

## Exploring Non-Native-English-Speaking Preservice EFL Teachers' Cognitions: What Teaching Philosophy Statements Can Tell Us

Exploración de las cogniciones de docentes de inglés no nativos: lo que las declaraciones de filosofía de enseñanza pueden decirnos

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This study investigates the content and characteristics of the cognitions of 30 Turkish English-as-a-foreign-language preservice teachers as manifested in their teaching philosophy statements. The study showed that the preservice teachers' cognition was focused on both the pedagogical (teaching-learning and language teaching methods) and the personal and interpersonal (learners' and teachers' roles and the relationship between them) aspects of teaching and was characterized by high idealism and naïveté, but they also demonstrated a certain level of awareness of the future contexts in which they would be teaching. Although their past experiences significantly shaped their cognition, they found that their current teacher education program helped them develop a critical view of these experiences.

*Keywords:* English as a foreign language, language teacher cognition, language teacher education, preservice teachers, teaching philosophy statement

En este estudio se investigan el contenido y las características de las cogniciones de treinta futuros docentes turcos de inglés, tal como se manifiestan en sus declaraciones de filosofía de la enseñanza. Se encontró que la cognición de los docentes se centraba en los aspectos pedagógicos (enseñanza-aprendizaje y métodos de enseñanza de lengua) y en los aspectos personales e interpersonales (papeles de los alumnos y docentes y la relación entre ellos) de la enseñanza. Esta cognición se caracterizó por un alto idealismo e ingenuidad, aunque los docentes también demostraron ser conscientes de los contextos futuros en los que estarían enseñando. Aunque sus experiencias pasadas desempeñaron un papel importante en la formación de su cognición, descubrieron que su actual programa de formación docente les ayudó a desarrollar una visión crítica de estas experiencias.

*Palabras clave:* cognición del docente de lengua, declaración de filosofía de la enseñanza, formación docente, futuros docentes, inglés como lengua extranjera

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## Introduction

For the past three decades, understanding language teacher cognition has been a productive area of research, as teachers' cognition directly influences their practices (Pitkäniemi, 2010). Some areas of language teaching that have received attention include instruction in grammar (Liviero, 2017), reading (Meijer et al., 1999), writing (Yigitoglu & Belcher, 2014), listening (Abad, 2023), speaking and pronunciation (Aloud, 2022; Couper, 2017; Kochem, 2022; Webster, 2019), and self-regulated learning (Barr & Askill-Williams, 2020) as well as language teachers' general cognition. Owing to the diversity of teachers in English language teaching, there has been a growing body of research on the cognition of non-native-English-speaking English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in the last two decades. In particular, preservice teachers, who are at the threshold of their professional development, should critically examine the ideas and beliefs about teaching and learning they have formed, often unconsciously. Also, it is important for teacher educators to explore and respond to preservice teachers' beliefs and understandings, as such feedback is known to have a powerful impact on teachers' practices (İnceçay, 2011). Building on what preservice teachers know as a result of training and experience, the beliefs and values they bring to teaching, and their attitudes toward teaching and learning are central to designing effective teacher education programs (Verloop et al., 2001).

The aim of this study, therefore, was to contribute to the body of knowledge on non-native-English-speaking preservice EFL teachers by exploring their cognition, as manifested in their teaching philosophy statements. A group of Turkish preservice teachers in a language teacher education program in Istanbul, Türkiye (an EFL context) was the focus of the study. To gain an understanding of their knowledge, beliefs, and values, the participants' written teaching philosophy statements were analyzed, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the main components of the content of non-native-English-speaking preservice EFL teachers' cognition as manifested in their teaching philosophy statements?
2. What overarching themes characterize the cognition that non-native-English-speaking preservice EFL teachers bring to teaching?

## Theoretical Background

### Conceptualizing Language Teacher Cognition

Borg (2003) traditionally defined language teacher cognition as an umbrella term comprising "what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom" (p. 81). Recently, Borg (2019) expanded this definition to include the social, cultural, and historical contexts and the teachers' emotions. The knowledge teachers have, which forms the basis for their cognition, has been variously conceptualized as pedagogical content knowledge (Schulman, 1986), teachers' personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), formal and practical teacher knowledge (Fenstermacher, 1994), images (Johnson, 1994), and practical theory (Levin & He, 2008). Despite differences among these frameworks, common to all conceptualizations is the understanding that what teachers know and believe is central to their work.

