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Foreign Language Teachers' Knowledge Base and the Influence of Teaching Experience

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Abstract: The present paper elucidated the issue of foreign language teachers' knowledge base and the influence of teaching experience on their beliefs. A self-report questionnaire was utilised to explore what domains of knowledge language teachers prioritised in planning and delivering instruction, what sources they drew on to gain professional understanding and to compare teachers' views relevant to the length of their experience. The analysis of data revealed quantitative dissimilarities in the assumed sources and knowledge domains, as well as teachers' instructional preferences. The study's findings lend empirical evidence to the influence of experience on teachers' cognitions and yield additional insight into the way language teachers gain their insider knowledge.

Introduction

Against the backdrop of lingual globalisation, effective foreign language (FL) teaching and learning have witnessed intensified interest, in light of which language teachers' competence is of primary concern (Levrints/Lőrincz et al., 2021). As one of its core elements, teachers' knowledge has drawn considerable research attention, accounting for learners' academic achievements (Tchoshanov, 2011) and having a demonstrable effect on language teachers' instructional practices (Farrell & Richards, 2007; Sanchez, 2014).

Despite extant evidence that teachers' knowledge holds implications for quality teaching and learning (Burroughs et al., 2019; Liakopoulou, 2011), little is known in terms of transformations it undergoes along the stages of language teachers' professional maturation or what knowledge is central to maintaining effective instruction (Lőrincz, 2022). Critically important for the understanding of currently upheld by professional community assumptions as to FL teachers' knowledge base is the study of factors shaping language teachers' views about their professional knowledge. Initial teacher education is pivotal to establishing the foundation of teachers' knowledge (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005), heavily influenced by teachers' prior learning experience (Borg, 2009; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015), branching out to further experience gained in the course of teaching. There has been a long-standing debate in the academic literature regarding the primary source of professional understanding language teachers draw on. More specifically, it has been debated whether teachers derive knowledge to a greater or lesser extent from initial teacher education or language teaching experience (Liu, 2013). It is, therefore, essential to examine what domains of knowledge FL teachers believe to be relevant in providing effective instruction and what role FL teaching experience and formal teacher preparation opportunities play in its development.

As operationalised in this study, the concept of FL teachers' knowledge base incorporates a range of domains related to knowledge of and about language teaching and learning. It is integrated with and feeds into language teacher competence, thus enabling teachers to practice their profession effectively. As a notion in the making, it has evolutionised along four perspectives from disciplinary knowledge, knowledge as pedagogy (methodology), knowledge in person (student and teacher-related issues), to knowledge-for-teaching (purposes in the classroom) (Freeman, 2018). In terms of Freeman (2020), its current conceptualisation is informed by a set of aspects: "the content (what is taught), the teaching force (who is teaching it), learners (who are learning and why), pedagogy (how it is being taught) and teacher education (how teachers are being prepared and supported in teaching)" (p. 9). Given such complexity, it is hard to draw the numerous aspects of the FL teachers' knowledge together in a unified framework. Unsurprisingly, academic discourse proliferates with the discussion of language teachers' subject-matter knowledge and the role of FL proficiency (Freeman, 2017; Freeman et al., 2015), pedagogical content knowledge (Evens et al., 2017, 2019), pedagogical technological content knowledge (Kozikoğlu et al., 2019), knowledge of learners (Canh, 2020) and others.

This study examines the relevance of knowledge base domains perceived by FL teachers in order to discern what professional guidance and course content need prioritising in teacher education and development. It also probes for the differences in language teachers' perceptions relevant to the length of teaching experience. The paper is structured in the following way: it looks into the concept of language teachers' knowledge base and the influence of experience on language teachers' assumptions in the pertinent literature. Next, the methodology of the study is explicated. Lastly, the study considers the obtained findings, concluding with their implications for teacher education.

A Conceptualisation of Language Teachers' Knowledge Base

Attempts to frame the knowledge base of FL teachers revolve around the questions of what language teachers need to know to realise their potential as professionals, how this knowledge develops, how teachers apply it to attain the desired objectives in language education, or what reflection it should find in the content selection and organisation of teacher education programs. The conceptualisation of language teachers' knowledge base is affected by multidimensional factors, exhibiting qualities of dynamism by continually alternating over time and under contextual demands, as well as reactivity by incorporating current developments in the field. In examining factors that stimulate changes in the conceptualisation of the knowledge base of English language teaching, Freeman (2020) singles out two such sources or perspectives. The "work-driven" perspective rests on the assumption that the primary source of knowledge should be teachers themselves engaged in solving particular tasks within specific contexts. Thus, teachers are credited with the authorship of the knowledge base. The "field-driven" perspective in the construal of language teachers' knowledge base pertains to the incorporation of the developments in the sphere of language teaching and research into its "socio-professional storage system" (p.6). Although epistemologically dissimilar, the two paradigmatically different driving forces of the evolution of professional understanding are ultimately conducive to the emergence of a more refined definition of the field's knowledge base. The contribution of both individual-derived insights and those originating from the field of language education should, therefore, be recognised for the sake of comprehensive explication of FL teachers' knowledge.

