

The Impact of the Continuum of an Education Programme on Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs about English Language Education

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Background: Teachers' beliefs play an important role in the way they teach and meet their students' needs. Researching pre-established pre-service teachers' beliefs gives evidence that they might impede pre-service teachers' compliance with pre-service education.

Purpose: Many studies have produced contradictory findings in terms of prospective change in pre-established pre-service teachers' beliefs caused by the impact of pre-service education study programmes. Therefore, this study addresses the gap by enriching this field with research findings reinforcing the potential impact of the study programme on changes in pre-service teachers' beliefs on effective English language teaching and learning expressed across different years of the study programme.

Method: The study uses the results of questionnaires completed by 99 randomly selected pre-service teachers enrolled in an English language teaching study programme provided by the Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. In addition, the study participants' database was expanded using bootstrapping to enhance the results obtained by applying statistical methods.

Results and Implication: The results showed statistically significant differences among different years of the study programme within the continuum of their English language teacher education thus indicating the potential impact of the programme. The impact of the study programme led to pre-service teachers' raised awareness and some modifications in their pre-established beliefs based on the learnt and acquired knowledge and gained practical teaching experiences during the practicums in higher grades of the study. The findings suggest that teacher educators and policymakers should be aware of pre-service teachers' beliefs when adopting new strategies for reconceptualising and/or modifying language teacher education programmes.

Keywords: teachers' beliefs, pre-service teachers, questionnaire, teacher education programme, effective English teacher

Introduction

The study of teachers' beliefs and teachers' knowledge has occupied a significant position in teaching research programmes and teacher education research since the mid-1980s. The bulk of the research efforts (Borg, 2003, 2006; Calderhead, 1996; Grossman et al., 2005; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Verloop et al., 2001) has been focused on establishing the distinction between teachers' knowledge and teachers' beliefs. According to Grossman et al. (2005, p. 18), "while we are trying to separate teachers' knowledge and belief about the subject matter for the purposes of clarity, we recognise that the distinction is blurry at best." In Verloop et al. (2001, p. 446), the authors explain, "in the mind of the teacher, components of knowledge,

beliefs, conceptions, and intuitions are inextricably intertwined." They also state that beliefs and knowledge are seen as inseparable. Although beliefs are seen roughly as referring to personal values, attitudes, and ideologies, knowledge refers to a teacher's more factual propositions. We agree with Nespor (1987) who claims that beliefs have stronger affective and evaluative components than knowledge and they are far more influential in determining how individuals organise and define tasks and problems. According to Farrell & Yang (2019), teacher beliefs have also been identified as one of the key variables to technology presence in classrooms. Undoubtedly, teachers' beliefs represent crucial aspects of teachers' inner worlds that impact prospective teachers' classroom behaviour, preferences and particular

practices. On the contrary, as evidenced by Gao & Cui's case study (2022) revealing a complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and their emergency remote teaching activity preferences amid and after COVID-19, they argue that "pedagogical beliefs in a broad sense may not be a sound indicator of teachers' online teaching preference" (p. 11) since pedagogical beliefs do not directly lead to teachers' varying levels of agency in choosing online activities.

It is essential to emphasise that although research on pre-service teachers' beliefs has brought rather ambiguous, even unsettling findings, their beliefs play a pivotal role in their knowledge acquisition as well as subsequent professional behaviour, attitudes, and classroom practices.

Therefore, this study intends to shed light on the change in pre-service teachers' beliefs by examining the whole spectrum of pre-service teachers on the continuum of their 5-year-long English language teaching study programme, i.e. from the very beginning of their pre-service education (first-year undergraduate students) up to the final years of pre-service education (second-year graduate students). Consequently, this research examines whether there are differences in beliefs based on age, learnt and acquired knowledge, prior language learning experience, and gained practical teaching experiences. For these groups of pre-service teachers, it is proposed that their beliefs are strongly influenced by their learnt and acquired knowledge of the subject content in particular courses, particularly in the first two years where linguistic and literary content is viewed as being important in laying the philological foundation. Furthermore, ELT methodology, language pedagogy, etc., gain dominance and become more important, particularly during practical microteaching seminars and short-term teaching practicums where there is a need for the pre-service teacher to demonstrate their ability to link linguistic and literary content and language pedagogy in the EFL classroom.

Therefore, we consider it essential to enrich the field of language teacher education with research findings reinforcing the importance of understanding pre-service teachers' beliefs, thoughts, and views on effective language teaching and learning. For this aim, we established a basic research question:

What are significant differences in Slovak pre-service teachers' beliefs across different years within particular grades of English language teacher education programmes?

To answer the research question, the collected data

were processed using appropriate statistical tests. To obtain the necessary conclusions, we set the following hypotheses.

The null hypothesis:

H0: There are no significant differences in Slovak pre-service teachers' beliefs across different years within particular grades of English language teacher education programmes.

The alternative hypothesis:

H1: The beliefs of Slovak pre-service teachers of English differ across different years within particular grades of English language teacher education programmes.

The rest of the study is organised as follows. First, the literature review highlights the most significant theoretical and research studies that have been carried out in the field of the development of the concept of teachers' beliefs. Second, the context of the study outlines the system of language teacher pre-service education in Slovakia. The next sections present the basic research questions and hypotheses, briefly describe the statistical methods used, and characterise the data set used in this study. The ensuing section presents the results of the study. The discussion compares the results obtained in this study with similar studies by other authors, suggests possible further directions of the study, and lists its limitations. The last section concludes the article.

Literature Review

The Place of Teachers' Beliefs in Research / Core Beliefs vs Peripheral Beliefs

Teachers' beliefs represent a very broad research construct that has been conceptualised and operationalised in educational sciences since the mid-1970s (Abelson, 1979; Fang, 1996; Green, 1971; Nettle, 1998; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Richardson, 1996; Rokeach, 1968). The study of teachers' beliefs is one of the challenges faced by many scholars because beliefs are not directly observable. It is possible to sit in a classroom where a researcher can observe a teacher's behaviour, see what the teacher does, and describe it. But the researcher cannot look into teachers' minds and see what they believe. It is also essential to note that teachers' beliefs exist as a system in which certain beliefs are core and others peripheral (Green, 1971; Pajares, 1992). Core beliefs are stable and exert a more powerful influence on behaviour than peripheral beliefs. Moreover, as proved by several studies (Borg,

2003, 2006; Pajares, 1992; Phipps & Borg, 2009), teachers' core beliefs are the ones that are more stable and powerful regarding what teachers do. In Borg (2006), the author claims that teachers' peripheral beliefs are, in contrast, less stable and might be changed and/or modified when tension arises between a peripheral belief and a core belief. This seems to be a matter of strength and will vary enormously from individual to individual.

Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs in Research / Formation

Pajares (1992) highlights, that beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling, or experience. He also claims that the earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter (newly acquired beliefs are most vulnerable to change). According to him, beliefs about teaching are well established by the time a student gets to college. Zhou & Liu (1997) and Li (2012) state that teachers' beliefs are shaped during their teaching processes and indicate the teachers' subjective knowledge of educational phenomenon, particularly towards their own teaching abilities and their learners.

Many research studies have produced contradictory findings concerning the change in pre-service teachers' pre-established beliefs related to what generally makes effective language teaching and learning, what roles language teachers play in the language classroom, how error correction should be done, what the role of grammar in language teaching is and which approach to teaching grammar is effective, which language skills should be focused on and how they should be balanced and integrated, how teaching materials should be utilised, etc. In this case, Borg (2003) points out that students entering language teacher education programmes may have an inappropriate and inadequate, unrealistic, or even naive understanding of teaching and learning (e.g., students in the initial stages of their teacher education programme believe that languages are learnt mainly by imitation and that errors are made mainly due to L1 interference).

Prospective Change in Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs

Some of the studies confirm *that pre-service teachers' beliefs can be developed and changed* during education programmes (Blume et al., 2019; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Debreli, 2012; Kavanoz, 2016; McCrocklin, 2020; Parkinson et al., 2017; Sheridan, 2016; Simsek, 2020). As Simsek (2020) states, this conceptual shift can be identified in their teaching perspectives from

behaviourist to constructivist paradigms of knowledge acquisition. Additionally, in Debreli's (2012) research study, the author concludes that although pre-service teachers' beliefs about effective language teaching and learning aligned with the content courses at the beginning of the teacher education programme, when they got opportunities to observe and teach in real classrooms, they found some of their beliefs were sometimes not applicable (e.g., on the one hand, using discussions, group work, playing games could be effective, on the other hand, they found these activities distracting and difficult to control, thus they preferred not to use them too frequently; at the beginning, they found learning grammar the least important skill in the EFL classroom, but over time, they stated, that an emphasis should occasionally be put on grammar since it impacts students' speaking and writing skills.

Conversely, according to constructivist theory, *teacher education programmes are not influential enough for modifying and changing pre-service teachers' beliefs* (Altan, 2012; Ballesteros et al., 2020; Capan, 2014; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Peacock, 2001). As Ballesteros et al. (2020) sum up in their study on Mexican pre-service English teachers, the metaphors provided by the researched teachers spanned two main categories, those of cultural transmission and learner-centred growth. The first one depicted such metaphors as "teacher as owner of knowledge", and the second was exemplified by such metaphors as "teachers as guides, atmosphere controllers, counsellors, fuel, farmers, and discoverers". In a similar way, Soleimani (2020) agrees that pre-service teachers who believe in constructivist conceptions tend to consider knowledge as a tentative phenomenon and those with traditional conception think that knowledge is certain and fixed. According to the findings by Ballesteros et al. (2020), the prevalence of the categories of transmission and provider of knowledge that accounts for 41.5 % of the metaphors produced by the pre-service teachers, is disappointing because efforts have been made in most education programs in the world in order to bring about a change in the traditional way of conceptualizing teaching and learning. In Soleimani's (2020) mixed-method research, by contrast, 200 EFL teachers who filled out the questionnaires followed by semi-structured interview sessions carried out with 20 participants, the research findings proved that EFL teachers predominantly practised facilitator style of teaching and inclined to student/learner-centered and constructive practices of teaching. The author concludes that the limitation of the study lies in the fact that data were collected from private language learning centers in which communications and improving speaking and listening skills are largely emphasized. Therefore, in such a context, EFL teachers mainly believe learning is malleable and

learning effort is the major source of knowledge acquisition. This finding reflects the idea of knowledge transformation rather than transmission propagated by post method proponents.

Interestingly, in the research study Uysal and Bardakci (2014) carried out on 108 primary-level EFL teachers in Turkey, it was found that *pre-service teacher-preparation courses* were reported to have only a 3% influence on teacher behaviour. The authors inquired about the stated beliefs of EFL teachers concerning grammar teaching and concluded that most of the teachers favoured traditional approaches to grammar teaching such as the use of explicit grammar teaching followed by controlled practise, the use of L1, mechanical drills, and repetitions. The teachers' most common classroom practices were also mostly related to teaching, practising, and testing grammar. Communicative activities were reported as important only after the traditional practices. The majority of teachers were found to use translations into L1, teacher-centred instruction, and deductive and explicit approaches to grammar teaching, with or without a controlled practice component. This finding indicated a gap between the teacher beliefs/practices and recent developments in second language acquisition research. This finding also pointed out a severe divergence between teaching practices and the curriculum goals in Turkey, which revealed an incongruence between curriculum innovations and teacher behaviours.

Undoubtedly, influencing pre-service teachers' beliefs relies upon multiple interdependent factors, such as the quality of the content of the study programme, the links between theory and practice, the balance between theoretical lectures and practical seminars and workshops, the length and quality of teaching practicums and classroom practices, and undoubtedly, the characteristics of university teachers, lecturers, mentors, and supervisors. Moreover, it is important emphasize that pre-service teachers' beliefs are formulated in particular socio-cultural and economic contexts that lead to expectedly different teaching behaviors and practices.

Method

Context

Regarding the issue of language teacher education programmes in Slovakia, Lojova (2009) points out that it is essential to focus on creating the teacher trainees' own theories on foreign language learning because when entering a classroom, each teacher behaves

according to his/her own theories of learning and teaching, which are comprised of his/her interiorised beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and understanding of learning and teaching processes. The author admits that even if the role of (university) lectures is obvious, seminars with problem-solving tasks leading to trainees' developing intellectual independence and autonomy must be assigned a high priority. Moreover, Siposova (2019) adds that it seems reasonable to suggest that pre-service teachers' beliefs are prone to change, particularly when the pre-service teachers observe the discrepancy between the knowledge they learn during language teacher education (i.e. the theory they study in lectures and seminars), what they would ideally like to do in their imaginative classrooms, and what they actually do during the short-term teaching practicum or, later, in the course of their classroom practice. Similarly, Vallente (2019) claims when the pre-service English language teachers enter the laboratory high school (a kind of training platform for education of the students of the college) for their on-campus practice teaching, they are met with the tension that concerns the ELT practices they learned in their college and those they are expected to implement in the laboratory high school.

