

INVESTIGATING SPANISH STUDENT TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT THE *GOOD* EFL TEACHER

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this article is to investigate Spanish student teachers' pedagogical beliefs about what makes a good EFL teacher with specific reference to several essential aspects of language teaching. The paper is organized as follows: an overview of the research literature on teachers' beliefs is first presented. Then it describes the sample of population surveyed and the research procedures employed. Next, the findings are reported and discussed. Finally, the conclusions make up the last section.

The resulting data reveal that there seems to exist among most Spanish student teachers an overall consensus on the main qualities or characteristics of the 'good' EFL teacher. Special emphasis is given to learning individuality and students' individual differences. Emotional aspects associated with language learning and teaching are particularly stressed. In this research article, student teachers' pedagogical beliefs and their implications for teaching EFL in particular are examined.

KEY WORDS: pedagogical beliefs, student teachers

RESUMEN

La principal finalidad de este artículo es investigar las creencias pedagógicas del profesorado español en formación respecto a las cualidades idóneas del profesor/a de inglés como lengua extranjera, haciendo referencia concretamente a varios aspectos esenciales de la enseñanza lingüística. Se ofrece inicialmente una revisión de la literatura especializada en torno a las creencias del profesorado. A continuación, se describe la muestra de población encuestada al igual que la metodología empleada. Seguidamente se analizan y discuten los resultados. Las conclusiones constituyen el apartado final.

Los resultados obtenidos revelan la existencia de un amplio consenso entre la mayoría del profesorado español en formación en lo relativo a las principales cualidades o características idóneas del profesor/a de inglés como lengua extranjera. Se otorga especial énfasis a la individualidad del aprendizaje, a las diferencias individuales del alumnado. Igualmente, los aspectos emocionales asociados a la enseñanza y el aprendizaje lingüístico son especialmente enfatizados. En este artículo de investigación se examinan las creencias pedagógicas del profesorado en formación y sus implicaciones para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera.

PALABRAS CLAVE: creencias pedagógicas, profesorado en formación

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Most contemporary research in language pedagogy has been guided by the principle of 'learner centeredness' which has been increasingly gaining much attention in instructional settings. The premise of placing the learner and his or her learning at the center of all instructional practices is essential. Much attention has thus been paid to the learning process and the learner. Traditionally the overall tendency pointed to the search of commonalities among learners instead of focusing on their diversity and individuality. However, it seems to make more sense to investigate learners according to their individual characteristics and differences and not according to which factors or aspects they may or may not have in common. SLA as a domain of research which contributes to the teaching and learning of foreign languages (Kramsch, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2003) has highlighted the importance of learner individual differences (Skehan, 1989; Ottó, 1998; Arnold & Brown 1999; Robinson, 2001; 2002; Cooper, 2002; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 2004; 2005) so as to better understand how each student actually approaches classroom situations and experiences. Given the shift of perspective (from the outsider's point of view to the insider's) in the field of SLA research (Kramsch, 2000) we can gain new firsthand insights into learner individuality. Accordingly, successful learning seems to depend less on the materials and teaching techniques employed in the classroom and more on what actually goes on inside the learner. Thus, the learner-centred approach is becoming an important term in SLA research.

One of the issues in language pedagogy research is that of learners' beliefs. Throughout the last decades the issue of beliefs about L2 learning and teaching has been attracting considerable research interest. Since Horwitz's pioneering study in 1985, which generated considerable research interests in the nature of learners' beliefs, a multitude of studies into the subject has been conducted (Mori, 1999; Horwitz, 1999; Dörnyei, 2001, 2005). Most of the studies have centred on learners' beliefs about language learning and have drawn significant relationships between their beliefs and their influence on learners' approach to learning, as Dörnyei claimed "the beliefs language learners hold considerably affect the way they go about mastering the L2" (2005: 216). Despite the fact that learners' beliefs were first highlighted in applied linguistics in the 1980s as a potentially important individual difference variable, their exact role and nature is still open to debate (Dörnyei, 2005).