Much of the earlier work on teacher cognition focused on exploring the content, nature, and sources of teachers' cognitions. Based on a study of two English as a second language (ESL) teachers, Golombek (1998) identified four overlapping and interacting areas of teacher cognition: (a) knowledge of self, (b) knowledge of subject matter, (c) knowledge of instruction, and (d) knowledge of contexts. Meijer et al. (1999) described teachers' cognition as (a) personal, (b) contextual, (c) based on experience, (d) guided by teaching practice, (e) mainly tacit, and (f) content-related.

Several researchers have emphasized that language teachers' cognition emanates from and is strongly shaped by their prior formal language learning experiences, teacher education programs, and daily practical experiences (Crookes, 2015; Ellis, 2006; Johnson, 2015). For preservice teachers, who have little or no teaching experience, past language learning experiences and present pedagogical learning have the most substantial impact on shaping their language teacher cognition. In this regard, Warford and Reeves (2003) found that the thinking of non-native TESOL students is shaped more by their prior experiences as language learners than is that of native-speaking students. In some contexts, there might be a mismatch between prior language learning experiences of non-native-English-speaking EFL teachers and their current training and teaching contexts. For example, Moodie (2016) found that his participants, who studied English at public schools in Korea with a more grammar-oriented approach, often experienced models of "what not to do" as language teachers (p. 29). These preservice teachers, therefore, lacked positive models of teaching and teachers, resulting in an "anti-apprenticeship of observation." Similar concerns were voiced by Lin (2022) in the Taiwanese context, where teacher candidates had to draw from their own experiences to implement globally oriented English language teaching practices.

Much of the challenge of researching foreign language teacher cognition arises from the complex nature of English as a world language with many variants, the complications of teaching it, and the international nature of the TESOL profession (Crookes, 2003; Pratt, 2005). Crookes (2003) argues that different groups of prospective teachers, both native and non-native, bring their own beliefs, experiences, and knowledge to their language-teaching education programs. Ben-Peretz (2011), noting that many teacher cognition studies assume a Western cultural perspective, calls for a broader scope of studies that includes non-Western cultures and contexts.

Some language teacher cognition researchers have focused on non-native-speaking English teachers in EFL

contexts (Hayes, 2009; Tajeddin & Aryaeian, 2017; Tsang, 2004). In their study of Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching, Tajeddin and Aryaeian (2017) found that more experienced teachers had a broader knowledge of this approach and were better at articulating their cognition. Chou (2008) found that elementary school EFL teachers in Taiwan developed a set of teaching principles based on their training and practice, which were realized as rules of practice in their actual teaching. Also in the Taiwanese context, Hayes (2009) found that the classroom practices of EFL teachers were driven mainly by the local dynamics of their specific contexts and emphasized the multidimensional aspect of teachers' work in Taiwan. Tercanlioglu (2001) focused on preservice EFL teachers' views on teaching reading and found that the participants did not consider themselves good readers, which they believed was necessary to teach reading properly.

Arslan (2019) and Maaranen and Stenberg (2017), in studies of Turkish and Finnish preservice teachers, respectively, found that their participants tended to focus on overt aspects of teaching, such as environment and behaviors, with little attention to internal factors, such as their beliefs and professional identity. Such self-awareness, however, is an essential dimension of professional growth. In this respect, having preservice teachers articulate their teaching philosophies could serve as a beginning to self-examination of their cognitions.

### Teaching Philosophy Statements as a Tool for Understanding Language Teacher Cognition

Due to an increasing emphasis on a reflective approach to second/foreign language teaching (Payant, 2017), a common practice in many English language teaching education programs is to have students write a teaching philosophy statement (TPS). A TPS is "a narrative essay which reflects an individual's beliefs and values about teaching and learning, often including

concrete examples of the ways in which that individual enacts those beliefs” (Bowne, 2017, p. 59). A typical TPS usually covers six focal areas: (a) a definition of teaching, (b) a definition of learning, (c) a perspective on learners and their development, (d) student-teacher relationships, (e) teaching methods, and (f) evaluation of their impact on learners (Schönwetter et al., 2002). A TPS may cover some or all of these areas and may be written only for personal reflection and growth or be submitted for academic evaluation (Schönwetter et al., 2002).

Writing a TPS is intended to help preservice teachers reflect on and develop an awareness of their beliefs and encourage professional growth (Caukin & Brinthaup, 2017; Hegarty, 2015). Reflecting on their past and present ideas in relation to their future identities enables preservice teachers to develop an image of themselves as future teachers. As Payant (2017) emphasizes, “writing a TP should be added to the repertoire of reflective activities, especially for pre-service teachers” (p. 640).

