

## CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON TEACHER'S BELIEFS

Lilia Sulema Bórquez Morales; Abigail Carretero Hernández\*

Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, Pachuca, Mexico

\* Email: [abigail\\_carretero@uaeh.edu.mx](mailto:abigail_carretero@uaeh.edu.mx)

(Received: 01/02/2023; Revised: 27/03/2023; Accepted: 07/04/2023)

**Abstract:** Mexican teachers working in the area of English language, provided the context for the study. In Mexico, English teaching in the basic education system is still incipient, irregular, in progress, and not yet compulsory in all institutions. Therefore, this study aims to describe contextual factors that influence what teachers believe to be possible or not to foster in their own teaching practice. The study uses qualitative content analysis to explore teachers' narratives displaying beliefs of 9 Mexican teachers working in a state in Central Mexico. The in-depth analysis led to the identification of concrete factors that in Teachers' Beliefs hinder the use and fostering of strategies used in the process of learning a language, also known as Language Learning Strategies (LLS), in their teaching practice. The findings, based on two specific kinds of strategies; metacognitive and social, show that for the teachers in this state there are three main beliefs that hinder the use and fostering of LLS. The identification of such contextual factors is of relevance to Teacher Education as a result of the interaction between the actual teaching practice, the previous knowledge and the personal beliefs, which frame the contextual factors and guide the teachers' pedagogical decisions.

**Keywords:** Teacher's beliefs, language learning strategies, contextual factors, teaching practice

### 1. Introduction

Research into the process of teaching and learning English has a solid history. Empirical observations suggest that some students have a more effective learning process, or better use of learning strategies, than others. When enquiring informally about it, students often talked about the teacher being a decisive factor in their learning process. However, when talking to teachers and enquiring about what guided their decisions in the practice, it was evident each teacher taught the way they believed it was best.

In the last decades, research in the area of learning and teaching has recognised the need to understand Teachers' Beliefs as part of the process of teachers' development. The learning process is impacted by the way the teaching practice is conducted, while the teaching practice is largely shaped by the beliefs that the teacher holds. The understanding of such beliefs leads not only to a clear idea of what impacts the teaching practice, but also to the underlying beliefs teacher educators need to work with when dealing with Strategy Instruction (SI), because it helps students develop their personal knowledge about the way they think and the strategies they can adopt to improve their language and learning process so as to build their proficiency (Griffiths, 2008). Despite the fact that Teachers' Beliefs have been studied from different angles, the research conducted on the area has yet to expand on the learning process (Fives, Lacatena & Gerard, 2015), it means that, previous research studies have focused their attention on the teaching practice, but

there is little research on the learning process. Moreover, Griffiths (2019) has stated that within the beliefs of the learning process, Teachers' Beliefs about Language Learning Strategies (thereafter: LLS) need to be researched and understood due to the usefulness and relevance of LLS within the learning process. In her 2007 study, Griffiths found that despite the pivotal role teachers have in the enterprise of teaching and learning, "teachers are generally not aware of their students LLS" (Griffiths, 2007, p. 91), which results in mismatches that negatively affect both the teaching practice and the learning process. She argues that if teachers are not aware of their students' use of LLS or their own beliefs about these strategies, the teaching practice cannot be adjusted to fill the particular needs that may aid the learning process. Furthermore, literature has shown that teachers do not always act according to what they believe to be desirable because there are many factors involved in their choices (Phipps & Borg, 2009).

Teachers' Beliefs in the teaching of languages are particular, changeable, subjective, and individual; they are inherent to each person, and they allow understanding of the world around them and shape a great part of the actions performed. Beliefs are particular to each person; they are formed by the experiences lived throughout life. Fives and Buehl (2012, p. 476) state that 'beliefs are individually held conceptions that are in constant relation to the context and teachers' experience'.

Unfortunately, the literature has not identified what exactly contributes to these beliefs; how the beliefs shape the teaching practice; why beliefs change sometimes and remain the same some others (Fives *et al.*, 2015). Research conducted on beliefs has suggested that a key aspect in Teachers' Beliefs in guiding teaching choices is importance beliefs (Gay, 2014). Nevertheless, we suggest that the aspect of (no) possibility may carry more weight when influencing the pedagogical decisions of the teachers. This is a relevant construct since identifying which aspects within beliefs carry more weight may result in new beliefs being better received; for instance, the way teachers use and foster LLS in their teaching practice.

English teachers in Mexico provided the context to explore Teachers' Beliefs on the importance and possibility of using and fostering LLS in their teaching practice. This relationship has implications for the design and implementation of teacher development, given that when teachers identify their existing beliefs, they are more prone to creating new ones or modifying the existing ones. Therefore, this study aims to describe contextual factors that influence what teachers believe as not possible in their teaching practice.