All over the world people seem to have common and, in some cases, *erroneous* beliefs about how an L2 should best be learned and taught in the classroom context. Beliefs—or personal “myths” or mini-theories—can be defined as “general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning, and about the nature of language learning and teaching” (Victori & Lockhart, 1995: 224). Generally, learners’ beliefs are described as an important individual difference variable in L2 learning (Arnold & Brown, 1999; Dörnyei, 2005). Ever since their introduction into L2 literature by Elaine Horwitz in 1985, learners’ beliefs have been recognised as “learner characteristics to count with when explaining learning outcomes” (Dörnyei, 2005: 214). It is argued that the preconceived ideas L2 learners indeed hold considerably affect the way they approach L2 learning and teaching. These convictions seem to be mainly influenced, among other sources, by their previous personal learning experiences as language learners as well as by their personality traits, which shape their attitudes towards language in general and language learning in particular. According to Lightbown and Spada (1999: 59), “all learners, particularly older learners, have strong beliefs and opinions about how their instruction should be delivered. These beliefs are usually based on previous learning experiences and the assumption (right or wrong) that a particular type of instruction is the best way for them to learn”. In addition, it has revealed that some of these preconceived ideas and, in some cases, misconceptions held by learners may have negative effects on their learning progress and outcomes. That is, certain *mistaken* beliefs can become real barriers to language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). Investigating and understanding learners’ beliefs is thus essential for effective teaching and learning. Accordingly, research into learners’ beliefs about language learning so far has provided us with valuable firsthand insights that may have important implications for teaching EFL.

Given the complex and multidimensional nature of learners’ beliefs, research has suggested that learners’ beliefs about language learning may not only influence the way these approach the new language but also affect the way they respond to classroom procedures and/or activities that significantly differ from what they believe about how an L2 should best be taught. Additionally, it needs to be mentioned that beliefs cannot be separated from classroom actions and experiences. An exploration of what learners actually believe and do in the classroom is necessary to better understand how L2 teaching and learning really happen. As mentioned above, the outcome of the learning process can be strongly influenced by both students’, and teachers’

beliefs (Arnold & Brown, 1999). It needs to be made clear that teaching actions are somehow shaped by teachers' beliefs, personality and level of experience. Generally teachers are guided by routines, developing several teaching strategies and habits in an almost automatic way without hardly reflecting on the validity and efficiency of their own pedagogical decisions and actions in the classroom context. Moreover, each teacher conceives teaching in a particular way, acting in the classroom according to his/her own personal vision or interpretation concerning the ideal way of learning and teaching an L2. Such personal beliefs that underlie their own teaching actions affect whatever they do in the classroom, particularly their way of teaching (Williams & Burden, 1997). That is, these beliefs guide and explain the pedagogical decisions and actions developed in the classroom. In order to better understand how language teachers actually face the different dimensions of teaching, it is necessary to explore their own personal beliefs which constitute the main reference or starting-point of their pedagogical decisions and actions in the classroom, affecting the way they teach a second language in the classroom context. Additionally, it needs to be mentioned that language teachers should bear in mind that what they actually do in the classroom context might influence students' beliefs and attitudes towards L2 learning. Research has revealed that attitudes toward learning, and the perceptions and beliefs that determine them may have a profound influence on learning outcomes. Classroom procedures may somehow influence the way in which learners perceive and approach language learning. Just as teachers' beliefs influence their teaching performance, students' beliefs affect the way they face L2 learning. Their beliefs are influenced by their own attitude towards the language itself and language learning in general. Similarly, teachers' negative beliefs are also seen as serious obstacles to successful teaching. In this sense research has shown that there seem to exist differences and mismatches between teachers' and learners' beliefs about what L2 learning involves and how the language classroom should be organized, or rather, how an L2 should best be learnt and taught in the classroom context.

Just as L2 learning development is determined by countless influence factors of a cognitive, emotional and social nature language teaching constitutes an enormously complex activity given its multidimensionality because numerous aspects need to be taken into consideration in the classroom context. Given the complexity, variety and apparent asystematicity of classroom situations, it seems reasonable to give sense and justification to such situations and experiences so as to better understand how second language learning and teaching actually happen. In addition, it is

necessary to analyse the conditions under which second language teaching and learning are normally developed in the classroom context. It needs to be made clear that learning a language “demands both emotional and mental involvement” (Cook & Seidlhofer, 1995: 9). Thus, one aspect that needs to be better explained is that of emotional factors of L2 learning and teaching.