A recurrent theme in the literature on language teachers' knowledge base concerns the discussion of its composition, resulting in several frameworks and taxonomies (Faez, 2011; Freeman, 2016; Richards, 2011, 2017). Essentially, language teachers' knowledge base comprises knowledge about FL teaching and learning or declarative knowledge, and knowledge of FL teaching and learning or procedural knowledge. Because knowledge about language teaching does not readily translate into knowledge of its teaching, there is a continuous tension between the two paradigms causing some practitioners and researchers to doubt the relevance of declarative knowledge taught in teacher education programs (Freeman, 2002), foregrounding instead the importance of teachers' capitalising on their theory built from the practice of teaching.

In his seminal paper, Schulman (1986) singled out such constituents in teachers' knowledge base as content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values. Schulman's contribution was notable for coining the term pedagogical content knowledge as a blend of content and pedagogical knowledge. He contended that pedagogical content knowledge enabled teachers to present the instructional material clearly, thus making them distinct from other area specialists. In an insightful classification of language teachers' knowledge base offered by Richards (1998), the traditional constituents were extended: accentuating the situated nature of language teacher knowledge, he endorsed the importance of contextual knowledge, as well as pedagogical reasoning and decision making, which usefully expanded the other categories, such as theories of teaching, teaching skills, subject-matter knowledge, communication skills, and language proficiency. The framework's elements also reflect general research trends by focusing on the frequently examined issues related to language teachers' knowledge base.

Research into Language Teachers' Knowledge Base

One of the key themes in contemporary research is language teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) which refers to teachers' facility to transform subject-matter knowledge into forms readily accessible by learners (Richards, 2011). PCK distinguishes an FL teacher from other language specialists. It was observed to affect the quality of education, students' academic gains, and learner motivation (Evens, 2017). PCK evolves as the result of formal education, including initial teacher preparation, professional development courses, and practice, i.e., experience gained in the role of a language learner and in the course of actual teaching. The procedural aspect of PCK was found to grow mainly in the course of instruction. The induction phase is critical to its development, underscoring the need for novices' professional support (Liu, 2013).

Foundations of PCK, integrating declarative knowledge about FL teaching and elementary practical experience, are laid during the initial teacher preparation. Empirical evidence suggests that teacher education affects the development of PCK. For instance, more coursework related to PCK termed opportunities to learn in teacher education contributed to more developed PCK on quantitative measurements in the study of Evens et al. (2017). The study of PCK of experienced and pre-service teachers of French as FL revealed no significant difference in quantitative measurements of the declarative component of PCK. However, the qualitative analysis revealed that teachers encountered more problems with declarative

knowledge, whereas student teachers displayed less insight into practical issues of language teaching (Evens et al., 2019). The development of PCK positively correlated with opportunities to engage in action research as part of thesis preparation by graduate students of English as an FL in the study of Gomez (2020). While engaging in research, student teachers developed multiple components related to PCK, among which highly impacted were knowledge of learners, knowledge of FL teaching methods, strategies, and others. The above findings indicate that procedural knowledge of PCK is acquired in actual teaching. However, to counteract the prevalent among teachers “intuitive teaching and common sense” (Liu, 2013, p.130), instead of reliance on a solid theoretical foundation and research, prospective teachers require ample opportunities to develop their knowledge about and of language teaching.

PCK draws on and is impacted, though indirectly, by language teachers’ content knowledge (CK). Although knowledge components are compartmentalised in research, they form a complex whole, and each of them affects the quality and nature of instructional performance. CK is viewed as “a circumscribed body of knowledge that is considered to be essential to gaining membership of the language teaching profession” (Richards, 2011, p.5). It typically includes the study of second language acquisition, language pedagogy, phonology, semantics, syntax and others. Both academia and practitioners tacitly accord great importance to CK. However, what specific disciplinary knowledge FL teachers need to deliver effective instruction and the degree of its impact on learning effectiveness is still unclear from research (Bartels, 2005). In recent years, language teachers’ disciplinary knowledge has re-emerged as an asset in professional thinking after a period of neglect, accentuating knowledge constructed by language teachers and teacher learning (Freeman, Johnson, 1998; Freeman, 2020). Language teachers’ CK has now recovered its due place (Bartels, 2005; Freeman, 2020; Lantolf, 2009). CK was reported to impact the instructional practices of language teachers, their emotional well-being, and, in general, good teachers held CK in high esteem in the above publications. CK transforms into PCK or, in other words, available for practical application forms, with opportunities to use it in dealing with authentic teaching tasks. Teachers involved in the practical application of CK to solve professional tasks reported to have benefited from such a learning experience (Bartels, 2005; 2009).