Generally, pre-service English language teachers in Slovakia have to take a number of linguistic, literature-based, and linguo-didactic disciplines during their five-year-long study programme (three years of undergraduate study and two years of graduate study). Moreover, they are obliged to participate in the teaching practicum carried out in Slovak state schools (two weeks as an undergraduate and ten weeks as a graduate student). In the context of Slovak pre-service English language teacher education, we count ten universities and twelve faculties at present. As aforementioned, pre-service language teacher's theoretical backgrounds are shaped by lectures and seminars as well as obligatory teaching practicums in primary and lower and upper secondary schools. The number of specialised linguo-didactic courses (e.g., ELT Methodology I, II, III, Teaching English to Young Learners, ICT in the Language Classroom, Psychological Aspects of Language Teaching and Learning, etc.) provide our pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills that will have an impact on their pre-established beliefs. On the one hand, many of their pre-established beliefs remain; on the other hand, potential changes can take place, especially when they are trained to recognise how their beliefs are changed and how contextual factors (e.g., particular school environments and conditions during their ten-

week-long teaching practicum in their graduate programme) can influence their instructional practices. By providing pre-service teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs, e.g., through developing reflective thinking (e.g., answering reflective journals, filling in research questionnaires, etc.) during pre-service education, we can enhance their professional development and ultimately benefit their language learners'. Correspondingly, Pajares (1992) stated that teachers' beliefs and practices seem to be formed not by their pre-service education but through a process of enculturation and social construction once they started teaching.

Participants

A total of 150 students in all grades (undergraduate and graduate levels) of the pre-service teacher programme study at the Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia participated in the research study. Since we assumed that it would not be realistically possible to get answers from all students, we wanted to create a sample of 100 students (to meet the requirements for using the central limit theorem and correct use of statistical methods). Therefore, we randomly assigned case numbers to the students and then randomly selected 100 of them (according to Agresti & Franklin, 2007). As a result, we were able to get answers from 99 of these selected pre-service teachers enrolled in the five-year-long English language teaching study programme provided by the Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Slovakia. The research sample consists of 20 randomly selected first-year undergraduate students (aged 19-20), 23 second-year undergraduate students (aged 20-21), 19 third-year undergraduate students (aged 21-22), 28 first-year graduate students (aged 22-23) and 9 second-year graduate students (aged 23-24), i.e., 62 undergraduates and 37 graduate students. In terms of statistics, the

sample of 99 participants is sufficient for the correct use of selected statistical methods, the interpretations of the findings, and the generalisations of conclusions to the whole population. In addition, we used the bootstrapping method to enhance the sample size. This method was used because the application of the MANOVA method divides the sample of 99 students into smaller subsamples. Since not every of these subsamples meets the required sample size to justify the validity of the normality assumption using the application of the central limit theorem, we enlarged the sample using the bootstrapping method. This method randomly generates new cases in the database based on existing cases. Thus, we increased the sample to 1,000 students, while the random generation of new cases was carried out by stratification according to the year of study. Thus, the original set of 99 students was divided into subsets according to the year of study and new random units were generated in them based on the real units in these subgroups. This also preserves the proportion of students in each year of study in the whole sample.

Materials and Instruments

Based on the questionnaire used in Kissau et al. (2012), we modified the instrument to align it with the purpose of the current research study, thus specifying the statements using the effective 'English' teacher instead of the original 'foreign language'. We also made changes concerning the identification of a study programme by indicating particular years (i.e., first-year, second-year, or third-year undergraduate; first-year or second-year graduate). The questionnaire, based on a 5-item Likert scale, included the following options (1 = Strongly Disagree/SD, 2 = Disagree/D, 3 = Neutral/N, 4 = Agree/A, 5 = Strongly Agree/SA). Furthermore, the questionnaire subscales were thematically divided into five sections, A – E, see table 1.

Table 1

Sections of questionnaire subscales

<i>Section</i>	<i>Subscale</i>	<i>Question numbers</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Cronbach's α</i>
A	Language and Culture	Q1 – Q9	9	0.83
B	Teaching Strategies	Q10 – Q17	8	0.8
C	Individual Differences	Q18 – Q22	5	0.85
D	Assessment and Grammar	Q 23 – Q29	7	0.82
E	Second Language Theory	Q30 – Q45	16	0.61

Procedure

We administered the questionnaire to 99 randomly

selected pre-service teachers enrolled in the five-year-long (three years of undergraduate and two years of graduate study) English language teaching study programme provided by the Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Slovakia. The questionnaire was administered in print at the beginning of the winter term 2020/2021 during English Language Teaching (ELT) Methodology seminars (September 2020) carried out via in-person teaching. The rationale behind administering the questionnaire personally was to obtain prompt feedback from all the participants of the seminars. By filling out and returning the survey, the participants of the study gave their informed consent. Participants were encouraged to tear off the cover page and retain it for their records. It took approximately 25-30 minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

Analysis

To compare students in different years of study, we used the method of analysis of variance with the multivariate dependent variable (MANOVA). MANOVA is an extension of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) method, which is one of the most frequently used statistical models suitable for verifying the existence of significant differences in several independent samples. In other words, to verify the significant influence of the factor (qualitative variable, in our case the degree of study) on the values of the multivariate dependent variable (quantitative variable, in our case the score on the scale of pre-service teachers' beliefs on individual questions in the questionnaire).

We considered a random sample of the students, for which we have measured values of the dependent variable (the score on the scale of pre-service teachers' beliefs on the 45 questions in the questionnaire), and factor meaning the year of the study – five groups of pre-service teachers (first, second, and third-year undergraduates and first and second-year graduate students). The whole sample of students was then divided into the subsamples given by the different levels of factor. Thus, will be the subsamples of the multivariate dependent variable corresponding to the levels of factor (Svabova et al., 2020).

The MANOVA method aims to analyse whether there are statistically significant differences between the average values of the dependent variable, the score on the scale of pre-service teachers' beliefs for individual questions, in the subsets created for the individual

years of study, i.e., whether these mean values can be considered equal (which actually means that the year of study does not have a significant impact on the values of the dependent variable) or differ significantly (which means that the year of study has a significant impact on the dependent variable).

Formally, we would write the tested null hypothesis

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \dots = \mu_5, \quad (1)$$

where μ_i is the mean value of the multivariate dependent variable in the i -th year of the study, $i = 1, \dots, 5$. The alternative hypothesis can be written formally

$$H_1: \mu_i \neq \mu_j, \quad (2)$$

for some $i \neq j, i, j = 1, \dots, 5$.

For a visual view of the mean values in the subsets, we use a Means Plot, which indicates what is the content of the null hypothesis of the test and suggests whether there are significant differences in the mean values of individual study levels, and we can expect the null hypothesis to be rejected. Or, conversely, if the average values are similar, we can expect not to reject the null hypothesis. In testing, we use a significance level of 0.10.

We performed hypothesis tests in the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 25. We evaluated the test results based on the p-value of the test. If the p-value of the test is lower than the significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected. Rejection of the null hypothesis H_0 and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis H_1 means that the year of the study programme education content impacts the score of the students on individual questions. On the other hand, the case of not-rejection of H_0 means that the year of the study programme does not significantly influence the scores of pre-service teachers' beliefs.

Results

Table 2 shows the results of the one-way MANOVA test. Based on the p-value of Wilks' lambda for the factor variable *degree* of study (p-value = 0.059), we can conclude that the pre-service teachers' beliefs were significantly dependent on the actual level of their study.