There are many ways in which modern languages are currently learnt and taught in the classrooms according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFRL (Council of Europe, 2001). Given the wide diversity and variety of classroom situations and/or experiences it seems reasonable to assume that we cannot make generalizations about the best way of teaching a second language because there does not actually exist any ideal or perfect teaching method that suits every classroom situation or experience (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Actually there seems to exist very little agreement or consensus on the best way to teach an L2, even though, interestingly, the important question is “How does a teacher decide which method is best?”. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000: 181-182):

Before being persuaded that one method is absolutely best, however, we should remember methods themselves are decontextualized. They describe a certain ideal, based on certain beliefs. They deal with what, how and why. They say little or nothing about who/whom, when, and where. [...] Each method has its strengths and weaknesses, relativists believe, but they are not equally suited for all situations. Different methods are suitable for different teachers and learners in different contexts [...] There is another version of the relativist position, one we might call pluralism, which many other teachers find reasonable. Rather than deciding to adopt or reject methods in their entirety as being suitable or unsuitable for a particular context, they believe that there is some value to each method [...] When teachers who subscribe to the pluralistic view of methods pick and choose from among methods to create their own blend, their practice is said to be *eclectic*.

The search for the best method still continues. The communicative language teaching approach seems to prevail at least theoretically. Such theoretical emphasis on the communicative properties or dimension of language is missing in the classroom reality, which corroborates once again the habitual divergence or dissociation between theory and classroom praxis. It should be noted that it is necessary to move forward in the direction of communicative language teaching, promoting above all the functional and communicative use of modern languages. Surely the

quid of the question lies in the willingness to constantly improve the quality of second language teaching and learning or at least to attempt to do so whenever possible. As regards this, Dörnyei claimed that “the best motivational intervention is simply to improve the quality of our teaching” (2001: 26).

There is no doubt that the changing and unpredictable reality of classroom situations requires a relative improvisation as well as flexibility on the part of teachers, who feel obliged to constantly make decisions and to improvise so as to be able to face and overcome the countless challenges and difficulties of classroom experiences and situations (Lee McKay, 2002). As Larsen-Freeman suggests, “decisions that teachers make are often affected by exigencies in the classroom rather than by methodological considerations” (2000: xi). Thus, language instruction can be seen as a highly personal activity because L2 teachers feel the need to create their own teaching method, discovering new teaching formulae according to their own personality, previous learning experiences and personal preferences and beliefs about how an L2 should best be learnt and taught in the classroom.

Generally the lack of connection and/or differences between theory and practice are rather evident. Often there seems to exist some kind of divergence between our intentions and our actions, between what teachers say and/or think and what they actually do in the classroom context. That is, teaching decisions do not provide us with the whole picture of what is actually happening in the classroom. The fact is that L2 teachers as reflective professionals need to constantly observe and reflect in a critical and objective way on why they do what they actually do in the classroom, teaching differently from the way they were taught (Wallace, 1991; Williams & Burden, 1997). As regards this, it should be added that there are many teachers who simply pay attention to the “how to teach” and not to the “why”. Accordingly, L2 teachers need to make an effort to understand the real reasons that lead them to make particular decisions when teaching a second language. Language teachers need to become critically reflective teachers (Williams & Burden, 1997) who explore the complexity of classroom reality and interpret their own teaching decisions and actions, discovering if their teaching acts correspond to what their students actually learn. This will help us to better understand what actually occurs in the classroom context because what teachers do is a consequence of what they actually think. What teachers actually believe about L2 teaching and students deeply influences the way they teach, their own teaching decisions and actions in the classroom (Pajares, 1992; Richardson,

1996). This reflective task contributes somehow to develop their teaching competence. Therefore, reflective teaching constitutes an essential component for professional development (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Learning to teach an L2 thus represents a developmental and life-long process (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH STUDY

Generally action-research gives special emphasis to teachers' beliefs and their interpreting ability to find the rationale of the different classroom situations and/or experiences. In this research article, *diversity* thus constitutes a key term concerning Spanish student teachers' pedagogical beliefs about the good EFL teacher. As explained above, teachers' beliefs about what second language teaching involves considerably affect what they actually do in the classroom. What actually matters is thus to understand what actually happens in the classroom so as to improve the quality of teaching practice.

The main purpose of investigating student teachers' beliefs about the ideal EFL teacher is to find out whether the former hold *erroneous* and/or unrealistic beliefs about several essential aspects of language teaching. The student teachers described here have several preconceived ideas about how an L2 should best be learnt and taught in the classroom context. More specifically, the present study focused on the following research question:

RQ: What are the main qualities or characteristics of the *good* EFL teacher?