The content of this paper is divided into four parts. The first discusses the literature about teachers' beliefs. The second describes the methodology that was followed. The third discusses the findings. Lastly, the fourth presents the conclusions of the study.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 (No) Possibility**

Possibility is understood as the choice teachers can make in their teaching context. Possibility is defined as the aspect of being available or achievable in a particular situation. The identification of what teachers consider important and possible, represents the choice of something of great value that is available to them in their teaching context. Having the power to make that choice and choosing to make it is the agency they enact and which guides their teaching

and influences the learning of their students. The data analysed in this paper signals to beliefs that lack that choice or availability in a particular context. That is, teachers believe they do not have the possibility to use or foster a certain strategy due to the constraints perceived or experienced. We understand such belief of lack, as a no possibility belief.

## 2.2 Beliefs

Regardless of the awareness, stability, or specificity, beliefs impact the way everything is perceived, understood and performed; that is, beliefs act as filters, frames and guides (Fives & Buehl, 2012);

a) Beliefs as filters are related to the way humans perceive and interpret the information received. This filtering role is pertinent as it determines which information is valuable enough to take, retain and share.

b) Beliefs as frames are used to devise and formulate the action and response to a task, activity or problem.

c) Beliefs as guides define the actions implemented to successfully achieve a goal or accomplish a task.

## 2.3 Teacher beliefs

A vast number of researchers have stated that the beliefs teachers hold regarding the teaching and learning process are quite embedded in their cognitive system. It has been suggested that teachers come with a set of preconceived notions even before they start their education (Pankratius, 1997) and that those beliefs are hardly changeable unless there is no satisfaction produced by the belief (Pajares, 1992). However, the idea of beliefs being changeable is what makes researchers aim for the understanding of the phenomena.

Many researchers have scrutinised Teachers' Beliefs from different angles as well as the way these beliefs shape the teaching practice (Fives *et al.*, 2015; Fives and Gill, 2014; Fives and Buehl, 2012). The interaction that teachers have with their environment, their learning experience, their relationships with others, and their set of individual characteristics are part of the complexities embedded in how teachers act in the classroom, address students, or design their classes (Mahlios, Engstrom, Soroka & Shaw, 2008). Moreover, research has found the way teachers interpret what goes on in their classrooms to be central to the teaching practice (Borg, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 2001) and some researchers believe that it is not possible to fully understand neither the teaching process nor the teachers unless there is an understanding of their beliefs (Díaz & Solar, 2011).

Considering the complex nature of beliefs (Borg, 2009; Fives & Gill, 2014) as well as the imperative need to further the understanding of Teachers' Beliefs (Fives *et al.*, 2015), it was necessary to select a lens that allowed the exploration of such beliefs. The selection of LLS to research Teachers' Beliefs was a threefold purpose choice (for an updated review on LLS see Oxford, 2018). First of all, despite the large available body of literature in the area of Teachers' Beliefs, the beliefs teachers hold regarding the learning process have not been extensively researched; especially the importance and possibility to use and foster LLS. In the same line, the extensive research on LLS (Oxford, 1990, 2016; Griffiths, 2019; Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012) offered a widely validated instrument that could be used as the basis for the collection and analysis

of Teachers' Beliefs. Furthermore, it is worth emphasising that the use of LLS as the lens to explore Teachers' Beliefs allowed to propose an instrument that, using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (thereafter: SILL) classification by Oxford (1990), could gather explicit and implicit beliefs so that there is a better understanding on how to lower the conflict between old and new beliefs when introducing new training initiatives which may have a more lasting impact.

## **2.4 Language learning strategies (LLS)**

A concept that has proven useful for language learning and that in words of Ungureanu and Georgescu (2012:2004) should be familiar to teachers so they can help their students to identify their 'favourite strategy or strategies and the way they manage the learning process' so they can become more efficient learners through strategy instruction. Language learning is a process that has been extensively researched. During this process, researchers have tried different techniques, methods, or approaches intended to find the best way to learn. At some point on this path, researchers started looking at the characteristics embodied by a 'good learner' (Rubin, 1975; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978) with the intention of understanding such characteristics and transferring them to less successful learners. According to Rubin (1975:46), 'the good language learner is a willing and accurate guesser, has a strong drive to communicate, is often not inhibited, is constantly looking for patterns in the language, practices, monitors his own and the speech of others, and attends to meaning'. These characteristics were the bases of what is now known as Language Learning Strategies (LLS).

The gap that has been found in the literature review is the need to identify the no possibility beliefs that hinder the use and fostering of strategies, since what is surrounding teachers is filtered and framed under these beliefs, and finally actions are guided by the same particular, individual and changeable system of beliefs.

## **3. Methodology**

This paper is part of a larger study that gathered qualitative data. The present paper concentrates on the teaching practice narratives shared by the participants. This section exemplifies the process by presenting excerpts from 9 teachers' narratives.

### **3.1 Instrument**

Teachers who volunteered for the qualitative phase also had the option to participate in a focus group (thereafter: FG) discussion. Using a FG discussion guide the participants were invited to share their teaching experiences in a group discussion that revealed subtle details that could not be obtained in an individual interview. The FG discussions in this research were designed to collect information on a wide range of opinions given by the participants and they provided the space for different ideas to emerge. By having teachers sharing the different activities they do with their students, there was a memory activation process about activities performed by each teacher. Moreover, listening to new activities invited the participants to have an opinion on strategies they may have never used in their classes, which allowed access to Teachers' Beliefs on the new strategy.