In the following parts, we included the results of those questions for which there were significant differences in the individual years of the study programme. In these, using the post-hoc Scheffe's test of multiple comparisons, we found those years of study in which there were significant differences in students' answers.

Based on the statistical processing, Figure 1 shows there are significant differences between the groups of the first-year and third-year undergraduates for **Q9** from **Section A (Language and culture)**, referring to the implementation of materials in the EFL classroom as stated in Table 3.

Table 2

Multivariate MANOVA test

		<i>Multivariate Tests^a</i>				
	<i>Effect</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Hypothesis df</i>	<i>Error df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	0.998	581.069 ^b	45.0	50.000	0.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.002	581.069 ^b	45.0	50.000	0.000
	Hotelling's Trace	522.962	581.069 ^b	45.0	50.000	0.000
	Roy's Largest Root	522.962	581.069 ^b	45.0	50.000	0.000
degree	Pillai's Trace	2.033	1.218	180.0	212.000	0.084
	Wilks' Lambda	0.050	1.254	180.0	202.192	0.059
	Hotelling's Trace	4.831	1.302	180.0	194.000	0.036
	Roy's Largest Root	2.396	2.822 ^c	45.0	53.000	0.000

Note:

a. Design: Intercept + degree

b. Exact statistic

c. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.

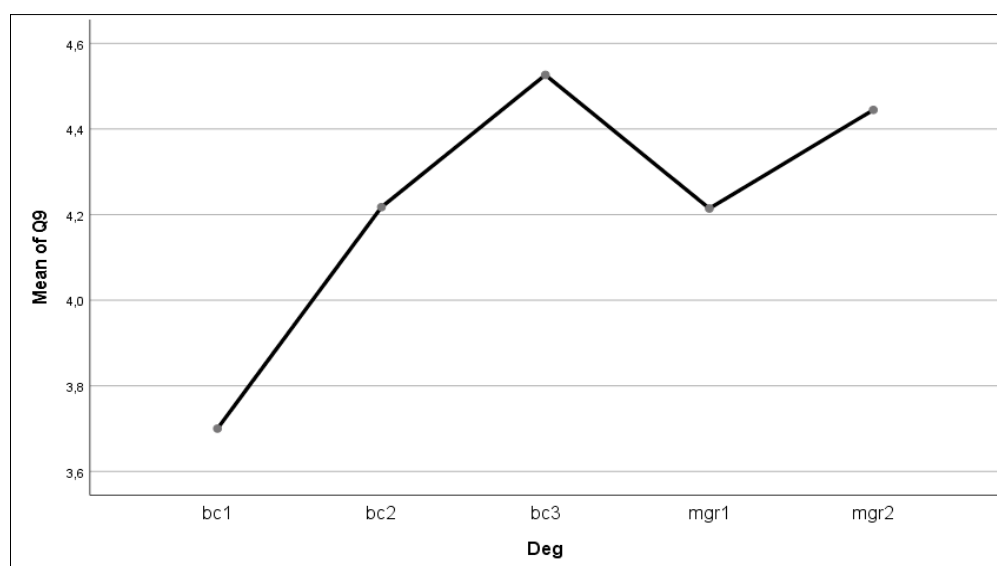
Table 3

Question 9

<i>Question no.</i>	<i>Section</i>	<i>Statement</i>
Q9	A: Language and culture	An effective English teacher selects materials that present viewpoints that are unique to the target language and its culture (e.g., a text shows how people greet each other differently in the target culture).

Figure 1.

Differences among particular grades for Q9



PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS

For **Q9**, the statistical differences were found by Scheffe's test of multiple comparisons between the groups of first-year and third-year undergraduates (mean difference = - 0.83; p-value = 0.012, using bootstrapping with 1 000 samples: p-value <0.05, 95 % confidence interval for mean difference is (-0.85;-0.81)).

Regarding this, it is necessary to consider that first-year undergraduates are student teachers who have just entered the five-year-long teacher education programme at the university (i.e. three years of undergraduate studies and two years of graduate studies). Therefore, the impact of their previous language studies in upper secondary education may be seen, reflecting the selection and usage of materials utilised by their former language teachers. In contrast, third-year undergraduates are student teachers who have already passed several courses at university, in particular, area studies and intercultural awareness courses aimed at developing their knowledge of cultural aspects.

Regarding the second section, **Section B (Teaching strategies)**, Figure 2 shows the significant differences found for **Q13** (stated in Table 4), referring to the opportunities to learn more about other subjects in

English in the foreign language classroom. For **Q13**, significant differences were found between the groups of first-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students (mean difference = - 1.28; p-value = 0.029, using bootstrapping with 1 000 samples: p-value = 0.012, 95 % confidence interval for mean difference is (-1.32;-1.25)).

Obviously, second-year graduate students have already passed the majority of their methodology courses, e.g., CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) aspects. Thus, they are aware of the benefits of including content knowledge in language teaching as it enhances the complex integration of all language skills and language means for the sake of practical application and real-life usage.

With regard to the third section, **Section C (Individual differences)**, there were no statistical differences found among particular years (min p-value = 0.094). Therefore, it can be assumed that pre-service teachers within different years of the study programme are aware of the individual differences that should be considered when teaching and learning a foreign language. Obviously, since all of them experienced language study themselves, they realise how important these factors are, namely when

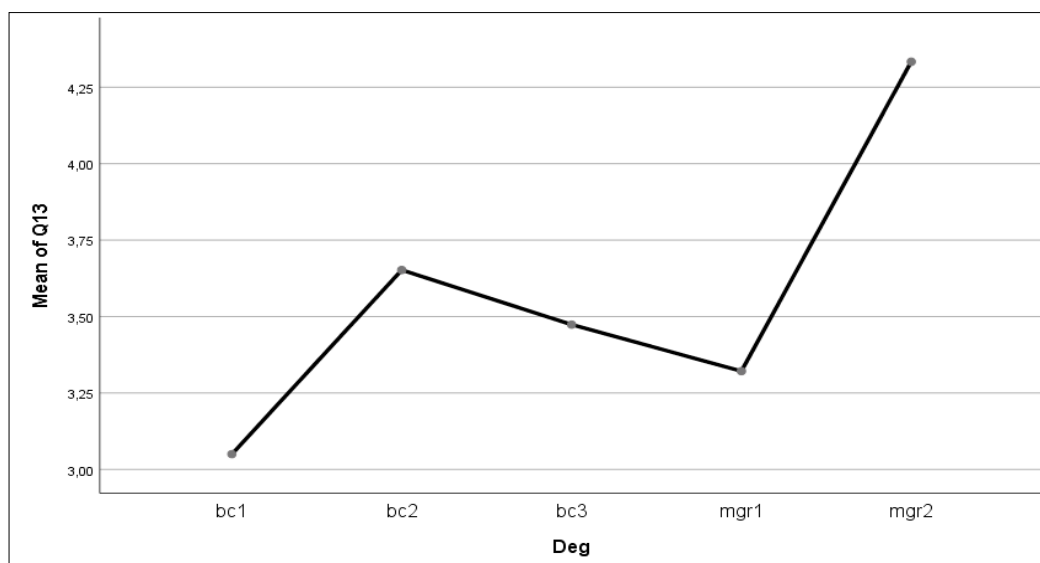
Table 4

Question 13

Question no.	Section	Statement
Q13	B: Teaching strategies	An effective English teacher provides opportunities for students to learn more about other subjects (e.g., math, science, social studies) in the target language classroom.