In addition to the value to the writer, the highly personal nature of a TPS makes it an effective tool for teacher educators to explore prospective language teachers’ cognition, particularly with respect to their beliefs about (a) language learning, (b) language teaching, and (c) teachers’ roles (Payant, 2017; Payant & Hirano, 2018). Payant and Hirano also found that well-developed and strongly stated TPSs are more balanced in covering a variety of topics while emphasizing their discussion. Maaranen et al. (2016) also point out that the TPSs of preservice and novice teachers tend to be highly idealistic and often far from reality.

Considering that most research on English language teacher cognition has been carried out in the North American and British contexts with native English-speaking participants or TESOL students receiving education in these countries, little is known about TPSs written in non-Western contexts where English is taught as a foreign language, which represents a major global proportion of English teaching and learning. To help close the gap in this area, the present study focuses

on the TPSs of English language preservice teachers in Türkiye.

## Method

### Research Design

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe basic qualitative research as an investigation of “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 24). This methodology was, therefore, appropriate for this study of the experiences, beliefs, values, and attitudes toward teaching English as expressed in the TPSs written by English language preservice teachers in Türkiye.

### Research Context

**Participants and Data Collection.** This study was set in a research university’s English language teaching department in Istanbul, Türkiye. The data were collected from 31 third-year preservice teachers enrolled in a second language teaching methods course I taught as a teacher-researcher. There were ten men and 21 women, ages 20 to 22.

The TPSs that formed the data were included in the participants’ assessment. The TPSs were written in English and submitted electronically through the Turnitin website. In class, I gave the participants general guidelines for writing an effective TPS and samples of well-written TPSs. The study received approval from the university’s ethics review board. In line with the ethics board policies, I started the analysis of the TPSs after the course grades were turned in.

In a class of 34 students, 31 signed written consent forms granting me permission to use their TPSs in this research. To preserve confidentiality, each participant was assigned a number to be used for the presentation of the findings (P1, P2, etc.). One TPS was not included in the data set due to the irrelevance of its content. The remaining 30 TPSs ranged from 403 to 3,113 words with

an average of 876 words. The entire dataset totaled 26,286 words.

**Data Coding and Analysis.** Before analyzing the data, I printed each TPS uploaded on the Turnitin website, redacted all identifiers, and assigned a number to each sample. As Creswell (2013) suggests, I first read all the data to have “a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning” (p. 197) and then reread the data several times to identify the main topics. In analyzing the data, I took a flexible approach, combining emerging and predetermined codes (Creswell, 2013).

For reliability in coding, I worked with a colleague from another university. After the initial categories were formed, a description for each category and sample statements were developed. Then, to ensure interrater agreement, we coded 20% of the data independently with an overall agreement of 90%. In this process, we followed the six-step thematic analysis described by Kuckartz (2014) and applied thematic coding procedures (Ayres, 2008). The categories that emerged in the first round of coding (beliefs about English language, definition of teaching, definition of learning, views of the teacher's role, student-teacher relationships, teaching methods, description/awareness of context in Türkiye, learner participation, etc.) were merged to form four major categories: (a) conceptualization/descriptions of effective teaching and learning, (b) focus on language teaching methods, (c) focus on the teacher, and (d) focus on the learner.

To establish the credibility of the findings, I identified negative and discrepant information (negative

case analysis) and followed prolonged engagement and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2013). An experienced colleague acted as a peer debriefer, asking specific questions and commenting on the categories. The discussion contributed to the overall credibility of the findings by helping me to clarify some issues as I revised the analysis.

## Findings

The findings are presented in response to the research questions.

### What Are the Main Components of the Content of Non-Native-English-Speaking Preservice EFL Teachers' Cognition as Manifested in Their TPSs?

To address this question, the TPSs were coded as described above, and frequencies were calculated to identify a wide range of main topics or themes. These were divided into two overarching conceptual categories or perspectives: *the pedagogical perspective* and *the personal and interpersonal perspective*. The pedagogical perspective included immediate pedagogical matters such as teaching methods, beliefs about teaching, and language learning. The personal and interpersonal perspectives included perceptions of the roles of students and teachers in the teaching-learning process and the relationship between them. Table 1 shows the frequencies for each perspective. Table 2 presents excerpts from participants' TPSs and the categories in which they were placed.

