how teachers of English in Chile maximise the classroom time to teach English and treat mistakes with a positive attitude as a way to promote adaptability and resilience in contexts where speaking English outside the school is extremely limited. Unlike previous studies that examined classroom dynamics and mistakes in isolation, our study offers fresh insights into the complex world of methodological beliefs among Chilean teachers of English in disadvantaged contexts. Future research should incorporate observations alongside interviews, increase participant numbers for deeper insights, and explore how attitudes and external challenges influence methodology beliefs in ELT.

INTRODUCTION

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has spread all around the world as an effective approach to English language learning, including Chile. The Chilean curriculum emphasises the use of CLT to help students achieve the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Barahona, 2016). Notably, the implementation of CLT approach in Chilean private schools has produced significant success as most students have reached Level C1. However, a constrasting scenario unfolds within the public where the instruction of English predominantly relies on traditional pedagogical methods and the use of the teachers' native language (Spanish) (Mineduc, 2019; Ramírez & Artunduaga, 2018). This incongruity can be attributed to the relative of inexperience of public school teachers and the lasting influence of their own English language learning experiences during their formative years at school (Birkner, 2021). Regarding university English teaching programmes, it is essential to acknowledge that most of them are not adequately preparing future teachers to address the multifaceted challenges encountered in the real-world

teaching contexts (Abrahams & Farias, 2010). These limited conditions in public schools have resulted in only 10% of students from vulnerable contexts reaching the A1 level (Barahona, 2016).

Studies conducted in various countries where teaching methods where prescribed to increase the students´proficiency have demostrated that the mere prescription of teaching methodologies does not ensure their effective implementation, especially when teachers do not agree with them or when their beliefs about language learning and teaching are not aligned with the prescribed approach (Mak, 2011; Tootkaboni, 2019; Pitikornpuangpetch & Suwanarak, 2021).

Teachers' beliefs play a crucial role in their decision-making regarding curriculum and methodology. Borg (2001) defines beliefs as propositions accepted as true by individuals, even though they may recognise that alternative beliefs exist. There are various perspectives on teachers' beliefs. Some authors argue that teachers' beliefs are:

a. Interwoven with knowledge and thinking, leading to their interchangeability in the literature (Borg & Burns, 2008; Graham et al., 2014). This idea suggests that the more a teacher knows, the stronger their thoughts and beliefs may become, although they can also weaken or change over time (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

b. Constructed and reconstructed through experience (Kagan, 1992; Raymond, 1997).

c. Shaped by self-evaluation and the evaluations of other people around them, such as students and colleagues (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Khader, 2012).

d. Related to teachers' self-efficacy (Bandura,1986; 1987).

Considering these conceptualisations, it is evident to assume that teachers´ beliefs are complex, situational, and shaped by the knowledge gained through education and professional experience (Johnson, 1994). Throughout their careers, teachers normally (re)construct multiple and conflicting beliefs about various aspects, including students' learning and the subjects they teach (Borg, 2017; Calderhead, 1996). Thus, the challenges that teachers of English have to confront at disadvantaged schools will certainly affect teachers´ beliefs as they are constantly reconstructed by examining previous experiences and the current teaching situations.

The link between teachers' beliefs and their practices has been well-documented (Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Gatbonton, 2008; Zacharias, 2005). Many scholars propose that teachers make curricular decisions informed by their beliefs about what good teaching is like (Borg, 2009; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 2003). Different authors propose that beliefs regarding language learning and previous experience can inform teachers' decisions when it comes to methodology (Birkner, 2021; Borg, 2009; Kagen, 1992; Williams & Burner, 1997). Having in mind that most of the time, beliefs inform practice and vice-visa (Richardson, 1996), we could not agree more with Phipps and Borg (2007) who argue that "Understanding teachers and teaching is not possible without an understanding of the beliefs about language teaching and learning which teachers have" (p. 17).

While some scholars have questioned this relationship (Li, 2013; Richardson et al., 1991; Spawa & Hassan, 2013), the evidence is insufficient to argue that teachers' beliefs do not inform their practices. Contextual constraints, such as those found in Chile's public schools, can limit teachers' ability to teach according to their beliefs, leading to a dissonance between their beliefs and practices (Borg, 2017; Farrell, 2008). According to different scholars, these constraints have to do with a lack of time, resources, experience and students' motivation (Chang, 2020; Hidayat et al., 2018; Michel, 2018; Shi et al., 2018). In many cases, teachers challenge these constraints or even leave their schools or teaching careers (Birkner, 2021).