Figure 2

Differences among particular grades for Q13



teachers plan the activities in order to show practical reasons for doing them; when teachers select the activities including a variety of students' interests; the age of learners; and learners' learning styles and strategies. According to Oxford (2003), it is crucial for a learner to be aware of one's learning style but warns us against being too rigid about the types as they "are not dichotomous (black or white, present or absent). Learning styles generally operate on a continuum or on multiple, intersecting continua."

The research findings in **Section D (Assessment and grammar)**, as stated in Table 5, show that there are significant differences between undergraduates and graduate students (first-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students: mean difference = 1.23; p-value = 0.016, using bootstrapping with 1 000 samples: p-value = 0.011, 95 % confidence interval for mean difference is (1.20;1.26); and second-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students: mean difference = 1.08; p-value = 0.041, using bootstrapping with 1 000 samples: p-value = 0,01, 95 % confidence interval for mean difference is (1.05;1.11)), in particular for **Q23** concerning the basics of linguistic analysis applied

in the foreign language as shown in Figure 3.

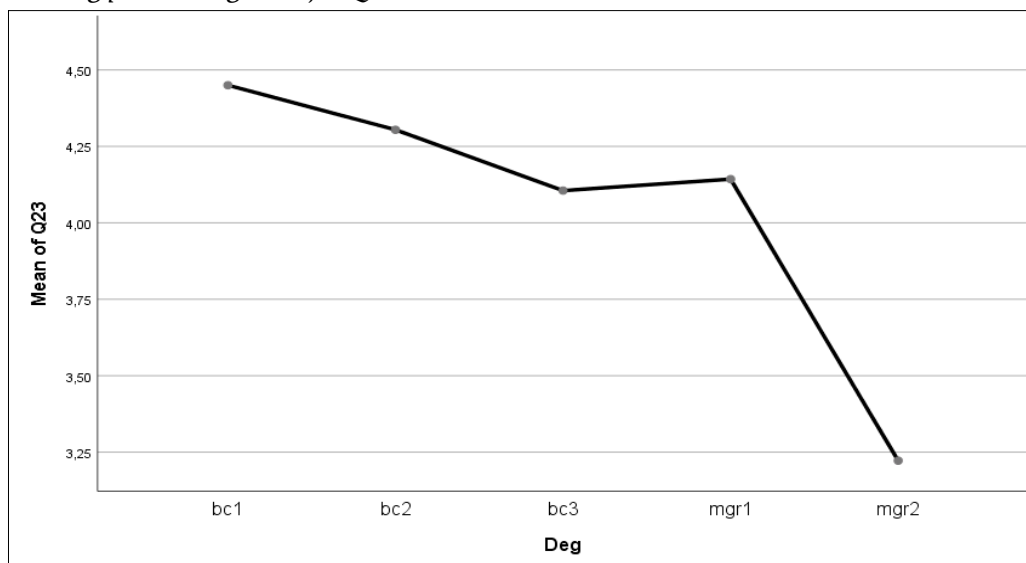
Presumably, this finding lies in the fact that undergraduates are obliged to take purely linguistic courses aimed at enhancing declarative knowledge of phonetics and phonology and morphology and syntax in the first three years of their language teacher education programme. They believe that academic grammar needs to be explicitly applied also in foreign language teaching. On the contrary, graduate students, who are fully aware of ELT methodology consider declarative knowledge to be subservient to the procedural knowledge that resides in the practical application of communicative activities carried out in language classrooms.

Another difference in **Section D (Assessment and grammar)** was found in **Q25** (as shown in Figure 4) concerning students' homework completion and its position in the assessment scale. Scheffe's multiple comparisons tests showed significant differences between the groups of second-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students (mean difference = 1.16; p-value = 0.048, using bootstrapping with 1 000 samples: p-value = 0.011, 95 % confidence interval for mean difference is (1.13;1.20)).

Table 5
Questions 23 and 25

Question no.	Section	Statement
Q23	D: Assessment and grammar	An effective English teacher understands the basics of linguistic analysis (phonology, syntax) as they apply to the target language.
Q25		An effective English teacher bases at least part of students' grades on the completion of homework.

Figure 3
Differences among particular grades for Q23



It has to be emphasised that (language) teachers at all levels are constantly assigning and correcting homework. Activities related to homework are part of a teacher's daily work. According to Warton (2001), homework is a widespread educational activity across cultures, ages, and ability levels. We claim that although homework and assessment have long-established connections and rely on old school traditions, there is little research on homework assessment. We assume that the beliefs of second-year undergraduates are based mainly on their previous schooling when they themselves were assigned homework and graded. Conversely, second-year graduate students, having completed their ELT methodology courses, are aware of the research findings in this field. In fact, a review of the literature (Strandberg, 2013) suggests that there is a gap in the research field of homework, especially in relation to formative assessment practices that are carried out by teachers to avoid discouraging their students from taking more responsibility for their homework.

Finally, the research findings in **Section E (Second language theory)** presented in Table 6 showed the significant differences between undergraduates and graduate students (first-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students: mean difference = ; p-value = , using bootstrapping with samples: p-value

= , confidence interval for mean difference is) for **Q36** concerning error correction as shown in Figure 5.

This suggests that teacher education programmes may be influential enough to modify and change pre-services teachers' pre-established beliefs. On the one hand, first-year undergraduates, having completed their former schooling where their teachers constantly corrected them, are convinced that teacher correction must be done in every lesson and in every aspect of language study. On the other hand, graduate students, who are about to finish their pre-service education, and hence are fully aware of ELT methodology, report beliefs that indicate the impact of second language theory.