Centrally featuring in recent research is FL proficiency as a prerequisite skill to effective language teaching and learning. Some of the main issues problematised in the literature concern the level of target language proficiency and concomitant native versus non-native speaker teacher debate. For the longer part of its history, the sole element of effective FL teaching was fluency in the target language. Its primacy was undermined with the spread of the grammar-translation method and other approaches to language teaching, favouring language analysis over language use. However, the status of English as lingua franca has re-kindled interest in the problem of FL teachers’ language proficiency and its interplay with their ability (Faez, Karas, 2019; Freeman et al., 2015; Freeman, 2016; Richards, 2017). Language proficiency was found to affect instructional practices. Teachers with insufficient language proficiency experienced continuous stress and had doubts over the adequacy of their professional competence (Farrel & Richards, 2007, p. 56). Such teachers also appeared to be less flexible in adapting their instruction to learners’ needs, rigidly followed coursebook content (Megyes, 2001), adopted a more authoritative teaching style, preferred routines in planning instruction avoiding in this way risk-taking, shunned active teaching forms and genuine communication in the target language (Tsui, 2003). Even so, good command of the target language is only one of the core elements of effective teaching. Hence, a native speaker should not be seen *de facto* as a better language

teacher. Richards (2017) proposes to resolve this “deficit view” (p. 22) of non-native speaker teachers by recognising FL teacher talk as a form of language for specific purposes. Instead of squarely focusing on student teachers’ general language proficiency, he believes curricula of language teacher education programs should include courses aimed at developing their special professional discourse competence.

With regard to the focus of the given paper, of particular interest is research into the impact of experience on language teachers’ cognitions and instructional practices. The reviewed literature suggests that teachers undergo transformations in the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains. Notably, there were differences in the number and order of thoughts representing language teachers’ pedagogic knowledge base of experienced and novice teachers in the study of Akbari and Tajik (2009). Discrepancies in the cognitions of novice and experienced language teachers in the area of PCK were documented in the study by Khazae (2020). New and experienced language teachers also held different views on the utility of teacher development activities in the study of Mahmoudi and Özkan (2015). In essence, in contrast to extant scholarship in general education research, only modest empirical evidence on language teachers’ knowledge base perceptions has been accumulated to date, especially research focusing on the impact of the length of teaching experience. To fill this gap, the following research questions were raised:

1. What knowledge base domains do language teachers prioritise in providing effective instruction?
2. What are the principal sources of language teacher knowledge?
3. Are there any differences in teachers' perceptions with varying length of teaching experience concerning knowledge base?

The Study

Participants

Altogether 208 FL teachers from Ukrainian educational institutions expressed their voluntary consent to participate in this study. All language teachers held BA, MA, and PhD degrees in English language and literature. The participants occupied teaching posts at primary, secondary, and tertiary educational levels. A stratified random sampling technique (Griffie, 2012) was applied to generate the study’s sample. The sample was grouped according to the length of teaching experience criterion ranging from 1 to more than 25 years. As seen in Table 1, quite a proportional number of participants constituted the sample. Although the term “novice teacher” has been used with some variance in literature to refer to teachers with less than five or three years of experience (Curry et al., 2016), for the sake of convenience, in the present study, teachers with experience of fewer than five years were labelled as “novices” and teachers with more than five years as “experienced teachers”.

<i>Experience</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1-5 years	34	16.34	primary school (1-4 forms)	24	11.5	male	14	6.7
5-10 years	36	17.3	secondary school (5-11 forms)	54	26	female	194	93.3
10-15 years	37	17.8	primary and secondary school	76	36.5			
15-20 years	39	18.75	institution of higher education	54	26			
20-25 years	29	13.9						
≥ 25 years	32	15.4						

Table 1. Demographic data

Research Venue

The choice of the research venue was justified by the following considerations. Firstly, since the proclamation of Ukraine's independence in 1991, its educational system has been in a state of reform, warranting research on current practices shaping its identity. Also, Ukraine's aspirations to infuse with the world education arena have initiated calls for enhanced FL competence of its citizens, thus necessitating the renewal of language teacher preparation. Finally, the selection of this particular site was based on personal considerations, as the researcher was immediately involved in a language teacher education program in Ukraine.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study forms a part of sequential mixed-methods research on FL teachers' knowledge base. During its first phase, an exploratory interview study probing into FL teachers' beliefs was conducted to generate qualitative data on a range of problems related to their professional knowledge (Lőrincz, 2022). It has been further elaborated in the present study using a survey research design to yield quantitative follow-up data. The gleanings of this interview study facilitated the development of a questionnaire, adding to its content and construct validity. The instrument's face validity was established by a panel of experts represented by experienced FL teachers and teacher educators (n=5) (Muijs, 2004, pp. 65–68). Additionally, piloting the instrument with five more teachers helped to refine its items and eliminate ambiguity. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was calculated through SPSS producing the correlation coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha = .934, which is considered highly reliable. The questionnaire was distributed via email and social networks utilising Google Forms in 2021.