METHOD

Participants

The research study was conducted at the Faculty of Education of the University of Extremadura in Spain. A total of 104 Spanish EFL student teachers initially participated in the present study. After receiving 104 questionnaires, the researcher discarded six invalid questionnaires, which were either incomplete or failed to follow the instructions of the questionnaire. Accordingly, the valid response rate was 94.2% and a total of 98 questionnaires were identified as valid data for statistical analysis in the present study. A sample of 98 Spanish EFL student teachers was eventually employed, 82 (83.6%) were females and the remaining

16 (16.3%) were males. Their ages ranged from 20 to 37, with an average age of 21. All the subjects took part in the experiment voluntarily. The participants in this study were nonnative speakers in an English as a foreign language context. Additionally, it needs to be mentioned that English is not used in Spain as a medium of instruction or used in everyday conversation but only serves as one compulsory subject in school curricula. All subjects were enrolled in a teacher education programme and were all trained to become teachers of the language they learn. Additionally, the participants were in their final year of study, with an average of at least 15 years of previous English study (ranging from six to 21 years). All the participants were classified at the upper-intermediate level by their language proficiency. The majority of these learners (95%) had never visited an English-speaking country, and only a small minority (5%) had spent some time (a few weeks) in either Great Britain or the United States. Finally, it should also be added that there were at least five students with a degree in English Philology.

Instrument and data collection procedure

For the present research study data have been collected through a closed questionnaire used as a research instrument and designed to collect and analyse information on Spanish student teachers' beliefs about the ideal EFL teacher. Participants were given this questionnaire on EFL teacher evaluation from Madrid and McLaren (1995)—see Appendix 1—, which provides us with both quantitative data from EFL student teachers using a Likert-like scale as well as qualitative data from the comments provided. The 20-statement questionnaire used has a 5-point Likert-scale format (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). In addition, the comments provided will help us to shape the quantitative data. The questionnaire used allows a quantitative measurement of each category by using the scale 1 to 5 as well as a qualitative assessment through comments which are very helpful to the percentage obtained in each statement. Despite the fact that most research into beliefs is interpretative and uses qualitative methods, this questionnaire enables us to explore and identify Spanish student teachers' beliefs about the good EFL teacher.

The questionnaire used was administered by the researcher himself, who explained the purpose and potential usefulness of the survey, made it clear to the participants that the questionnaire was not a test, and that their responses would

be used for research purposes only. The questionnaire was distributed to the students in Spanish in May 2010 at the end of the academic year 2009/2010. They were requested not to consult their classmates while working with the questionnaire in order to ensure that the answers actually reflected each student's own beliefs and opinions about the good EFL teachers. The questionnaires were completed anonymously in class and handed back on completion. Data collection took place in a single one-hour session.

Analysis and discussion of results

This research article adopts a different approach to data analysis because only descriptive statistics are used. Based on the result of descriptive statistics, the present findings indicate that participants hold a range of similar beliefs about the good EFL teacher. As we will see, the data obtained are consistent enough to draw overall conclusions. Table 1 shows the level of agreement with the different aspects indicated by each statement and thus provides an overview of the results obtained.

STATEMENTS	STRONGLY DISAGREE		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE		STRONGLY AGREE		TOTAL
	DISAGREE	DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	
1. Knowing the subject well	0.00%	0.00%	2.04%	6.12%	91.84%	100.00%	
2. Planning appropriate objectives and contents	0.00%	0.00%	4.08%	31.63%	64.29%	100.00%	
3. Considering students' needs and interests	0.00%	0.00%	24.49%	34.69%	40.82%	100.00%	
4. Explaining clearly	0.00%	1.02%	4.08%	28.57%	66.33%	100.00%	
5. Preparing classes	0.00%	2.04%	28.57%	32.65%	36.73%	100.00%	
6. Encouraging class participation	0.00%	0.00%	5.10%	34.69%	60.20%	100.00%	
7. Motivating students	0.00%	0.00%	9.18%	17.35%	73.47%	100.00%	
8. Using interesting materials and activities	0.00%	1.02%	11.22%	46.94%	40.82%	100.00%	
9. Treating students well	0.00%	0.00%	4.08%	21.43%	74.49%	100.00%	
10. Teaching in English	0.00%	1.02%	11.22%	34.69%	53.06%	100.00%	
11. Evaluating students objectively	1.02%	1.02%	10.20%	28.57%	59.18%	100.00%	
12. Balance between all the curricular components	0.00%	1.02%	12.24%	35.71%	51.02%	100.00%	
13. Using technological aids	0.00%	4.08%	35.71%	36.73%	23.47%	100.00%	
14. Encouraging learner autonomy	0.00%	0.00%	10.20%	41.84%	47.96%	100.00%	
15. Promoting cooperative learning	0.00%	2.04%	19.39%	45.92%	32.65%	100.00%	
16. Maintaining classroom discipline	0.00%	2.04%	18.37%	34.69%	44.90%	100.00%	
17. Creating game-like activities	1.02%	2.04%	38.78%	28.57%	29.59%	100.00%	
18. Organising extracurricular activities	2.04%	6.12%	51.02%	28.57%	12.24%	100.00%	
19. Attention to student diversity	0.00%	0.00%	8.16%	25.51%	66.33%	100.00%	
20. Teaching how to learn	0.00%	1.02%	13.27%	29.59%	56.12%	100.00%	