Discussion

Similarity of Beliefs in (C) Individual Differences Section

In brief, the examined pre-service teachers had similar beliefs in regard to Section C (Individual differences) of the administered questionnaire. Based on the analysis of the questions in this section, we can conclude that pre-service teachers within the five continuous years of their teacher education

Figure 4

Differences among particular grades for Q25

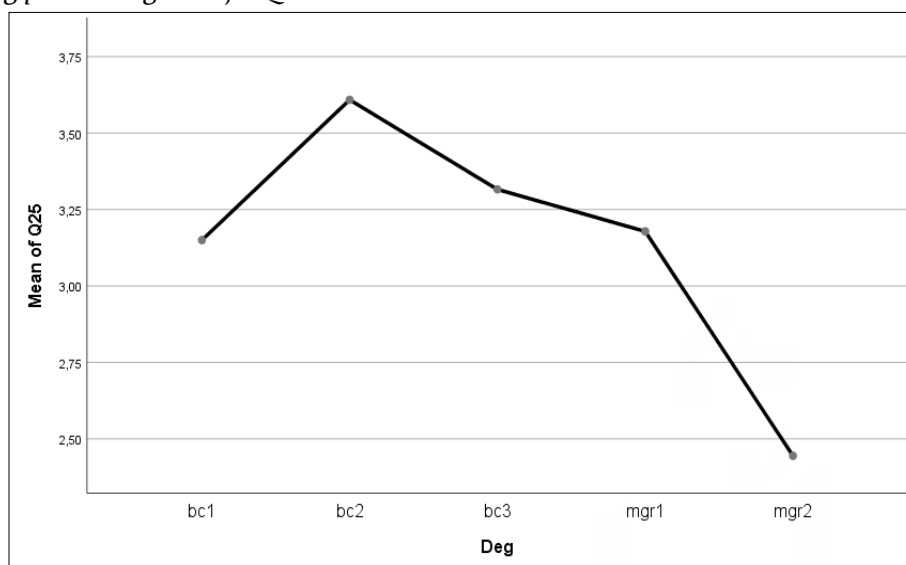
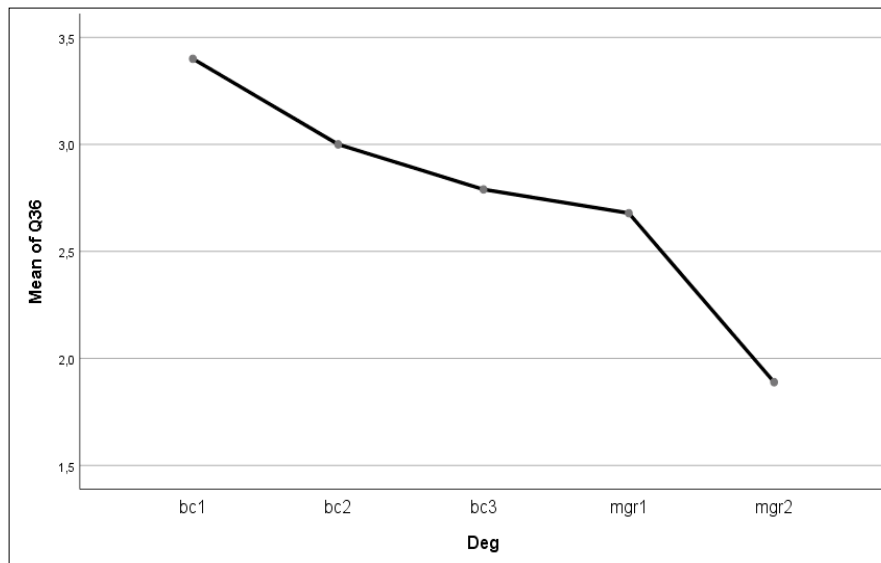


Table 6

Question 36

Question no.	Section	Statement
Q36	E: Second language theory	Foreign language teachers must correct most students' errors.

Figure 5*Differences among particular grades in Q36*

programme are aware of the fact that individual learner differences play a crucial role in learning a foreign language. We assume that they believe a teacher should be skilled and willing to help students use these differences to their advantage in the process of learning a foreign language. Contrary to traditional language teaching approaches in which the teacher was supposed to be a controller and the centre of the class (Ballesteros et al., 2020; Uysal and Bardakci, 2014), the learner is given the centrality in a student/learner-centred approach (Soleimani, 2020). The assumption is that this approach allows teachers to consider and study individual differences since their pedagogical implications will further lead to the kind of teaching practices that increase the success ratio at the foreign language achievement level. According to McDonough (1981), “the teachers have six options to select: do nothing different, as the variables are so complex and the effects relatively small; use such knowledge in the diagnosis of learning problems; select only students who have the demonstrated relevant qualities; select a method which is known to match the kind of learner they have; train the students to adopt the behaviour characteristics of good language learners; only teach students whose learning characteristics match their own in some way.” Obviously, a language teacher, apart from imparting linguistic knowledge, must also be a psychologist who can modify his/her teaching methodology according to the factors related to the individual differences of his/her learners. Moreover, s/he has to realise that it is not enough to know that all students are different from each other. Regarding this, Strevens (1985) suggests the learning style should determine the teaching style, teaching materials, and course syllabus. He argues that one of the fundamental

teaching activities is shaping the input that the learner receives. Therefore, it can be concluded that to match teaching to learning, at least two teaching strategies should be involved. Firstly, it refers to the variety of pre-planned teaching materials that are prepared on the basis of the learners’ characteristics. Secondly, it is essential to have teachers who are sensitive to individual differences, i.e., teachers who are able not only to decide on and use a teaching method appropriate to the class but also to make decisions from moment to moment in the class depending on the particular learner, situation, and language task. Thus, it is necessary to elaborate and establish appropriate teacher education programmes for pre-service teachers to develop their own beliefs about particular criteria for both methods and materials selection.

Significant Differences in Pre-service Teachers’ Beliefs

Based on the statistical processing, the examined pre-service teachers exhibited different perception in Sections A (Language and culture), B (Teaching strategies), D (Assessment and grammar), and E (Second language theory). We found that significant differences were proved for Q9 (Language and culture) between first-year undergraduates and third-year undergraduates; for Q13 (Teaching strategies) between first-year undergraduates and second-year graduates; for Q23 (Assessment and grammar) between first-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students as well as second-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students; for Q25 (Assessment and grammar) between second-year undergraduates and second-year graduate

students, and finally, for Q36 (Second language theory) between first-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students.

Differences in Beliefs in (A) Language and Culture Section

Referring to a detailed analysis of the background of Q9, we have to consider the intertwined relationship between culture and language. Undoubtedly, language teachers (in our case, third-year undergraduates – having passed the first obligatory ELT Methodology course) realise that teaching a foreign/second language (L2) is incomplete without studying culture. Based on the scientific literature (Robb, 2005; Kakeru, 2012), for L2 learners, language study seems senseless if the students know nothing about the people who speak the target language or the country in which the target language is spoken. Learning a foreign language means a lot more than the manipulation of grammar and vocabulary in speaking or writing. According to Robb (2005), “the need for cultural literacy in ELT arises mainly from the fact that most language learners, not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers.” In addition, many authors (McDevitt, 2004, Sysoyev & Donelson, 2002, etc.) claim that, nowadays, the L2 culture is presented as an interdisciplinary core in many L2 curricula designs and textbooks. In Kakeru (2012), the author contends that culture influences language teaching in two ways: linguistic and pedagogical. Linguistically, it affects the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of the language. Pedagogically, it influences the choice of the language materials because the cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology must be considered while deciding upon the language materials.