**Table 1.** Frequency of Instances/Comments Related to Each Category in the Teaching Philosophy Statements

Pedagogical perspective		Personal and interpersonal perspective	
Conceptualization of teaching and learning	Focus on language teaching methods	Focus on the learner	Focus on the teacher
157	128	83	41

Table 2. Description of Categories and Sample Statements

Categories	Description	Sample statements
<b>Conceptualization of teaching and learning</b>	Beliefs and views about (effective) teaching and learning, conceptualizations of how students learn (languages)	First of all, I believe that without using what they have learnt in the class, the learning is difficult to be permanent. (P3)
<b>Focus on language teaching methods</b>	Discussion of certain approaches and methods, student diversity, specific references to language learning theories, aspects of teaching such as giving feedback, specific examples of teaching practices	CLIL, for example, would work well for these students because all they need is to enjoy. They are at the play age, and they need to have fun while learning. (P15)
<b>Focus on the learner</b>	Expectations of student-teacher relationships, teacher's view of learners and their role in the classroom, teacher's expectations of learners in class	My students are part of teaching process, and I know there are many things I learn from them. (P7)
<b>Focus on the teacher</b>	Perceptions of what a teacher's role should/should not be in a (language) class	Thus, my role as a teacher in the language classroom will be an observer and facilitator, not a provider of direct information. (P30)

#### Pedagogical Perspective

This category included concrete aspects of teaching practice, such as beliefs about effective teaching and learning and knowledge of language teaching methods, the two major categories under this perspective, accounting for 56% of the data. Teaching the functional aspects of language and linking the classroom to real life emerged as central themes, as reflected in the following quote: "Eventually, to me, language teaching is to teach learners how to use the language to function" (P8).

The participants conceptualized effective language teaching and learning as processes in which meaning is primary and classroom practices mirror real-life language use. There was a strong emphasis on providing opportunities for learners to use the target language in a variety of pragmatic situations. Being aware of the restrictions of studying English in a context where it is not part of daily communication, the participants perceived language learning as a long endeavor that is

not restricted to the classroom. Many suggested strategies for expanding language learning beyond the classroom, such as selecting English as the default language when using technological devices, watching movies and reading books in English, and interacting with other English speakers as much as possible:

A language that is aimed to be taught and learnt is a living entity that expands every day and consists of many different aspects. A language, in my opinion, cannot be taught only in a classroom setting, and it goes way beyond grammar or textbooks or a university entrance exam. (P16)

Language teaching methods also received a great deal of attention in the TPSs in discussions that tended to be highly detailed and structured. The explanations were not merely descriptions of these methods but provided reasoning, which displays a broad knowledge of language teaching methodologies and develops

connections between this knowledge and what the participants could do in their prospective classrooms. They identified the approaches they found effective, justified their choices, and provided details such as how to use them with specific proficiency, age, or grade groups. One participant wrote:

For example, instead of giving students a text in which every word is known to them, a little challenging text which contains a few unknown words might better help them to learn new words in an environment where they can use some strategies to find out their meanings, like relying on a co-text. (P25)

Language teaching methods that were emphasized included communicative language teaching, task-based teaching, and content-based teaching, which were highly favored by the participants. Comments often referred to teaching the four skills in an integrated manner; teaching grammar implicitly; correcting errors indirectly; using games, realia, or role-plays; and encouraging student-to-student interaction.

Regarding the teaching and learning of English, some participants commented on the uniqueness of learning and teaching a language among other subject areas taught in schools due to its function as a tool for communication and its potential for extending learning outside the classroom environment: "I believe that English has a distinct nature to learn compared to other lessons. English education does not necessarily depend on classroom teaching and materials. It is everywhere in our lives" (P9).

As the excerpt illustrates, some participants were aware of language as a practical, dynamic, and context-sensitive communication tool. Indeed, the participants converged in their widespread emphasis on communicative approaches to teaching language, which has for some time been the predominant ESL/EFL methodology and about which they displayed a well-developed understanding of currently favored language teaching approaches.

### Personal and Interpersonal Perspective

This perspective, accounting for 25% of the data, included the roles of students and teachers in the learning/teaching context and the nature of their relationship. The comments in this category referred to the participants' feelings, attitudes, and values rather than to particular teaching practices.

Overall, under this perspective, the participants revealed that they made a fundamental distinction between the general mission of an educator and the particular role of a language teacher, supporting the notion of the uniqueness of language teaching and learning. According to this distinction, all educators have broad responsibilities, such as shaping students' lives and behaviors positively, whereas language teachers' roles are specific to the classroom environment. "Teacher as a general educator" was an expression used by two participants to characterize a teacher as one who acts as a role model not only in the classroom but also outside of school: "Not only with their lessons, but with their lifestyles, beliefs, and manners, they need to be students' role models to affect them greatly" (P7).