### **3.2 Data collection**

Once all the narratives were transcribed, the qualitative content analysis was conducted to explore the underlying factors by which teachers' use and fostering of LLS may be hindered. All the teachers' narratives were transcribed verbatim, a qualitative content analysis was conducted to explore the underlying factors by which teachers' use and fostering of LLS may be hindered. Oxford (2016:315) explains that 'strategy assessment and research might begin to rely more heavily on narrative approaches. And so, this project uses narrative inquiry to explore how teachers develop and express agency as well as the aspects that hinder strategies.

### **3.3 Setting and participants**

A total of 8 teachers from a state in central Mexico participated in focus group discussions where they shared how they conduct their teaching practice. These accounts were recorded and are treated as narratives following the example of Oxford, Griffiths, Longhini, Cohen, Macaro & Harris, (2014). All the participants were teaching English at the time of the data collection, though not all had the required profile. This paper exemplifies the process by presenting excerpts from 8 teachers' narratives because these selected teachers cover all teaching levels and are representative of the different levels and contexts. Heidi works at a University and a language centre, while Bob teaches at a Preparatory school. Kristy works with children in a Kindergarten and Olivia is a Primary teacher. Finally, Omar, Angel, Alejandra, and Dinorah work with Secondary students in different locations across the Mexican state. They all teach English as a foreign language in public institutions.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The first analysis in the research process consisted in identifying all the times teachers mentioned a specific strategy that could be matched to the strategies in a pre-established framework. While coding, challenges were identified in the excerpts where teachers would talk about LLS but would turn their attention to the contextual factors that seemed to hinder their agency in using and fostering such strategies in their classrooms. As a group, metacognitive and social strategies indicated a higher level of beliefs of no-possibility. Consequently, to understand why these particular strategies are believed to be not possible, in this analysis the focus is on them.

Through the use of qualitative content analysis (Drisko and Maschi, 2015) this work portrays the process of identifying which contextual factors are included in the narratives of teachers with a hindering connotation. The first analysis in the research process consisted in identifying all the times teachers mentioned a specific strategy that could be matched to the strategies in the questionnaires used to collect explicit beliefs. Parallel to working with a preconceived set of categories, the narratives were also coded for emergent themes. These themes were assigned a label and then grouped into broader categories.

## **4. Findings**

In this section, a sample of some strategies found in the teachers' narratives is presented and analysed to identify the factors that may influence beliefs of no-possibility. As is seen in the following excerpts, they show samples of strategies found in the teachers' narratives where contextual factors that hinder the use or fostering of this group of strategies were identified.

The following excerpts are some examples of contextual factors that evidently hinder the fostering of LLS by creating Teachers' Beliefs that these strategies are not possible to use in their context. These contextual factors were grouped under the following final categories a) Beliefs about students' capabilities; b) Beliefs about external constraints; and, c) Beliefs about socio-affective factors. The analysis was conducted on the narratives of all 41 teachers; however, due to space constraints, this paper only exemplifies the findings by presenting excerpts from nine teachers. The excerpts presented in underlined words show positive beliefs about LLS, whereas **words in bold show the contextual factors that teachers see hindering the use and fostering of LLS**. These are subsequently presented in detail.

#### 4.1 Beliefs about the students' capacities

The participants were asked to share some of the most common problems they could observe in the learning of their students and the actions they took to help those students deal with their problems. Heidy is a teacher working in the language centre and the language faculty of a public university. To this regard Heidy commented:

[141] *What daisy is mentioning that they [the students] come to tell you "what do I do"? It is because they have never made a reflection, right? They have never ... like ... they have never thought and self-assessed about what they do or don't do when they study a language [...].*

[145] *[...] I generated one with my own ideas*

[147] *A self-assessment instrument ... I took an ethics course in the spring break and I thought it would be a good idea to test them ... to test the students regarding their ethics, right? That they may have er [...] and I tried to include aspects that would make them reflect towards the actions that they take when they are studying a language; It is a very big commitment for me. I believe that if you do not commit you are not going to succeed, then for me it happens to me that I have noticed that they are missing that introjection [...] that saying "yes I am giving 100% how much am I giving? How much am I contributing?" because I am a bit ashamed to say it buy [sic] the students today want you to do everything for them.*

In the excerpt, it is clear that Heidy is convinced that her students never reflect on or self-assess their learning progress. Besides, when she shares that she was now using a self-assessment instrument in her class, the fact that Heidy uses the expression '*test the students regarding their ethics*' points to a belief that she holds that her students may not have the ethics Heidy considers necessary to conduct self-assessment. Even though she believes it is important that the students commit to the learning process and reflect on the actions they take when studying the language, at the end of this participation she somewhat reluctantly shared that she believes students want to be spoon-fed by the teacher and are not willing to organise and self-evaluate.