Differences in Beliefs in (B) Teaching Strategies Section

In terms of Q13 (statistical differences between first-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students), it is crucial to consider the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) aspects implemented in lessons. By teaching CLIL lessons, we are giving students the tools to grow, and acquire and activate cross-disciplinary skills by using a language different from their own. CLIL encourages learners to think critically and utilise their collaboration skills. Students in CLIL lessons need to pay attention, observe, and learn the language by learning about other subjects in that language since the CLIL curriculum balances bilingual education and language

learning. Repeated exposure and stimulation help students assimilate the language while learning particular content (e.g., history, chemistry, biology, geography, math, physics, etc.) that will greatly expand their horizons and promote natural curiosity. Moreover, apart from the significant differences between undergraduates and graduate students, we have to point out that third-year undergraduates showed a very high degree of agreement with Q13, which can be explained by the fact that they had already learnt about CLIL methodology in their first ELT Methodology courses.

Differences in Beliefs in (D) Assessment and Grammar Section

Referring to Q23, according to Stern (1997), we need to consider the general model for second language teaching comprised of three levels. The point of view represented by the model is that in language teaching, we have to operate with four key concepts: language, learning, teaching, and context. At the basic Level 1 (foundations), a prospective teacher, either implicitly or explicitly, works with language theory. The main disciplines that can be drawn upon are linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and the study of particular languages. Generally, Level 1 disciplines represent the core of obligatory courses that also the first- year and second-year undergraduates take. However, language teaching demands a view of the learner and the nature of language learning. Hence, Level 2 (inter-level) emphasises the disciplines that most directly relate to this issue, such as psychology, particularly educational psychology and psycholinguistics, for language learning and language use. Furthermore, language teaching implies a view of the language teacher and language teaching. The discipline that most directly relates to this concept is the study of education. Finally, language teaching occurs in a given context. The interpretation of context is an essential part of a theory. Therefore, language learning and teaching must always be viewed in a particular context, setting, or background. A substantial part of these courses is provided in the master's degree portion of our pre-service education programmes, not omitting Level 3 (practice level) of the model. This includes methodology and organisation, i.e., the objectives, content, procedures, materials, and evaluation of outcomes, as well as planning and administration at different educational levels (primary, secondary, higher education, teacher education, adult education, informal education). In addition, all graduate students in our faculty undergo obligatory teaching practicums during which they are allowed to put the theory they get from the courses into practice.

The research findings referring to Q25 revealed significant differences between second-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students. Unfortunately, few studies address students' perspectives on homework in relation to assessment (Warton, 2001; Xu & Yuan, 2003). However, two perceptions expressed by students in Wilson and Rhodes (2010) have a connection to formative assessment and homework: firstly, if teachers do not grade the homework and return it quickly, the students report feeling like they have wasted their time on that activity, and secondly, students prefer that the teacher shows how the homework has an impact on the current subject matter and connects homework assignments to current lessons. Therefore, we can assume that our teacher education programme has impacted the graduate students and helped them realise the importance of formative assessment, expressed by giving grades. Therefore, our second-year graduate students disagreed with Q25.

Differences in Beliefs in (E) Second Language Theory Section

Finally, the differences between first-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students on Q36 signify pre-service teachers' beliefs about error correction in the language classroom. We believe that language teachers should be aware that their time and effort needed to correct students' mistakes are not wasted. On the other hand, they should also realise that in many cases, less is more, which is also emphasised by Hubbard (1983). The author states that "teachers will also have to allow errors to go uncorrected on many occasions – something which the behaviourist would not feel happy about." With this in mind, as supported by behaviouristic theory – errors are viewed as a symptom of ineffective teaching or evidence of failure. Therefore, errors become like sin, something to be avoided. The current teaching reality of the 21st century, which nurtures from the postulates of communicative language teaching and the diversity of eclectic teaching methods, advocates certain types of corrective feedback in different circumstances, particularly as a tool for integrating form and meaning.

Contrary to traditional methods, nowadays, the focus is on the process of learning rather than on the product. Undoubtedly, the main goal of the foreign language classroom today is to develop students' language skills and overall communicative competence. Hence, language learners worldwide should be aware of the fact that making mistakes is a natural process in learning a foreign language and that the purpose of giving them feedback is to help

them progress and improve rather than to criticise and punish them. Owing to traditional conservative ways of teaching English that our pre-service teachers (first-year undergraduates) were exposed to, their beliefs reflect their personal experiences. Contrarily, as our second-year graduate students have completed their ELT Methodology courses in which they also dealt with different attitudes towards error correction, it can be assumed that this pre-service education impacted their current beliefs about this issue.

The study results have implications and applications for policymakers and school authorities designing language teacher education programmes in which specialised courses should be offered. For example, pre-service language teachers should be trained to recognise how their beliefs and pre-established philosophies may influence their prospective classroom practices. Similarly, Ballesteros et al. (2020) claim that teacher educators need to make their students' conceptual systems more explicit and enhance their reflection on the implications these concepts have for their actions as teachers. There is common agreement that reflection in and on practice needs to be enhanced, but it also needs to be equally understood by teacher educators and pre-service teachers. The challenge of a change in pre-service teachers' pre-established beliefs can bring about new directions in language teacher education programmes so that the programmes enhance teachers' professional development and benefit their language learners. We agree with Farrell (2019a), who emphasises that teacher education programmes deal with several major problems to achieve the goal of quality and effective education. These include bridging the gap between theory and practice, making practice more meaningful and significant for student teachers, and a lack of follow-up contact with teachers. Furthermore, Simsek (2020) sought to investigate the impact of a 20-hour peer-tutoring project on the teaching beliefs, community service attitudes, and personal and professional development of 14 Turkish EFL teacher candidates. The author revealed a promising shift concerning not only a conceptual shift in the area of knowledge acquisition but also their community partnership approaches from the unidirectional to the reciprocal pattern of altruism towards their tutees.

The results of the research study also demonstrate the need for more research related to this issue. By adding a qualitative component to the strictly quantitative measures used in the present research study, we can enrich the statistical data through complex personal interpretations of the research subjects. Further research by means of qualitative research methods

involving narration, in-depth interviews, and unstructured observations processed in the form of either Grounded Theory Paradigm models, concept maps, metaphors etc., would be essential for gathering qualitative data that could reveal specific aspects of pre-service teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning. Moreover, longitudinal studies may bring about complex research data that will continuously enrich the issue of teachers' beliefs.

Lastly, there is a limitation to the present study, which relied entirely on a questionnaire to discover pre-service teachers' beliefs about effective language teaching and learning and was administered to pre-service teachers just at one Faculty of Education. Despite the limitations regarding the small scale of this study, it may be seen as a starting point for educational researchers interested in making comparisons of diversity within groups of different years of student teachers enrolled in pre-service language education programmes. A weakness of the study can also be considered the fact that in the study, we focused on different students of each year of study. It would certainly be appropriate to monitor the same students during all the years of their studies and thus assess the impact of their studies on their beliefs about teaching. In this, we see a possible further direction of the study. However, this weakness was balanced using a very robust statistical method that is appropriate and commonly used for the data of this nature. The obtained results are statistically significant and generalisable with high probability.