Teachers who actively resist the limitations imposed by their circumstances are often motivated by their firm "beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their own functioning" (Bandura, 1994, p.14). Bandura (1997) defines this type of belief as self-efficacy and argues that it plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to carry out the necessary actions to achieve specific goals. In educational settings, self-efficacy is understood as the teachers' confidence in their capacity to effectively manage the responsibilities, problems, and tasks associated with their position (Barni et al., 2019).

The review of the literature shows that teachers' beliefs are situational and inform their teaching practices. Although there are several studies that examine ELT teachers´ beliefs, there is a lack of research in the field of English Teaching methodology in vulnerable contexts in Chile. Considering that ELT teachers´ beliefs are (re)constructed by knowledge and experience, the purpose of this case study is to gain a deep understanding of how Chilean teachers of English construct the beliefs that inform their methodology in vulnerable contexts. The findings contribute to narrowing the theoretical gap in the field of ELT by disclosing the real beliefs of a teacher of English who works in an underprivileged context.

The study was guided by the following research questions that were used to generate and organise the data analysis:

1. How do teachers construct their beliefs about English language teaching methodology?
2. What types of factors are involved in the construction of those beliefs?

The first research question aimed to investigate the mechanisms and cognitive procedures that are involved in the construction of teachers' beliefs about English language teaching methodology. On the other hand, the second question aimed to identify the key factors that constitute the system of teachers' beliefs in the context of English as a Foreign Language. By examining these factors, it is possible to understand the underlying reasons that inform teachers' implementation of specific methodologies to teach English. By exploring these questions, the current inquiry aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how and why teachers construct beliefs about teaching, which will eventually provide effective solutions for improving English education in China for all its stakeholders.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach underpinned by the constructivist paradigm, which proposes that teachers´ beliefs are not given but constructed around the students´ needs (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2001; Meirink et al., 2009; Valckx et al., 2021). Moreover, this paradigm highlights experience as a critical aspect in the construction of knowledge (Cashman et al., 2008; Hein, 1991). In the same vein, the constructivist paradigm emphasises that knowledge is created through interaction and the use of language in particular contexts (Burr, 2015; Morehouse, 2011; Morehouse & Maykut, 2002). Informed by the constructivist paradigm, we considered the participant as a co-researcher, so we established a close connection to construct meaning collaboratively from her experience (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As a result of the interaction, this investigation generated situated knowledge. This can help to inform educational practices and policies that are more responsive to the needs of students.

A case study is a suitable design for this qualitative study as we seek to get the richest data possible from just one participant to understand a particular phenomenon as a whole in a specific context (Noor, 2008).

Participants

For this study, we selected one participant through a purposeful sampling method. This sampling method is suitable for qualitative studies as it provides rich data from the participants (Patton, 2014). The participant is a female teacher of English with six years of experience in the same vulnerable school in Chile. Given this particular context, it takes a lot of effort from teachers and the educational community to keep students engaged and motivated; this is why this teacher was chosen since she experiences these issues firsthand.

Data collection technique

To collect data, we held two semi-structured interviews because these instruments offer some flexibility in terms of how to conduct the interview, and it goes hand in hand with our methodology and our qualitative research approach. This type of technique is suitable for the purpose of the study as it allows the researcher to obtain "...rich, thick, and descriptive, not thin, limited, or superficial" (Geertz, 1973, p.5).

The length of the interviews varied from forty-five minutes to one hour. The participant was informed about everything that concerns the research process. The interviews were recorded, and we assured the participant that her name would not appear in our research data, nor the name of the school where she works. To make the participant comfortable, we agreed that the interviews be in the participant´s native language (Spanish) and conducted online so that she had the opportunity to be at home. During the interviews, we were able to ask our study participant every question needed for our research purposes. The interviews revolved around five themes: school experience, university experience, teachers' methodology, beliefs about teaching, and perceptions of students. Additionally, probing questions were used to get detailed data. These questions include:

- Could you tell me a bit more about that?
- Can you give me some examples?
- Can you elaborate on that?
- Why do you think that is?

Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out after transcribing interview recordings. The transcription was translated into English, and we skipped things like the warming-up questions and conversation fillers as they did not help us produce relevant data. With the data obtained, we carried out a thematic analysis, which is commonly used in qualitative research. We started the analysis by highlighting everything that we deemed useful for our discussion and gave it a certain code. These codes were then separated into themes and emerging themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the analysis of the data, six themes were identified. These themes encompass "Previous Experience", "Social Interaction", "Teaching Materials", "Attitudes Towards Mistakes", "Teacher self-evaluation", and "Challenges Outside the Classroom".

Previous experience

The findings of the study suggest that teachers' previous experiences play an essential role in beliefs about teaching methods (Birkner, 2021; Kagen, 1992; Williams & Burner, 1997). The participant remarks that she has worked hard to construct her beliefs as a teacher of English from the experience that she gained from different contexts that include education and work. The participant explains, "*I learned strategies in my internships, my classes at university, and while working at the school, and all of that I have incorporated into my classes*".

She confessed that she believed she could not teach English to young learners as she knew little about that particular methodology. To overcome this weakness, she admits, "*…I studied a lot for that; I enrolled myself in a training program that was all about teaching younger students*". From that educational experience, she reported that her beliefs about teaching methods were modified, and as a result, her lessons improved and made her students feel more engaged.

Her reflection seems to indicate that the types of formal educational experiences that are more meaningful in terms of professional development are those that are not prescribed by bottom-up decision-makers but the ones that are self-imposed and respond to a knowledge gap detected. In this respect, the participant believed in her capacities (Bandura, 1994, 1997; Barni et al., 2019) as a teacher of English and looked for help to improve her methodologies for teaching children. The course that she took equipped her with didactic knowledge that helped her to narrow her pedagogical gaps. According to Borg (2009), teachers' cognition—that is, their thoughts and beliefs—strongly influences their subject didactic competence, which includes didactic knowledge. This reflection implies that teachers' professional development should be carefully designed according to the teachers' real needs.

Social interaction

Furthermore, the findings indicate that social interaction at all levels can modify teachers´ beliefs about methodology. In other words, teachers' beliefs do not take place in a vacuum but are constructed in relation to their self-perception and the perceptions of others around them (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Khader, 2012). On this matter, the participant states,

"*I feel like as time passes, you see different methodologies from different teachers. Methodologies you learn about in social media, on the internet, and that you can incorporate in your classes. You also see different methodologies from colleagues, and you transform everything you've learned into your own methodology*".

She acknowledged that through her interaction with others, her beliefs about language teaching continuously changed. In this respect, she remarks,

"*As time passes, everyone around you influences your methodology, but you still manage to make your own*".

This may imply that beliefs about methodology are not fixed; they evolve over time according to experience and interaction (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Khader, 2012). This is also supported by the participant when she argues, "*I think it is good to copy what you think is good for your classes*". This argument suggests that teachers construct self-efficacy beliefs by interacting within their educational context. This idea agrees with Takahashi's (2011) proposal that integrates the cognitive aspect to the social dimension of beliefs within theories of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). From this perspective, knowledge and beliefs are seen as inseparable aspects that shape the identity of an individual interacting within a community (Gray & Morton, 2018).

In the same vein, the participant's words suggest that constructing beliefs about teaching methodology involves both social and personal aspects of a teacher's identity. She asserts that as an individual, she adapts her teaching methodology using technological tools, while at the social level, she considers her students' needs. She claims that,

"*…you need to adapt your methodology to the different levels, to any changes around us; for example, during the pandemic, our methodology changed. Looking back, I think I have changed my methodology a lot, always trying to incorporate new things, like technological resources that I think are a great help for us, and for the students, because those resources are interesting for them*".

Teaching materials

The findings suggest that what learners mean to teachers has an influence on the methodology in terms of teaching materials and assessment. In this respect, the participant argues that

"*…the class materials are fundamental to motivate the students to learn English. For example, now the English book we are using has useful software, and it has videos and listening activities; it's more dynamic*".

She adds, "*Once, we turned a written test into a radio-theatre evaluation. In that way, the students got to work outside the classroom, and they were more motivated by it*". From her words, we can also infer she cares about keeping the students motivated through different factors and is always looking for new ways to do so, as she declares, "*I'm always looking to incorporate new resources*".