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics of participants' responses to the questionnaire

After the data-gathering process, the next step was to analyse the results. All results are expressed as percentages. As illustrated in Figure 1, most statements generated very high levels of agreement ('strongly agree' and 'agree').

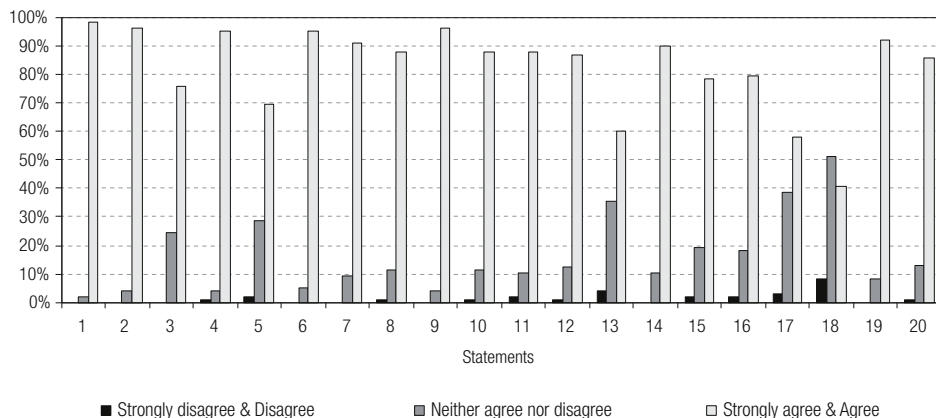


FIGURE 1. Graphical representation of student teachers' beliefs about the *good* EFL teacher

By focusing specifically on the top choice 'strongly agree', only those statements which generated levels of agreement above 50% will be analysed below.

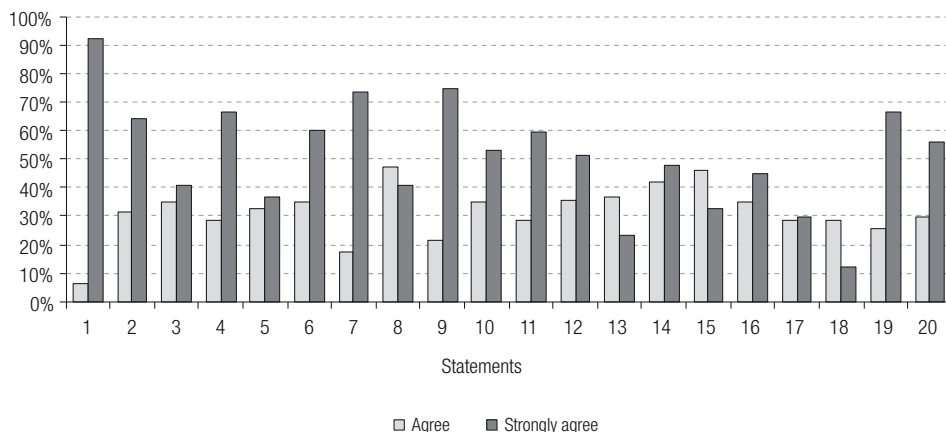


FIGURE 2. Graphical representation of student teachers' beliefs about the *good* EFL teacher