The questionnaire comprised five parts. The first part requested teachers to evaluate the adequacy of the university programs they graduated from in preparing them for the responsibilities of language teaching. Items 2 and 3 of the first part asked to measure the quality of theoretical and practical preparation. Items 4 and 5 concentrated on language proficiency development opportunities and respondents' perceived attainment at the outcome of their studies at the university. The instrument's second part asked language teachers to identify the principal sources of their professional knowledge, including initial teacher preparation, language learning and teaching experience, professional development courses and relevant literature. The third part targeted teachers' views on the components of their knowledge base, among which were FL proficiency, knowledge about language, knowledge about students and principles of organising

and managing instruction, knowledge of and about FL teaching, knowledge of the target language culture, sociocultural knowledge, knowledge of and about information and communication technologies (ICT). The fourth part elicited data regarding sources of knowledge teachers resort to, as well as their preferences in organising and delivering instruction featuring language teaching and learning experience, teacher education and development programs, self-development through extensive reading, collaboration with colleagues, and others. Parts 1–4 of the questionnaire comprised Likert scale items requiring the participants to express their opinion on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The fifth part of the questionnaire elicited profile data requesting language teachers to indicate their teaching experience, the type of institution they were currently employed at, and gender.

The responses were analysed using an SPSS tool package with the application of MANOVA. The given method allowed to compute and compare the mean scores for individual items of the questionnaire, as well as to compare the mean scores obtained on the categorical level (e.g. sources of knowledge, domains of knowledge base, etc.) between the groups of teachers with different language teaching experience or depending on the type of institution at which they held teaching positions.

Results

The obtained data were interpreted with consideration of the endorsement rates on individual items of the questionnaire by the participants and between-group comparisons on parts 1–4 of the instrument.

Adequacy of Initial Teacher Education

The findings on the questionnaire’s first part revealed the participants’ views on the perceived effectiveness of the university programs in providing them with prerequisite professional competence.

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Experience</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>TM</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>η²</i>
1. My university program provided me with adequate preparation for the work of a foreign language teacher.	1-5 years	4.400	4.115	.134	.008	.073
	≥ 25 years	4.000		.119		
2. My university program provided me with adequate theoretical preparation for the work of a foreign language teacher.	1-5 years	4.600	4.200	.116	.002	.089
	≥ 25 years	4.263		.103		
3. My university program provided me with adequate practical preparation for the work of a foreign language teacher.	1-5 years	4.133	3.804	.168	.115	.043
	≥ 25 years	3.684		.149		
4. My university program provided me with ample opportunities to develop my foreign language proficiency.	1-5 years	4.467	4.067	.153	.028	.06
	≥ 25 years	3.842		.136		

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Experience</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>TM</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>η²</i>
5. At the time of graduation, I felt my language proficiency was insufficient to provide effective instruction.	1-5 years	2.800	3.017	.157	.099	.044
	≥ 25 years	3.158		.139		

(Total mean TM – calculated for 6 groups of respondents with experience from 1 to more than 25 years)

Table 2. Perceived adequacy of initial teacher education

As displayed in Table 2, the mean rankings obtained on the first item showed that initial teacher preparation was deemed to be generally adequate in preparing them for the task of language teaching (M=4.115). However, a comparison of the data on items 2 and 3 showed that adequacy of theoretical preparation (M=4.200) scored higher than practical preparation (M=3.804). Teachers were quite unanimous on the sufficiency of opportunities to develop their language proficiency at the university (M=4.067). They felt more or less sure of their language competence (M=3.017) in that almost half of the teachers (47.1%) perceived their language proficiency as sufficient to organise effective FL instruction.

The between-group comparison with the focus on teaching experience length yielded a statistically significant difference (Wilk’s $\Lambda = .814$, $f = 1.674$, $p = .021$), although the output of the effect size measure showed a weak correlation ($\eta^2 = .04$). A statistically significant difference between novice and experienced teachers was documented on items concerning overall adequacy of teacher education ($p=.008$) and adequacy of theoretical preparation ($p=.002$).

As demonstrated by the data in Table 2, less experienced teachers provided higher rankings on all statements regarding the adequacy of formal teacher education. Interestingly, experienced teachers rated the quality of teacher education programs lower than their less experienced counterparts (1–5 years). The difference among other groups of respondents (from 5 to 25 years) was not as marked, although a similar tendency was also traceable in their answers.

A comparison of respondents’ views according to their current employment revealed that they differed only on the perceived level of language proficiency. FL teachers in higher education estimated their language competence to be more appropriate to provide effective instruction (M=2.963) than their colleagues who sought employment at the secondary educational level or grades 5–11 (M=3.243).

Sources of Knowledge

The mean scores on the questionnaire’s second part were calculated to explore the principal sources of language teachers’ professional insight. As shown in Table 3, the participants resorted to their language teaching experience as the major source of professional understanding (M=4.12), followed by language learning experience (M=3.97). Initial teacher education and relevant literature generated equal values (M=3.72), while teacher development courses scored the lowest (M=3.59).