The data also suggested that teachers believe students do not have the necessary knowledge or skills, and this belief can be seen in Alejandra's narrative. Alejandra is a teacher working at a secondary school and some of her students consider secondary school as the last level of education they must obtain before dedicating their lives to local commerce or agricultural activities in their hometown. In this part of the discussion Alejandra mentioned that the role of teachers was to be monitors and guides making students more autonomous, a quality that has been

related to the use of metacognitive strategies (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson 2015). However, when the researcher asked the participants their opinion about students being responsible for their own learning, Alejandra's opinion reflected a different belief:

[20] *Because of the age it is difficult [letting the students be responsible for their own learning] you guide them, you walk with them, for example, I left homework in internet, I created a page I would upload the pages they had to visit, I would explain what they had to do and the evidence they had to give me so that it would be valid as a mark. Only 45% could do it, the rest gave up easily; they do not know how to research as soon as they encounter a problem, they give up; they do not try; only very few kids really have (...) tolerance to failure.*

In her narrative, Alejandra shared that she had used different resources to help her students in their learning process, but unfortunately, not even half of her students succeeded in the activities. Her explanation for this low percentage of students doing the different activities, is that her students are not capable of learning from their own mistakes because they do not have the tolerance to failure. In her narrative, she shared that her students gave up easily even though she did everything to provide them with the necessary resources.

Olivia is a primary teacher working in groups with up to 55 students and the following excerpt comes from her experience as an English teacher. Towards the end of the discussion in her focus group, the participants were asked to share the activities they do with their students to help them develop their language skills. Some teachers mentioned the use of games, reading material, and songs. As a response to these comments, Olivia shared her experience:

[71] (...) *I have lost a bit the part of team work leaving them a bit individually because many times it has happened to me that they are not doing the things they start doing any other thing and a lot of the class is lost and to get their attention back is to waste time so then I try to make group activities perhaps I better guide the activity but they perhaps participate by rows or participate / if it is by team half and half or girls vs boys or I select who participates (...) but all of them at the same time or in the same side because if I ask them by to do something themselves suddenly they leave they get lost and we do not complete the part of the class or the activity.*

When talking about practising English with other students, Olivia shared that she likes to control the interaction of the students; instead of asking them to be in pairs or in groups, she prefers to guide the activity. She explained that she prefers to work this way because if she let the students work individually, students would stop doing what she asked them to do and start doing other things and wasting their time. This indicates that the belief Olivia holds that her students are not capable or won't follow her instruction when working in pairs stops her from fostering this social strategy.

#### 4.2 Beliefs about external constraints

The first belief found to contribute to the hindering of metacognitive strategies is the lack of time teachers have in their practice. In this participation, the teachers in her focus group had been talking about the way they each taught in their classes. In this regard Heidi shared:

[33] *well, yes I take my projector and i play the video and we do whatever I have planned for that / that is what I use the most video, I mean, time ago I once tried using ah a platform or a blog or something like that but honestly having to update it all the time at the same time that I have to teach my class ... I don't know what you think, I do not have enough time and honestly it did not work for me. Perhaps I did not manage time properly I'm not saying it is not useful it is useful and for many I've seen it work but for me it is just video, audio.*

In her extract it can be observed that Heidi shares using a projector to include video in her classes, providing the students with an alternate way to learn English. Moreover, she recognises that using other ways of learning the language such as the use of platforms and blogs is useful when she says that she has seen it work. The lexical analysis of her case evidenced that she believed that finding as many ways as possible to use English is important. Nevertheless, she admitted that when she tried using a platform or blog it did not work for her. The use of the verb **try** makes the fostering of the strategy only an attempt, besides when she expresses '**honestly, having to update it all the time at the same time that I have to teach**'. Her narrative points to an excessive amount of work for her. Thus, this excerpt suggests that the lack of time hinders the use and fostering of diverse ways to learn.

The case of Dinorah exemplifies challenges teachers encounter in the working context such as not having enough time to use and foster LLS in their teaching practice. Dinorah is a teacher working in an urban zone in a secondary school with close to 600 students. She works in the first two grades and her students' proficiency goes from completely basic to intermediate. When the participants were asked to share the challenges, they found in their teaching practice, Dinorah commented:

[15] *The biggest challenge for me is the part of designing the classes and the assessment when I design the classes, well, it is taking me from 3 to 10 hours the design of a sequence for a week (...) to lead the [the students] towards an autonomous learning there is the part of the instruction then they come and do their practice their exercise and they are doing the self-assessment after the self-assessment if I have time well there is feedback, otherwise, well, they are just left with what they did in the self-assessment and since they already have the part of the instruction well they can look for and find the mistake and if not we move to another topic.*

For Dinorah the main challenge is the amount of work teachers are asked to do in the time frame they have. In her narrative, the use of self-assessment is clearly related to autonomous learning, but it can be observed that she guides such self-assessment only if there is enough time. The excess of administrative work, as well as the lack of time, are decisive factors that hinder the use and fostering of metacognitive strategies in her teaching practice. There is a clear indication that she is aware of the importance of metacognitive strategies in fostering autonomy; however, it is also evident that in spite of the importance aspect she does not foster the strategy all the time because of her external constraints.