As illustrated in Figure 2, we can see that the statement which obtained the highest percentage is Statement 1 which concerns the importance of knowing the subject matter. Nearly 92% of the participants strongly believe that the English teachers ought to know the subject matter. As evident, this does not necessarily mean mastering the language being taught as a native speaker but having at least a reasonable level of language mastery. As suggested by their comments, knowing the subject matter is as important as knowing how to teach it because “if teachers do not know the subject matter well they cannot teach it correctly and thus will have serious difficulties and problems when giving lessons”. Before teaching, one first needs to be aware of what one actually knows about the subject matter. In fact, most respondents consider that one cannot or should not teach what one does not actually know. Accordingly, most respondents believe that this constitutes an essential condition or rather a real “must” for language teachers, though the most important thing is to know how to teach. We can even master the language being taught but if we do not know how to teach it all our efforts will be practically useless. Thus, mastering the L2 does not seem to be enough.

As shown in Table 1, most of the respondents give special emphasis to affectivity in second language teaching and learning. Results from Statement 9 indicate that it is essential to show interest in all the students and treat them well. Nearly 75% of the participants strongly believe that L2 teachers have to treat students in a gentle and tactful manner. In fact, each student deserves special consideration on the part of the teacher. Similarly, Statement 7 concerns the importance of motivation as an essential condition for second language learning. About 74% of the subjects strongly believe that language teachers should show enthusiasm when teaching as well as motivating students. There are those who think that the main responsibility of a good language teacher is mainly to motivate their students. As suggested by their comments, if learners feel positive they will surely work better. That is, students seem to learn faster and better when being motivated. Taken together, the high percentages of responses to these two statements would highlight the importance of emotional aspects associated with second language learning and teaching.

Regarding learning individuality, Statements 4 and 19 seem to be strongly interrelated. Statement 19 concerns the importance of considering learner diversity and uniqueness, that is, his/her individual differences or characteristics. It is important to remember that each learner is unique and thus has different qualities

and learns in a different way and rhythm. Nearly 67% of respondents strongly agree that it seems reasonable to pay attention to student diversity. As evident, this question cannot be overlooked.

About two thirds of the participants (66.33%) strongly agree that a good language teacher has to explain clearly and to adapt classroom work to their students' learning capabilities (Statement 4). It is absolutely necessary to facilitate students' understanding through clear and simple instructions and explanations. EFL teachers have to use a clear, simple and easy-to-understand language so that students can easily understand. As suggested by their comments, teachers need to adapt themselves to students and not viceversa. There is no doubt that this involves a real challenge to language teachers because of students' different levels of language mastery. Thus, individualised teaching is almost impossible due to the high number of students in the classrooms. The fact is that it does not make any sense to work on an activity which is too difficult for students because this constitutes a real waste of time. Accordingly, the level of classroom work cannot be too high because we can generate high levels of frustration and unmotivation among learners.

As can be seen from the data presented in Table 1, approximately 65% of the subjects in the present study strongly agreed with the Statement 2 which assesses the need and importance of planning appropriate objectives and contents and presenting them clearly. As suggested by their comments, EFL teachers need first to know what they intend to teach and then find out what students really know, need and expect to learn. Sometimes students are really not aware of what they are learning and why. Accordingly, learning objectives and contents should be made clear from the very beginning. This would be highly helpful for students when facing L2 learning.

Some 60% of the respondents strongly agreed with Statement 6 which concerns the importance of constantly favouring student participation and interaction in the classroom context. The fact is that EFL teachers have to do the best in order to get students to actively participate in class. It is thus essential to promote oral communication and interaction among students. They need to become active learners and not mere passive ones. As suggested by their comments, teaching and learning would not make any sense without students' active involvement and participation in class activities. In order to achieve this goal, routine and boredom should be avoided at all costs. Additionally, students need to overcome

their fears of making mistakes when attempting to express themselves orally in English.

Nearly 60% of the participants strongly agreed with Statement 11 which concerns the importance of establishing objective criteria when evaluating students. About 56% of the respondents also strongly agreed with Statement 20 which emphasises the need of promoting learning autonomy among learners.

Results from Statement 10 indicate that nearly half of the participants (53.06%) strongly agreed that the EFL teacher has to use English as much as possible in the classroom so as to provide learners with adequate input, an essential condition for second language development. Additionally, about 51% of the respondents strongly agreed that it is highly necessary to keep a balance between all the curricular components (Statement 12).