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Experience</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>
One of the main sources of my professional knowledge is the university program I attended.	1-5 years	4.27	.868	.000
	5-10 years	3.98	.937	
	10-15 years	4.10	.308	
	15-20 years	3.68	.708	
	20-25 years	3.40	.814	
	≥ 25 years	3.68	.662	
	Total	3.72	.816	
Language learning experience is one of the main sources of my professional knowledge.	1-5 years	4.00	.830	.806
	5-10 years	3.96	.815	
	10-15 years	4.00	.649	
	15-20 years	3.86	.632	
	20-25 years	4.13	.819	
	≥ 25 years	3.95	.837	
	Total	3.97	.767	
Experience gained as a foreign language teacher is one of the main sources of my professional knowledge.	1-5 years	3.67	.802	.064
	5-10 years	4.07	.486	
	10-15 years	4.10	.553	
	15-20 years	4.14	.702	
	20-25 years	4.00	.910	
	≥ 25 years	4.47	.506	
	Total	4.12	.699	
Professional development courses are one of the main sources of my professional knowledge.	1-5 years	3.33	1.155	.031
	5-10 years	3.45	.888	
	10-15 years	3.50	.827	
	15-20 years	3.68	.771	
	20-25 years	3.80	1.126	
	≥ 25 years	3.68	.662	
	Total	3.59	.907	
One of the main sources of my professional knowledge is relevant literature.	1-5 years	3.93	.583	.000
	5-10 years	3.52	.983	
	10-15 years	4.00	.918	
	15-20 years	3.72	.883	
	20-25 years	3.73	.785	
	≥ 25 years	4.11	.559	
	Total	3.72	.851	

Table 3. Sources of language teachers’ knowledge: mean scores and inferential statistics

The between-group comparison of teachers’ responses with varying lengths of experience revealed a statistically significant difference in the beliefs about the principal sources of their knowledge (Wilk’s $\Lambda = .59$, $f = 4.503$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .1$). The findings of the inferential statistics analysis set in the last column of Table 3 point to statistically significant difference on such items as initial teacher education ($p=.000$), professional development courses ($p=.031$) and reading the relevant literature ($p=.000$). Thus, novice teachers reported relying on initial teacher education for professional insight ($M=4.27$), language learning experience ($M=4.00$), reading the relevant literature ($M=3.93$), teaching experience ($M=3.67$), and in the last place on teacher development courses ($M=3.33$). Conversely, the subjects whose experience was more than 25 years mainly derived their knowledge from language teaching experience ($M=4.47$), academic and other

professional literature (M=4.11), language learning experience (M=3.95), professional development courses, and initial teacher education (M=3.68).

Knowledge Domains

Table 4 displays the mean scores for areas of language teachers’ knowledge base, supplied with significance and effect size measurements.

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Experience:</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>η²</i>
FL proficiency is indispensable for a language teacher in organising effective instruction.	1-5 years	4.73	.450	.123	.042
	≥ 25 years	4.47	.603		
	Total	4.49	.556		
Knowledge about language is indispensable for a language teacher in organising effective instruction.	1-5 years	4.47	.629	.074	.048
	≥ 25 years	4.05	.517		
	Total	4.22	.680		
Knowledge about students, principles of organising instruction and classroom management is indispensable for effective language teaching.	1-5 years	4.40	.621	.302	.029
	≥ 25 years	4.53	.506		
	Total	4.43	.602		
Knowledge about principles of FL learning and teaching, language acquisition is indispensable for a language teacher in organising effective instruction.	1-5 years	4.27	.785	.466	.022
	≥ 25 years	4.37	.489		
	Total	4.34	.662		
Understanding the environment, culture in which you work is indispensable for a language teacher.	1-5 years	4.4	.498	.048	.053
	≥ 25 years	4.16	.495		
	Total	4.33	.546		
Knowledge about the target language culture and its speakers is indispensable for a language teacher in organising effective instruction.	1-5 years	4.27	.450	.273	.031
	≥ 25 years	4.16	.370		
	Total	4.32	.543		
Knowledge and ability of organising instruction using information and communication technologies are indispensable for a language teacher.	1-5 years	4.47	.507	.094	.045
	≥ 25 years	4.42	.500		
	Total	4.37	.607		

(Total mean – counted for 6 groups of respondents with experience from 1 to more than 25 years)

Table 4. Knowledge domains

The participating teachers acknowledged the importance of FL proficiency (M=4.49), knowledge about students and principles of organising and managing instruction (M=4.43), knowledge of ICT in language teaching (M=4.37), knowledge of principles of language teaching and learning (M=4.34), sociocultural knowledge (M=4.33), knowledge about the TL culture (M=4.32) with knowledge about language ending the list (M=4.22). The results indicate that all knowledge base domains were considered essential by the language teachers considering the negligible difference in the calculations of the mean scores. The results of the between-subjects effects test (the last two columns in Table 4) indicated no significant difference between the groups of respondents with different lengths of experience, hence their views as to the essential components of the knowledge base do not significantly change with experience.