Bob is a teacher working in the faculty of languages at the public university in a state in central Mexico as well as in a preparatory school belonging to the same system. It is the narrative about the latter that Bob shared in this case:



[166] *To have them all participating because at any time I take out [a card with the name of the student] right? “mayra it is our turn please come over and write this on the board”*

[168] (...) *for me I have had good results because i keep them [the students] paying attention and i have seen... it is it difficult for them to speak English ... suddenly they do not want to be talking among themselves but [this activity] somehow lowers this.*

[170] *This mess of 45, I cannot make activities I cannot group them to do activities or role-play, I simply ... if I want them to talk about something I simply get their card and ask him /her to tell the whole group.*

[172] (...) *I don't do that [pairing students] because that does not work in my teaching environment, so what do I do? Er ... [name] please tell us what do you, what's your favourite kind of music and why? right? then she tells the whole group because I cannot move their chairs all the time it is complicated.*

In this extract Bob shared how he uses cards with the names of the students to make them participate. He explained that this technique has worked for him because that way all the students have the same probability of being called to participate and practice the language. However, his narrative shows that Bob has chosen to foster his students' participation only and exclusively in this way due to the large number of students in his class. He explains that he cannot group them so that they talk to each other because it is a mess. The number of students he has presents a complication for him and therefore his fostering of the strategy is hindered. His belief of impossibility is clearly expressed when he repeats, he **“cannot group them to do activities or role-play”**.

In the same topic of external constraints, the narrative of Omar evidenced how the amount of administrative work leaves very little time for teachers to foster the interaction of students in the classroom. After sharing many things he does to support his students' learning process, Omar moved to share the problems he observed in his context. In repeated moments he mentioned that he believes one of the problems is the lack of interest of the students, as well as the lack of support students have at home because no matter how hard he tries; his students don't make any effort in the school and then at home it is the same thing. Omar shared that he looks for ways to compensate for that lack of possibilities his students have to practice the language in their own contexts:

[61] *Perhaps in their homes they cannot see it but “let's do here let's make a stand where I sell sports stuff and you x” so they that they start to communicate in English and they can ask for things to each other, once we did it miss, yes, yes, well, the whole school we went out of the classroom like to a recess and I mean everybody “you have to be speaking in English minimum you have to make a survey to 10 people minimum but they have to be studying in different grades” right it was successful but sometimes for us the problem is the administrative workload, it is too much they tell us “for tomorrow I want your evaluations” even when the reform tells us that the submission of marks is for a certain date but that is only what is written on paper but here my supervisor tells me “for tomorrow I want this and that was for yesterday” for us then what can we do? The administrative workload pulls and pushes and sometimes to do an activity with the kids, besides, they are so many that you say “I better postpone it [the activity] and*

*we are going to do this let's repeat" and there's no further progress we leave it for later.*

Omar is a very enthusiastic teacher, throughout his narratives different strategies can be identified in his teaching as well as in his learning process. On this occasion, he shared how he organised the whole school to have all his students talking to other students and he commented that it was successful. However, the amount of administrative work that he deals with limits the time he can dedicate to organising activities even though he recognises that this leads to no progress. He admitted that in the aim of finishing his administrative work he ends up postponing or simply not doing activities that allow his students to practise the language.

Another challenge identified in the narratives of teachers is the interference of another teacher. This challenge is very particular to the situation teachers in basic education in the state where the research was conducted are experiencing as part of the process of introducing English teaching in public basic education. Kristy is a teacher who at the time of the data collection was working in two different primary schools. In the pilot programme in this state, the inclusion of English teachers in kindergarten and primary schools was done under circumstances where it was not possible to assign a teacher with the necessary profile to each classroom so the students could all have regular classes with a professional with the required language proficiency. In the schools, English teachers are known as promoters since they will not necessarily be teaching but mainly promoting a close encounter between the students and the language. Consequently, these promoters are not responsible for the students in the group and they are not allowed to be in the classroom if the lead teacher is not in the classroom.

Most of the teachers participating in the discussion group expressed criticisms towards the design and implementation of the pilot English programme. They commented about the very limited amount of time in English classes. In this regard Kristy commented:

[124] (...) *I tell them they must take advantage of their 30 minutes that we have here because I also have to be fighting all the time with the kids because I give them the speaking task and they go and ... an interview that has to have certain information and there I am monitoring and I catch them speaking Spanish and I stop the activity (...) I mean "if you do not speak English now that you can when are you going to speak English?" and the next time they talk to me in English and then I restart the activity and that's it but (...)/ it is every class that they do the same I mean that you have to talk to them in Spanish and the lead teacher is the first one to begin, I mean that \*pregúntale\* (ask him) and he [one student] is going to ask [to another student] "but he is not going to understand like that, ask him properly" once the student was about to ask what is your favourite colour? for example right? "no the thing is that he does not understand ask him properly" ... can't work like this!*

Kristy shared the experience of having to deal not only with the reluctance of the children to speak English but the interference of the teacher responsible for the group. She explained that when she asks her students to work in teams or pairs, she "catches" them speaking Spanish, and then she added that when this happens, she stops the activity and helps the students reflect, but then she commented that she is faced with this situation every class. Her narrative shares the reluctance of students to practice the language with their classmates as they go back to their native

language as soon as they can. Perhaps this reluctance is reinforced by the interference of the teacher responsible for the group. As mentioned before, the lead teacher must be in the classroom as part of the training these teachers are receiving so that in the future, they are the ones who teach the English classes. The narrative suggests that when she is working with her students the Spanish teacher asks her to “*ask properly*” (that is in Spanish) so that students can actually understand. This attitude may be perceived by the students as an affirmation that it is not necessary to practice English with their classmates and therefore hinders the fostering of the strategy in the classroom. In this case, we see how the beliefs Kristy holds about having to deal with the interference of the lead teacher, make her feel discouraged from fostering social strategies.