Conclusion

This study addressed the gap in pre-service teachers' beliefs research by examining the impact of the teacher study programme viewed across the whole spectrum of pre-service teachers. The results showed that there were statistically significant differences among different years of the study programme within the continuum. The impact of the 5-year-long study programme led to pre-service teachers' raised awareness and some modifications in their pre-established beliefs based on the learnt and acquired knowledge and gained practical teaching experiences during the practicums in higher grades (third year of undergraduate and first and second years of graduate school)

Although the examined pre-service teachers derived their beliefs based on their previous language learning experiences during their school years, having attended and passed ELT Methodology courses as well as teaching practicums at schools, pre-service teachers

developed more awareness of their beliefs leading to particular changes in their pre-established beliefs by demonstrating their ability to link linguistic and literary content and language pedagogy in the EFL classroom.

The results of this study are to some extent consistent with the results in similar studies. It is important to emphasise that compared to undergraduate students (1st– 3rd year bachelors), graduate students (1st and 2nd year masters) showed significant shift in their beliefs about teaching strategies, assessment and grammar and second language theory thus demonstrating conceptual change in their beliefs which was developed and modified according to the personal teaching experiences they had had within the teacher study programme

In the coming months we will try to enrich the field of language teacher education with qualitative research findings reinforcing the importance of pre-service teachers' self-reflection, which should become one of the essential skills that needs to be fostered in all candidates by giving them the opportunity to reflect on their beliefs, e.g., through developing reflective thinking (e.g., answering reflective journals, etc.) during pre-service education.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS

Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please, give your opinion on these statements. Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements by marking the number associated with your opinion, where:

1 = *strongly disagree* 2 = *disagree* 3 = *neutral* 4 = *agree* 5 = *strongly agree*

Group 1 – Language and culture

QA	Statement: An effective English teacher...					
Q1	... is involved in and enthusiastic about the target language (TL) and the TL culture.	1	2	3	4	5
Q2	... has good oral and writing skills in the TL.	1	2	3	4	5
Q3	... teaches familiar expressions (e.g., It's raining cats and dogs.) to help learners communicate successfully in the TL.	1	2	3	4	5
Q4	... often uses authentic materials (e.g., maps, pictures, clothing, food) to teach about the TL and TL culture.	1	2	3	4	5
Q5	... provides opportunities for students to use the TL in and outside of school.	1	2	3	4	5
Q6	... uses the TL as the main language of communication in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
Q7	... encourages foreign language learners to speak in the TL from the first day of instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
Q8	... gives examples of cultural differences between the student's first language and the TL.	1	2	3	4	5
Q9	... selects materials that present viewpoints that are unique to the foreign language and its culture (e.g., a text shows how people greet each other differently in the target culture).	1	2	3	4	5

Group 2 – Teaching strategies

QB	Statement: An effective English teacher...					
Q10	... uses small groups so that more students are actively involved.	1	2	3	4	5
Q11	... gives learners a time limit to complete small group activities.	1	2	3	4	5
Q12	... gives learners tasks to complete (e.g., labelling a picture, filling in blanks) while reading or listening in the TL.	1	2	3	4	5
Q13	... provides opportunities for students to learn more about other subjects (e.g., math, science, social studies) in the TL classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
Q14	... has students take part in role-plays from the beginning of TL instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
Q15	... asks students to find out unknown information from a classmate or another source.	1	2	3	4	5
Q16	... has students act out commands or do other physical activities to practice listening comprehension in the TL.	1	2	3	4	5
Q17	... uses computers (e.g., computer-based exercises, e-mail, Internet resources).	1	2	3	4	5

Group 3 – Individual differences

QC	Statement: An effective English teacher...					
Q18	... plans activities to meet the ends of TL students with a variety of interests.	1	2	3	4	5
Q19	... plans different teaching strategies and activities depending on the learners' age.	1	2	3	4	5
Q20	... encourages students to explain why they are learning the TL and how they learn best.	1	2	3	4	5
Q21	... teaches TL students to use various strategies to improve their vocabulary learning (e.g., creating a mental picture of the word, memory aids).	1	2	3	4	5
Q22	... teaches TL students to use various learning strategies (e.g., self-evaluation, repetition, draw a picture).	1	2	3	4	5

Group 4 – Assessment and grammar

QD	Statement: An effective English teacher...					
Q23	... understands the basics of linguistic analysis (phonology, syntax) as they apply to the TL.	1	2	3	4	5
Q24	... uses activities and assignments that draw learners' attention to grammatical points.	1	2	3	4	5
Q25	... bases at least part of students' grades on the completion of homework.	1	2	3	4	5
Q26	... grades written assignments mainly on the number of errors in grammar.	1	2	3	4	5
Q27	... grades spoken language mainly on the number of errors in grammar.	1	2	3	4	5
Q28	... bases at least some part of students' grades on how well and how often they speak in the TL.	1	2	3	4	5
Q29	... should rephrase learners' errors rather than focusing on the mistake.	1	2	3	4	5

Group 5 – Second language theory

QE						
Q30	Foreign language learners should speak with native speakers of the TL as often as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
Q31	An understanding of theories of second language acquisition helps foreign language teachers teach better.	1	2	3	4	5
Q32	Foreign language learners do not always learn grammatical points by means of formal instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
Q33	Using small group activities helps make students less nervous in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
Q34	Activities that focus on the exchange of meaningful information between two speakers are more important than activities that focus on the use of grammar.	1	2	3	4	5
Q35	The more intelligent a person is, the more likely he or she is to learn the TL well.	1	2	3	4	5
Q36	Foreign language teachers must correct most students' errors.	1	2	3	4	5
Q37	Having students work in small groups is likely to result in them learning errors in the TL from each other.	1	2	3	4	5
Q38	It is not good to have beginning foreign language learners speak too much with native speakers because native speakers usually do all of the talking.	1	2	3	4	5
Q39	Foreign language learners can learn to use a foreign language well simply by exposing them to it (e.g., reading or listening to the language).	1	2	3	4	5
Q40	Exposing learners to written and spoken language that is a little bit above their current level of understanding is necessary for TL learning.	1	2	3	4	5
Q41	Making students speak quickly in the TL improves TL use.	1	2	3	4	5
Q42	Adults learn a foreign language similar to the way they learnt their first language.	1	2	3	4	5
Q43	Teaching about the TL culture is not as important as teaching grammar and vocabulary.	1	2	3	4	5
Q44	Native or near-native language skills of the teacher are more important than his or her teaching skills.	1	2	3	4	5
Q45	Learners must understand every word of a spoken message to understand what is being said in the TL.	1	2	3	4	5