Curriculum Content

Slightly different findings were obtained on a closely related question asking language teachers to indicate what university curriculum content they would have chosen to study in more detail given the possibility.

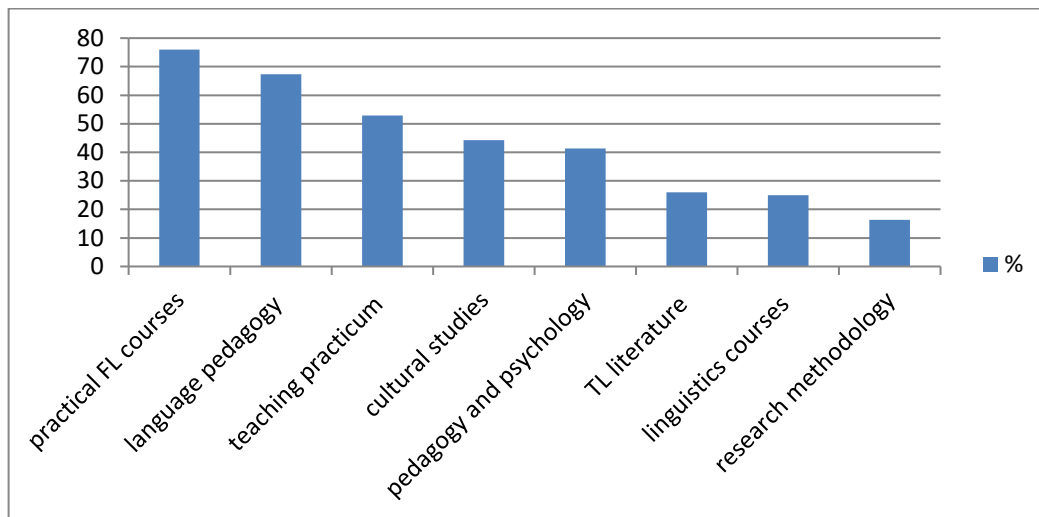


Diagram 1. Curriculum content preferences

The results set in Diagram 1 indicate that teachers gave preference to practical FL courses (76%), language pedagogy (67.3%), teaching practicum (52.9%), cultural studies (44.2%), pedagogy and psychology (41.3%), TL literature (26%), linguistics courses (25%) and research methodology (16.3%).

Active Knowledge Domains and Preferences

The analysis results of teachers’ preferences in planning and delivering instruction are set in Table 5. The findings provide compelling evidence of the influence of experience on language teachers’ views.

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Experience:</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>TM</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>
I mostly rely on my experience gained as a language teacher when preparing lessons.	1-5 years	3.400	3.81	.139	.022
	≥ 25 years	4.000		.123	
I mostly teach the FL as I was taught it.	1-5 years	2.933	2.88	.194	.511
	≥ 25 years	2.684		.172	
I try to use the knowledge acquired at the university when preparing lessons.	1-5 years	3.933	3.53	.164	.013
	≥ 25 years	3.279		.146	
I use knowledge and ideas gained from reading literature when preparing lessons.	1-5 years	3.600	3.76	.149	.079
	≥ 25 years	4.053		.133	
I use knowledge and ideas learnt at professional development courses when preparing lessons.	1-5 years	3.600	4.01	.138	.025
	≥ 25 years	4.158		.122	
I try to use information and communication technologies to make learning more effective when preparing lessons.	1-5 years	4.200	4.31	.116	.01
	≥ 25 years	4.526		.103	
I like experimenting with new approaches, techniques when preparing lessons.	1-5 years	4.267	4.24	.125	.158
	≥ 25 years	4.474		.111	
I usually follow the coursebook, trying to cover all tasks when planning instruction.	1-5 years	3.467	3.07	.167	.004
	≥ 25 years	3.111		.149	
I like discussing practical issues of teaching with my colleagues.	1-5 years	3.867	4.12	.124	.126
	≥ 25 years	4.263		.11	

(Total mean – counted for 6 groups of respondents with experience from 1 to more than 25 years)

Table 5. Active knowledge domains and teaching preferences

A statistically significant difference between novice and experienced teachers was found on variables presented in the first column of Table 5, where Wilk’s $\Lambda = .598$, $f = 2.357$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .21$. There was a significant difference between novice and experienced teachers in: (1) experience gained in the course of language teaching ($p = .022$), where novice teachers scored $M = 3.400$ and teachers with more than 25 years of experience $M = 4.000$ (Diagram 2); (2) using knowledge acquired at the university when preparing instruction ($p = .013$). For novice teachers, $M = 3.933$, for experienced teachers $M = 3.279$ (Diagram 3); (3) using knowledge learned at professional development courses ($p = .025$). For novice teachers, $M = 3.600$, for experienced teachers $M = 4.158$; (4) using ICT in delivering instruction ($p = .01$). For novice teachers $M = 4.200$, for experienced teachers $M = 4.526$; (5) coursebook utilisation ($p = 0.004$). Novice teachers followed coursebook material more rigidly ($M = 3.467$), while their more experienced counterparts used it more judgmentally ($M = 3.111$).