### 4.3 Beliefs about socio-affective factors

At the beginning of the discussion, Omar shared that he had been teaching English only for four years even though he had been a teacher for many years. He explained how going to training courses helped him in his teaching practice and in these courses, he saw that inviting his students to participate in classes through a variety of methods and with a variety of tools was an option.

The researcher asked the teachers to share which were the most common problems they faced within the teaching practice and what actions had been taken to deal with such problems. Omar mentioned that in the group where he taught English, he went to great lengths to help his students learn

[61] *now to the students I teach English and I tell you one of the problems well I see that one of the problems is that I believe they in the families there is no interest for the second language (...). Er I believe the main part is at home (...) “well your house is filled with many objects, right? /well in the house I have lots of objects and instead of saying \*ventana\* you can say open the window, right? \*abre la ventana\* open de door \*abre la puerta\* “right? I need them to have it. I need them to familiarize themselves with the word, I need them to familiarize with the object they have there. These are really simple little things that one tells them they can work with at home well but what happens? Well it turns out that they do nothing, right? Er ... another thing is that I see the problem, I see it with my students that if they have to do an activity at home for example if we did not finish an activity in reading and there were three little questions left “guys we will finish them at home”, well exactly the way they took the notebook home they take it back and when they come to class they just open [the notebook] for english class and I wonder what is the problem. One, the family, two, I believe our education has not been like that in the second language it has not been the most appropriate.*

Once again Omar’s narrative evidences his enthusiasm for teaching and his use of strategies in the teaching practice. In his narrative, we can appreciate that the challenges he faces are mostly related to the context where he works. It would seem that when fostering finding as many ways to use the language he faces a barrier with the students. In this case, Omar’s narrative indicates that even though he suggests his students do different things to practice their language, such as labelling items at home or using set phrases to communicate, in the end, he prefers to do

all the activities he needs with his students in the classroom because, as he clearly states, he believes his students do not do any work at home.

Also, within the basic education system but at a different level, the contextual factors of the students' learning process points to a belief of lack of confidence that seems to impact the way teachers conduct their practice. The discussion group Olivia participated in was joined by teachers working at different educational levels, and one of the aspects that were evidenced in their discussion was how students' participation decreases over time in the language classes. While students in kindergarten and low primary school are more daring and self-confident, the students in higher primary and secondary tend to be more self-conscious about their actions and as a result, students participate in a second language class less willingly. At this point in the discussion, the participants were asked to share the actions they took to help their students with their self-confidence. In this regard Olivia shared:

*[47] Bullying is something I have had to deal with in this school specially starting in fifth grade well 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> the kids are always seeing who makes a mistake and there they find the joke of the month then it is very complicated for me to get [students] to dare [participating]. I have tried to make it very cordial "come on do this" it does not work because the kid is always like "er they are looking at me and they are going to say something" it is a big problem and I regrettably for god or bad it sounds wrong for other countries specially because it sounds as if we bribed the kid. I use a lot the conditioning it is not very good but it works very well for a lack of strategies one has to use whatever works, then you do not try to do it like "hey kid your mark is" no no it's not about that but er you use more things like a marking stamp, a card, er then the kids have another motivation because they say "hey I want the card if anybody laughs at me I do not care "and to try to find a way for them [the students] to participate.*

Olivia's narrative begins by presenting the challenge she has been facing in her teaching practice and how this bullying prevents her students from paying attention when somebody is speaking English as a language learning. Not only is the attention paid to the person speaking far from a learning strategy but this attention results in students being laughed at and this causes the inhibition of the students' confidence to produce the language. Olivia shared that she has **tried** to invite her students to produce in a cordial way but then she stated that this does not work. Moreover, when she described the successful alternatives, she uses in her teaching practice to encourage her students to be respectful and speak English, even before describing these alternatives she disqualified them by saying that what she is doing may sound wrong in other countries because it may be considered as bribing the students, disqualifying her teaching strategies and assigning a negative value to the alternatives.

The participation of Angel sheds light on how teachers see the lack of a learning context as a challenge in their teaching practice. Angel is a teacher who at the time of the data collection was working in two secondary schools. Despite the notable differences in both schools, the commonality is that they belong to the public system and the facilities are the same, in this regard Angel mentioned finding as many ways as possible to learn the language and looking for people to talk. The prompt that was used when Angel shared about the lack of family support and an appropriate learning context, was ways to ask participants to share how the ideal classroom would be for them. Angel commented that for him the classroom was very important as a tool to support

the learning of his students and as a way to compensate for the small number of hours assigned to the learning of English.