As illustrated in Figure 1, most statements generated very high levels of agreement ('strongly agree' and 'agree'). In fact, 'neither agree nor disagree' was chosen by about half of the respondents on only one statement (Statement 18) which assesses the need of organising and taking part in extracurricular activities. Accordingly, the resulting data revealed that there seems to exist a wide consensus among Spanish student teachers on the main qualities and characteristics of the 'good' EFL teacher.

CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of this research article was to explore and analyse Spanish student teachers' beliefs about how English should best be taught in the classroom context by considering to what extent the respondents agreed with different qualities and/or characteristics of the good EFL teacher. The fact is that some results reported here may surprise teacher educators but others probably confirm our experiences and intuitions. The results obtained in the present research study show that there seems to exist among most Spanish student teachers an overall consensus on the 'good' EFL teacher. In this research article, student teachers' beliefs and their implications for second language teaching were particularly examined.

In order to improve the effectiveness of EFL teaching and to help student teachers become better professionals, it is important to explore their past classroom experiences and understand their beliefs about how English should best be learnt and taught in the classroom context. EFL student teachers' beliefs will

surely influence the way they teach the new language in the future. According to the results of the present study, two pedagogical implications were provided. On the one hand, learner individuality and the emotional aspects associated with language learning and teaching are especially stressed. On the other hand, it is believed that EFL student teachers' beliefs might have both a positive or negative effect on students' attitude towards learning. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to promote positive attitudes as well as helpful and realistic beliefs among student teachers and eliminate the negative ones.

Regarding the population sample, it is almost impossible to draw any overall conclusions for TEFL, because the number of participants was too small to make any attempt at generalising results to other classroom contexts. The insufficient number of participants ($n = 98$) and the respondents' problems with understanding the meaning of the questionnaire statements could be seen as the greatest limitations of the present research. Because of the very limited size of the sample, research findings call for replication on larger populations and in different teaching contexts. For future studies, a greater number of participants and the inclusion of more open-ended questions in the research instrument could be considered. Additionally, it needs to be mentioned that the questionnaire only lists aspects of what might be considered 'good practice' and characteristics or attributes of a 'good' teacher (communicative, creative...). But what about those statements which make reference to a stricter grammar focus or the importance of keeping a distance between the learners and the teacher? Such statements could be used as well. The fact is that there should be other questions stating the opposite or at least a different view. Thus, this research article must be interpreted in the light of its limitations.

Finally, this research article highlights the need for further research and a strong theoretical foundation because EFL student teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching in general demand further exploration. Accordingly, more research is needed to fully understand the impact of student teachers' beliefs on L2 learning and teaching.

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APPENDIX

TEACHER EVALUATION*

Grade the following statements from 1 to 5. Use:

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

The English teacher needs to

(...) 1. Know the subject well.

Comments:.....

(...) 2. Plan appropriate objectives & contents and present them clearly.

Comments:.....

(...) 3. Take the students' needs and interests into account.

Comments:.....

(...) 4. Explain clearly and adapt classroom work to the students' capabilities.

Comments:.....

(...) 5. Prepare classes and teach according to the school's curricular project.

Comments:.....

(...) 6. Favour student participation and interaction.

Comments:.....

(...) 7. Be enthusiastic about teaching and motivate students.

Comments:.....

(...) 8. Use interesting materials and offer a wide range of activities in class.

Comments:.....

(...) 9. Show interest in all the students and treat them well.

Comments:.....

(...) 10. Teach in English as much as possible.

Comments:.....

(...) 11. Use the right criteria for evaluation and evaluate students objectively.

Comments:.....

(...) 12. Keep a balance between all the curricular components: oral and written work; grammar, vocabulary; sociolinguistic & sociocultural aspects; discourse competence, etc.

Comments:.....

(...) 13. Use audiovisual and new technological aids.

Comments:.....

(...) 14. Encourage learner autonomy.

Comments:.....

(...) 15. Organise individual, group work and cooperative learning.

Comments:.....

(...) 16. Maintain discipline in class.

Comments:.....

(...) 17. Organise games and game-like activities when necessary.

Comments:.....

(...) 18. Organise and take part in extracurricular activities.

Comments:.....

(...) 19. Pay attention to student diversity.

Comments:.....

(...) 20. Encourage reflective learning and teach the students how to learn in an autonomous way.

Comments:.....

* Adapted from Madrid & McLaren (1995)