Regarding resources, the participant's arguments suggest that teachers' beliefs inform the materials they use to implement the curriculum. This is supported by previous studies that propose that teachers select particular teaching methods and resources—including technology—to use in the classroom based on their beliefs (Lim et al. 2014; Prestridge 2012; Zhao & Cziko 2001). According to Shawer (2010), teachers can be characterised into three groups that include curriculum transmitters, curriculum developers, and curriculum makers. While curriculum transmitters tend to believe that textbooks are authoritative materials, written by experts and should be followed to the letter,

curriculum makers often have a negative attitude towards textbooks, so they prefer to create their own materials according to the students' needs. On the other hand, curriculum developers are more likely to embrace a more balanced approach by adapting textbooks to suit the students' characteristics. In this respect, the participant could be easily identified as a curriculum developer as she tends to rely on textbooks but is always looking for extra materials to make the material more appealing to her students.

As for assessment, the findings indicate that teachers who are student-oriented design tests informed by their beliefs about what good tests are like. One of the aspects good tests cover has to do with authenticity. According to Bachmann and Palmer (1996), authenticity refers to "the degree of correspondence of a given language test task to the features of TLU (target language use) task" (p. 136). Thus, an authentic test depicts what the test takers would do in the real world, in this case, "*a radio-theatre evaluation*" instead of a traditional written test.

These findings challenge previous studies that suggest that there is an inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and their assessment implementations (i.e., Atay, 2017; Davison, 2004; Kim (2014; Widiastuti et al., 2020). The reason might be caused by the limitations imposed by school administrators, who usually restrict teachers' decisions.

Attitudes towards mistakes

The findings of this study indicate that attitudes towards mistakes play an important role in the methodology teachers adopt. The participant stated that teachers should have a positive attitude to enhance students' learning. She argues, "*I think the speaking skill is always going to be the most difficult thing to acquire for my students and as a teacher, you always have to remind your students that nobody's perfect and that we can all make mistakes*".

In contrast to previous studies that indicate that teachers often demonstrate inconsistency and a lack of clarity when addressing errors in their instructional practices (Ellis, 1990), the findings of this study suggest that teachers' beliefs about errors agree with their teaching practices, especially if they are aligned with the students' needs. Allwright & Bailey (1991) and Park (2010) support this assumption and observe that a teacher's positive attitude towards students' errors can have a positive impact on language learning, while a bad attitude can lead to students' anxiety and demotivation. Despite this agreement, a positive attitude might not be enough to treat errors effectively. There might be other aspects to consider, such as students' attitudes towards English learning, the importance that school administrators give to the English subject, students' self-esteem, and the relationship that the teacher establishes with the students.

Teacher self-evaluation

The findings suggest that teachers' self-evaluation affects their teaching methodology (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Khader, 2012). For example, the participant confessed that she believed that she was a role model to her students during the lessons. Referring to her classes in primary school, she claims, "*I think I'm more of a guide to them*", and "*Sometimes in my classes, I've noticed that my students can do things on their own, so I think you just need to give them that last push and let them grow as learners*".

This participant´s reflection clearly indicates that when teachers evaluate themselves in terms of their personal experiences in educational contexts, and these have been successful, their sense of self-efficacy can be enhanced. Consequently, it will undoubtedly affect the teaching methodology. This idea is supported by Bandura (1986; 1987), who relates teacher self-efficacy and teachers' self-evaluation. In the same vein, Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, and Medlock (2004) argue that when teachers notice students to be more interested and sensitive to the contents learned, this can increase the degree to which teachers believe their instruction to be effective. This implies that the school administrators should promote a welcoming learning environment where everyone feels part of a community with clear goals and not a group of people that compete among themselves at any cost. Considering that teachers' beliefs are situational, what happens around them will ultimately affect their pedagogical practices, including the teaching methodology.

Challenges outside the classroom

Another relevant finding indicates that there are challenges that are out of the control of teachers that may affect their beliefs about methodology. The participant explained that she takes maximum advantage of the classroom time to develop oral skills. In this respect, she declared, "*Something that can make Speaking difficult is the fact that after the class ends, the students have nowhere to practice that skill*".

This argument suggests that contextual factors regarding the use of English affect methodological teachers' beliefs. In this respect, the participant seems to assume that for the students to acquire the target language, there should be more opportunities to use it outside the classroom. Nevertheless, that is out of her capacity, so to diminish the impact of this issue, she devotes her lesson primarily to practice speaking.