[61] *The importance of having a classroom exclusively for English because in that way one can have everything set so they [the students] since the moment they come in they are reviewing or seeing or learning, right? ah (...). I believe the inclusion of technology in the English classroom is very important right? (...), from my point of view the classroom would have to be contextualised so that students can learn.*

Furthermore, the last phrase of this intervention '*from my point of view the classroom would have to be contextualised*' explicitly states, through the use of the modal would, that this is not a reality for him or his teaching practice. In the excerpt we can infer that with this contextualisation, his students can find many ways to learn the language; but without it, then students do not have the possibility to find different ways to learn English.

As exemplified in the previous excerpts from the teachers' narratives, the hindering factors for metacognitive and social strategies identified in the teachers' narratives were: Lack of time, students not reflecting, lack of family support, lack of contextualised learning spaces, lack of confidence of the students, lack of respect in classes, and students not having the knowledge.

It is relevant to remember that all these contextual factors are shared from the perspective of the teachers and illustrate the challenges they face and how these contribute to a belief of no-possibility. It is essential to emphasise that though external constraints may limit our actions as teachers and make our actions not representative of our beliefs (Phipps and Borg, 2009), the participants in this study shared their beliefs directly in their narratives. Also, these beliefs are held by the teachers but may not be representative of their reality, such as in the case of Omar, who chooses not to leave his students homework, because he believes they will not do it. It is evident that these beliefs impact directly on the decisions teachers make at the time of using and fostering a certain strategy in the classrooms.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

This study conducted a qualitative content analysis on the narratives of 8 teachers. The coding of the data as a contextual factor on every strategy found in the narratives was done when such strategy was surrounded by a clear demonstration that despite believing the strategy to be important, this was not fostered positively. The analysis revealed a series of contextual factors that influenced the Teachers' Beliefs of no-possibility which were grouped into three main categories of contextual factors; beliefs about the students' capacities; beliefs about external constraints; and beliefs about socio-affective factors.

The analysis in this paper advances the research on teachers' beliefs by providing evidence on how the beliefs held hinder the fostering of LLS in the teaching practice. Regardless of whether there is a belief of importance, the beliefs of no-possibility mostly led the teachers to not foster the strategy. In the narratives, it may be perceptible that these teachers are not fully aware of how these beliefs of no-possibility impact their teaching practice or that they even hold these beliefs of no-possibility. For instance, in the case of bullying, researchers have identified how the school – more precisely teachers- may contribute to the phenomenon through their lack of supervision or teaching strategies (Estévez-Nenninger, Manig-Valenzuela, & Valdés-Cuervo,

2022). In this paper, the data evidenced that what teachers believe may be the factors behind the phenomena actually hinder the fostering of knowledge or skills, like in the case of Olivia when she prefers not to use the metacognitive strategies because she perceives bullying in her classes. Similarly, Barnes *et al.*, (2014) have stated that teachers' beliefs and conceptions need to be changed if the assessment practices are to take a different direction. The authors explain these assessment beliefs are shaped by the policies and practices of education such as the case of Dinorah, which shows how her beliefs of no-possibility are created by her perception of not having time to foster self-assessment. Research has also observed that when education success depends on the available resources at home, education keeps promoting social inequalities (Blanco, 2021). The case of Omar exemplifies how because of his beliefs of lack of support at home, his pedagogical decision does not foster the use of the strategies that could help his student before better learners, supporting the claim by Blanco (2021).

As evidenced in the literature review, the beliefs that teachers hold, frame their actions as Fives and Buehl (2012) suggest in their work. Whether seen as external constraints, students' capacities or socio affective factors, the narratives of the participants show how teachers perceive them and based on these beliefs they act.

This paper evidenced the way in which beliefs about no-possibility hinder the fostering of LLS. In further research, we suggest creating tools that aid teachers recognise their beliefs and how these impact their teaching practice. The need for deep reflexivity within the teaching practice is strengthened by the findings in this project. It is urgent to find a way to raise awareness in teachers regarding their implicit beliefs and the way these impact their decisions in their teaching practice so that teacher education programmes deal with raising awareness of the beliefs shaping our teaching practice.

## References

- Barnes, N., Fives, H., & Ey, C.M.D. (2014). Teachers' beliefs about assessment. In *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs* (pp. 296–312). Routledge.
- Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 624–640.
- Blanco, E. (2021). La desigualdad de oportunidades educativas en México (1958-2010). Desplazamiento y reconfiguración. *Perfiles Educativos*, 43(171), 8–26.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher Cognition in Grammar Teaching: A Literature Review. *Language Awareness* 122, 96–108.
- Borg, S. (2009). English language teachers' conceptions of research. *Applied linguistics*, 30(3), 358–388.
- Díaz Larenas, C., & Solar Rodríguez, M. (2011). La Revelación De Las Creencias Lingüístico-Pedagógicas A Partir Del Discurso Del Wright, T. 2010. Second language teacher education: Review of recent research on practice. *Language teaching*, 43(03), 259–296.
- Drisko, J.W., & Maschi, T. (2015). *Content analysis*. Pocket Guides to Social Work R.
- Estévez Nenninger, E.H., Manig Valenzuela, A., & Valdés Cuervo, Á.A. (2014). Creencias de docentes acerca del bullying. *Perfiles educativos*, 51–64.
- Fives, H., & Buehl, M.M. (2012). Spring cleaning for the “messy” construct of teachers' beliefs: What are they? Which have been examined? What can they tell us? *APA educational psychology handbook*, 2, (pp. 471-499). American Psychological Association.
- Fives, H., & Gill, M.G. (Eds) (2014). *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs*. Routledge.
- Fives, H., Lacatena, N., & Gerar, L. (2015). Teachers' beliefs about teaching (and learning). *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs* (pp. 249-265).