Diagram 2. Reliance on language teaching experience

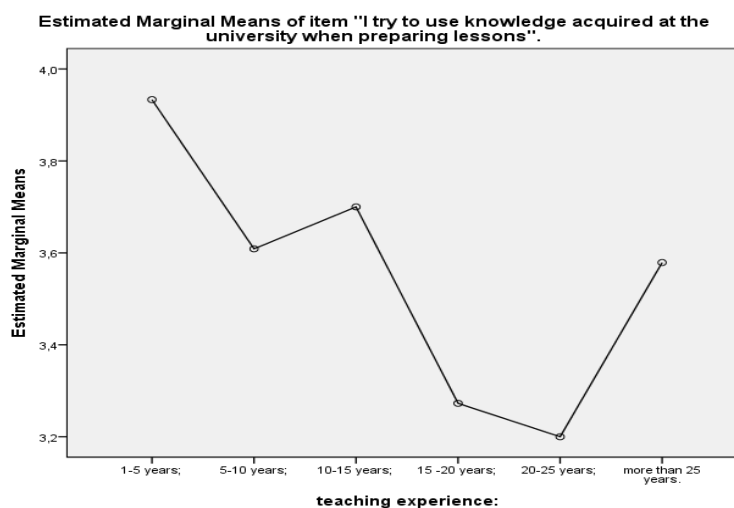


Diagram 3. Reliance on knowledge gained in initial teacher education

Notably, experienced language teachers were more open to experimenting with new didactic approaches and techniques ($M=4.474$) than novice teachers ($M=4.267$). More experienced teachers scored higher on the item related to collaboration with colleagues ($M=4.263$) than novices ($M=3.867$). Experienced teachers more willingly engaged in self-development through reading the relevant literature ($M=4.053$) than novice teachers ($M=3.600$). Contradictory findings were obtained on the utility of knowledge gained at professional development courses (Total Mean= 4.01), which were shown to play a less decisive role in the second part of this study. Once again, experienced teachers endorsed the value of knowledge gained in teacher development courses ($M=4.158$) to a greater extent than their less experienced peers ($M=3.600$). Most respondents disagreed that they taught the language as they were taught ($M=2.88$), although the learning experience was shown to occupy the second most important place among the sources of the language teachers' knowledge presented in Table 3.

Discussion

An author-designed questionnaire was drawn upon to provide quantitative snapshots to the exploratory phase of this study. Two-fold objectives guided the study: to analyse the essential domains and sources of the FL teachers' knowledge base and, in this respect, to explore the relationship between the length of teaching experience and beliefs held by language teachers.

The data generated by the questionnaire's first part revealed that the respondents were nearly unanimous about the adequacy of initial teacher preparation. Overall, language teachers valued most the quality of theoretical instruction and opportunities to develop language proficiency. At the same time, they deprecated the quality of practical preparation offered by formal teacher education. These findings are consistent with previous research where formal teacher education was highly valued by language teachers (Akcan, 2015). Moreover, the critical issues of teacher education inherent in the context of the present study, especially concerning the adequacy of practical preparation of language teachers, continue to plague it across other cultures (Karimi et al., 2021) and have been with us for many decades (Schulz, 2000).

The comparison of data pointed to variations in the perceptions of novice and experienced teachers on the quality of teacher education programs, with a tendency for more negative evaluation depending on the length of experience. Thus, novice teachers generally held more positive views concerning the effectiveness of teacher education experiences. However, the respondents appeared to gradually lose their initial enthusiasm as they advanced professionally, with a group of teachers with 20-25 years of experience scoring the lowest. Unfortunately, the given numeric data do not provide any explanation for the levels of language teachers' satisfaction with the quality of formal teacher education. For one thing, as time elapses, language teachers may no longer feel the impact produced by teacher education, while its memories are still fresh for novices. In addition, as teachers delve into their professional responsibilities, they realise that teaching is strewn with formidable challenges. Inadequacies of teacher preparation offered but for a limited period become more evident. Finally, with Ukraine's attempts at reforming language teacher education and its focus on professional competencies, more positive shifts may be underway in current language teacher preparation practices (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2020), which find reflection in the novice teachers' positive evaluation. Coming up with more substantial evidence necessitates additional inquiry, which is beyond this study's scope.

Rather unexpected findings were obtained on teachers' self-evaluation of their language proficiency. Contrary to the results of other studies (Karas, Faez, 2020), the participating teachers demonstrated more self-assurance about their readiness to meet the professional challenges, albeit it varied depending on the educational level and type of institution language teachers were employed at. Notably, teachers of the tertiary level rated their language proficiency higher than school teachers (grades 5–11). The results suggest that more confident individuals with a higher sense of self-efficacy are more likely to choose posts in higher education.