In this regard, this study extends the scope of earlier research focusing on contextual factors affecting teachers' beliefs and teaching practices. For example, Boyd et al. (2011) identified a number of contributing factors, such as students' socioeconomic status, success and motivation levels, and unfavourable attitudes about English classes. In the same vein, the findings of a study undertaken by Altinsoy and Zuhal (2017) concluded that contextual elements of the classroom are a common complaint from the perspective of public schools. They proposed that they must embrace methods that are at odds with their own convictions in order to accommodate crammed classes. Due to worries about classroom management, they turn to activities that require individual student work rather than fostering a communicative classroom environment. A related finding can be found in Nishino (2008). Teachers in public schools face additional pressure since these institutions lack adequate resources. Although these studies shed some light on external factors, there still is a need to consider how the lack of opportunities to use English beyond the school affects teachers' beliefs about teaching methodology.

All in all, the findings of the study confirm previous studies that propose that teachers´ methodological beliefs are experiential, situated, attitudinal, and both personal and social bound (Johnson, 1994; Khader, 2012; Nespor, 1987; Pajares; 1992; Raymond, 1997; Richardson, 2003). The participant's narrative suggests that these dimensions might not be valid for all the teachers of English but just for the ones who define themselves as student-centred. For that reason, their methodology is flexible and changes as they get more experience and interact with other people, such as students and colleagues. In terms of teaching materials, these teachers are more likely to adapt them to meet their students´ needs.

Two important themes that emerged and added new knowledge to the field of ELT teachers´ beliefs are the "challenges outside the classroom" and "attitudes towards students' mistakes" that might affect the teachers' beliefs about methodology. Even though these are situational and attitudinal aspects, there is not enough research. These dimensions of the ELT teachers´ methodological beliefs can be valid and relevant for vulnerable schools where English is taught as a foreign language just a few hours a week. Under these circumstances, the study participant takes advantage of the class to the fullest to provide authentic opportunities for the students to learn English in a positive learning environment where mistakes are not punished but are considered a natural dimension of the learning process.

The findings of this study have several implications for the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and its practical application in education. Firstly, it highlights the significance of development that teachers voluntarily undertake, emphasising the need for training programmes tailored to their specific needs. Secondly, the study underscores the role of interaction in shaping teachers' beliefs and teaching methods. This emphasises the importance of environments and communities where educators can share knowledge and experiences. Thirdly, the research suggests that teachers' beliefs strongly impact their choice of teaching materials and assessment methods. It challenges the notion that assessments are disconnected from teachers' beliefs, highlighting the need to align assessment strategies with goals. Fourthly, the study highlights how important it is for teachers to have an attitude towards students' mistakes. Encouraging learning from errors creates a constructive classroom environment. Fifthly, the research indicates that self-evaluation by teachers and their belief in their effectiveness significantly influence their teaching approaches. This calls for schools to promote self-reflection and self-confidence among educators. Additionally, this study sheds light on

external challenges that can impact teachers' beliefs and practices in schools where English is taught as a foreign language with limited resources. Finally, the study indicates a need to investigate the attitudinal elements that impact teachers' beliefs and methodologies. It promotes an examination of how teachers' attitudes towards errors, the difficulties they encounter in particular educational settings and their own self-evaluation and self-confidence contribute to shaping their instructional methods.

CONCLUSION

This case study explored how Chilean English teachers construct the beliefs that inform their teaching methodology in vulnerable contexts, guided by two research questions: the process of belief construction and the factors involved. Using semi-structured interviews with an experienced primary school teacher, the data revealed that experiences, social interaction, and self-evaluation are key dimensions in shaping these beliefs. Additionally, the study suggests that teachers' attitudes towards students' mistakes and external challenges significantly influence their methodological beliefs, particularly in creating a positive classroom environment and effectively utilizing time. The findings emphasize the need for school administrators to foster collaborative spaces where teachers can share and adapt teaching methods to better meet students' needs, especially in disadvantaged settings. Furthermore, continuous professional development tailored to these contexts is crucial for empowering teachers to refine their practices. The study also highlights the importance of ELT departments integrating theory and practice more effectively to bridge the gap between academic training and real-world teaching. For future research, expanding data collection methods and sample sizes is recommended to deepen understanding of how external factors and teacher attitudes shape belief construction in English language teaching. By addressing these aspects, educational stakeholders can develop more effective strategies to support teachers in navigating the complexities of disadvantaged educational environments.

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