- Gay, G. (2014). Teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity. *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs* (pp. 453-474).
- Gharbavi, A., & Mousavi, S.A. (2012). Do Language Proficiency Levels Correspond to Language Learning Strategy Adoption? *English Language Teaching*, 5(7), 110.
- Griffiths, C. (2007). Language learning strategies: Students' and teachers' perceptions. *ELT Journal*, 61, 91-99.
- Griffiths, C. (2008). *Lessons from good language learners*. Cambridge University Press.
- Griffiths, C. (2019). Language Learning Strategies: Is the Baby Still in the Bathwater?. *Applied Linguistics*.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001). Toward a postmethod pedagogy. *Tesol Quarterly*, 35(4), 537-560.
- Mahlis, M., Engstrom, D., Soroka, G., & Shaw, D.M.A. (2008). Study of Student Teachers' Reflections on Their Beliefs, Thoughts, and Practices. *Action in Teacher Education*, 30(1), 64-80.
- Naiman, N., Frohlich, M., Stern, H.H., & Todesco, A. (1978). The Good Language Learner Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto*, 14.
- Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies* (1<sup>st</sup> edition). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Oxford, R.L., Griffiths, C., Longhini, A., Cohen, A.D., Macaro, E., & Harris, V. (2014). Experts' personal metaphors and similes about language learning strategies. *System*, 43, 11-29.
- Oxford, R.L. (2016). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies: Self-regulation in context*. Taylor & Francis.
- Oxford, R.L. (2018). Language learning strategies. *The Cambridge guide to learning English as a second language* (pp. 81-90).
- Pajares, M.F. (1992). Teachers' Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning Up a Messy Construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307-332.
- Pankratius, W.J. (1997). Preservice Teachers Construct a View on Teaching and Learning Styles. *Action in Teacher Education*, 18(4), 68-76.
- Phipps, S., & Borg, S. (2009). Exploring tensions between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices. *System*, 37(3), 380-390.
- Rubin, J. (1975). What the "Good Language Learner" Can Teach Us. *TESOL Quarterly*, 9(1), 41.
- Ungureanu, C., & Georgescu, C.A. (2012). Learners' Strategies in Language Learning. *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 5000-5004.

## YẾU TỐ HOÀN CẢNH ẢNH HƯỞNG ĐẾN NIỀM TIN CỦA GIÁO VIÊN

**Tóm tắt:** Các giáo viên người Mexico làm việc trong lĩnh vực tiếng Anh, đã cung cấp bối cảnh cho nghiên cứu. Ở Mexico, việc giảng dạy tiếng Anh trong hệ thống giáo dục cơ bản vẫn còn sơ khai, không thường xuyên, đang trong quá trình hoàn thiện và chưa bắt buộc ở tất cả các cơ sở giáo dục. Do đó, nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích mô tả các yếu tố bối cảnh ảnh hưởng đến những gì giáo viên tin là có thể hoặc không thể thúc đẩy trong quá trình giảng dạy của chính họ. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phân tích nội dung định tính để khám phá những câu chuyện kể của giáo viên thể hiện niềm tin của 9 giáo viên người Mexico đang làm việc tại một bang ở miền Trung Mexico. Phân tích chuyên sâu đã dẫn đến việc xác định các yếu tố cụ thể trong Niềm tin của giáo viên cản trở việc sử dụng và thúc đẩy các chiến lược được sử dụng trong quá trình học một ngôn ngữ, còn được gọi là Chiến lược học ngôn ngữ (LLS), trong thực tiễn giảng dạy của họ. Những phát hiện, dựa trên hai loại chiến lược cụ thể; siêu nhận thức và xã hội, cho thấy rằng đối với các giáo viên ở bang này, có ba niềm tin chính cản trở việc sử dụng và bồi dưỡng LLS. Việc xác định các yếu tố bối cảnh như vậy có liên quan đến Giáo dục Giáo viên do sự tương tác giữa thực tiễn giảng dạy thực tế, kiến thức trước đây và niềm tin cá nhân, tạo nên các yếu tố bối cảnh và hướng dẫn các quyết định sư phạm của giáo viên.

**Từ khóa:** Niềm tin của giáo viên, chiến lược học ngôn ngữ, yếu tố bối cảnh, thực hành giảng dạy