Regarding sources of knowledge, the subjects reported to derive it mainly from language teaching and learning experience, initial teacher education, relevant literature, and teacher development courses. These findings were, to some extent, corroborated in the study of Janssem (2014) while diverging from the results of Mullock (2006), according to whom teachers derived their knowledge mainly from initial teacher education, in-service teacher training, and self-study (p. 62). The findings on the perceived relevance of knowledge base domains partly overlap with the previous research results. Thus, the participants endorsed, above all, FL proficiency as the

principal component of language teachers' knowledge base, knowledge of learners, principles of organising and managing instruction, conceptualised in literature as pedagogical and learner knowledge. Following it was the technological pedagogical content knowledge, the importance of which was also acknowledged by the participants in the study of Kozikoglu and Babacan (2019). Knowledge of principles of FL learning and teaching or pedagogical content knowledge was also considered pivotal. Nevertheless, it rated somewhat lower than knowledge of the language and pedagogical and learner knowledge. Analogous to other research, knowledge about language or content knowledge scored the lowest among other essential knowledge base domains (Bartels, 2009). Notwithstanding the above data, the respondents valued such curricula components as practical language courses, language pedagogy, teaching practicum, cultural studies, pedagogy and psychology, TL literature, and linguistics courses. Some discrepancies could be observed in the responses concerning the contribution to professional knowledge development of such disciplines as language pedagogy, integrated pedagogy and psychology courses.

Compelling evidence of the impact of teaching experience on FL teachers' cognitions was documented in the analysis of teachers' preferences of knowledge domains activation and instruction implementation. Experienced teachers reported activating knowledge accumulated in the course of teaching, at professional development courses, insights gained from reading widely, and collaboration with colleagues. Conversely, novice teachers readily utilised knowledge acquired at the university and were more rigid in applying coursebook material. Additionally, experienced teachers more willingly experimented with new language teaching approaches and techniques than novices, as corroborated by earlier research (Megyes, 2001; Tsui, 2003). Both novice and experienced teachers denied the fact of teaching the FL the way they were taught. Although the teachers chose language learning experience as one of the principal sources of their professional insight, in most cases, it served as a counter-model of how not to teach. Similar to the findings of Moodie (2016), where language teachers considered language learning experience as "an anti-apprenticeship of observation" (p. 29), the participants of this study also viewed their own learning experience in a negative light.

Consequently, these findings showcase transformations in language teachers' cognitions impacted by the length of teaching experience, especially in their knowledge base beliefs system. They overlap with the previous research on the impact of experience on language teachers' beliefs and practices (Akbari et al., 2009). Thus, the results provide additional proof of teaching experience being a predictive factor shaping the way language teachers approach the task of teaching.

Conclusion

This study explored the assumed relevance and sources of FL teachers' knowledge base and the influence of the length of teaching experience on their views and preferences. It documented quantitative dissimilarities on a range of aspects of knowledge base among language teachers relevant to the amount of their experience. While experienced teachers actively resorted to various sources for professional understanding and in making instructional decisions, like language teaching experience, professional development courses, academic literature, novice teachers heavily depended on initial teacher preparation. Also, experienced teachers asserted to

approach the task of language teaching with a more creative mind and flexibility than their less experienced colleagues who clung more to routines and coursebooks.

The present study provides a window into the way language teachers develop their insider knowledge. As shown, novice FL teachers resorted to initial teacher education as the primary source of professional knowledge. Conversely, their more experienced counterparts considered language teaching experience the principal source of knowledge. One should be mindful that it is a somewhat simplistic representation of a much more complex reality since teacher cognitions, including knowledge-related beliefs, are moulded by numerous sources and factors. At the same time, the present study is a warning against claims that language teachers gain their knowledge mainly in the course of teaching, given that less experienced teachers were essentially dependent on formal teacher education as a basis of professional knowledge. Another implication transpiring from this study concerns the lack of a balance between the theoretical and practical preparation of prospective language teachers, with a need for more emphasis on its practical issues. Similarly, although the participants accorded importance to the knowledge domains falling within the purview of the pedagogy and psychology curriculum components, their deliverance at the universities failed to meet their expectations. Likewise, the respondents expressed their reservations on the indispensability of knowledge about language extensively covered in a range of linguistics courses in the universities of Ukraine, often at the expense of the professional core, including language pedagogy. The findings point to the need to raise the relevance of the curriculum components offered by the teacher education programs by tapping into the language teachers' views.

The study's principal limitations arise from the general insensitivity of quantitative research to the reasons underlying the observed phenomenon (Dörnyei, 2007). Although statistically significant difference was documented between language teachers with differing lengths of experience, more material explanations of the underlying causes are yet to be captured in more meticulous in-depth research. Another downside of the present investigation derives from the nature of the observed construct, which is notoriously hard to circumscribe and due to its dynamism, i.e., the nature of language teachers' knowledge base and modifications in teacher cognitions instigated by experience. The future direction this research might take if one wishes to delve deeper is exploring what language teachers' experiences produce changes in their professional mindset. Moreover, replicating the study in cross-cultural settings involving more substantial samples would help generate more generalisable findings.

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