"Teacher as a role model" was an expression used by several participants, emphasizing the role of a teacher as an influential figure in the learners' lives. They articulated a clear image of a teacher as someone who prepares students for real life. Some of the metaphors given by the participants to enforce the strong character-building image were the teacher as a movie director, the teacher as a doctor, and the teacher as an orchestra conductor:

The role of teachers can be seen as to convey the information to the student, but at the same time I think a real teacher should teach his or her students real life and how to handle the challenges they encounter. (P1)

The classroom profile of a teacher as a caring, attentive, and considerate guide who treats learners as unique individuals with their own learning styles and interests was articulated in some way in most of the TPSs.

Participants provided examples as to how to put students at ease in class, how to encourage their participation, and ways to accommodate their individuality and feelings: “The teachers should also be aware of such changes in students’ mood and make some changes in their teaching ways to get the learners involved with the learning process” (P5).

Nevertheless, while the participants acknowledged the important influence of teachers on students’ lives, there were some conflicting views as to what the role of a teacher should be. A few participants described a narrower role for teachers as professionals in their fields without any obligation to be role models or behave in particular ways in their personal lives: “As a teacher, I do not have to be a role-model, but I should behave and teach in a professional way” (P28).

Overall, the ideal language teacher is portrayed as someone who is motivating, caring, patient, and tolerant of students’ mistakes:

As a teacher, my role is here to give instructions, check what they are doing while the groups are studying the word, encourage and motivate them, make corrections when necessary, answering students’ questions, make clarifications, make comprehension checks after the activity. (P24)

As for the language teacher’s role in the classroom, there was agreement that a teacher should be willing to share authority with the students, reflected in such terms as “observer,” “facilitator,” “assistant,” “helper,” and “guide.” The emphasis on the facilitator role was related to perceptions of the nature of learning languages, in which learner-to-learner interaction in the target language is an essential part of learning: “Ideally, the teacher must be a supporter, an attention grabber, a facilitator, and an observer, but never the center of the class” (P3).

Another common theme focused on the kind of relationship participants wanted to have with their

students. In articulating their views on this issue, the majority envisioned a friendly teacher-student relationship in which they would establish a good rapport with learners, and being empathetic to their needs would be central. These images project an ideal classroom picture in which students and teachers care for each other, and students are motivated and willing to learn: “My teaching philosophy emerged from the desire to build a respectful, but close relationship between me and my students. Because I believe that students can effectively learn from a person they trust, love, and respect” (P30).

The participants in this study valued learners’ active participation as an important aspect of language learning. They expected learners to take responsibility for their own learning, and their mistakes are tolerated as they use the target language for authentic communication. “Because for my learning and teaching principles to work out, students’ hands should also get dirty; they should also participate in the process” (P20).

In parallel with encouraging learner autonomy, several participants recognized that learners have the potential to contribute to the teacher’s learning. In line with the view of co-learning and cooperation, these comments show that the participants were willing to share the teacher’s power with their students:

I perceive students as the people from whom I learn, so they are also my teachers. Not only my personality but also my teaching skills will develop as I engage with students. They will always shape my personality and contribute to my professional skills. (P22)

To sum up, the preservice teachers’ cognition of essential aspects of a teacher’s daily work included effective teaching and learning, language teaching methods, students’ and teachers’ roles, and the relationships between them. In the findings related to students’ and teachers’ roles and relationships, affective factors were major.



### What Overarching Themes Characterize the Cognition that Non-Native-English-Speaking Preservice EFL Teachers Bring to Teaching?

This question referred to the common patterns and overarching themes that characterized the preservice teachers' cognition at a more abstract level and concerned their broader understanding of matters that they perceived would influence their future teaching practices.

#### Teaching as a Value-Laden, Moral Act

Throughout the TPSs, teaching was framed as a value-laden, moral act in which the role of the teacher is paramount. Care and responsibility stood out as the two most important qualities of good teachers. Thus, the participants positioned their future selves as responsible for making the right decisions to set their students on a positive life path as members of society:

I will be a role model . . . Not only I give them knowledge, but also I prepare them for life itself. The best motivation is knowing the fact that I touch and shape new generations and indirectly the future of the world. (P12)

In discussing their roles as teachers and the influence they imagined they would have on their students, the participants expressed highly idealistic and, therefore, largely unrealistic expectations, as illustrated by such declarations as "I will be the person whom they could consult whenever they need" (P22). By elevating teaching to the level of a calling to serve, they revealed their strong professional commitment but also their naivety:

Being a teacher is beyond an occupation. I will be one call away my students. I, as their role model, will be the person whom they could consult whenever they need, so my work doesn't end when classes finish in a school day. (P22)

The moral aspect of teaching continues to be emphasized in the student-teacher relationship participants hope to have in the future. Creating a student-friendly

environment where students feel free to speak up and being highly attentive and aware of students' needs are considered very important. Being a positive influence on students' language learning and their lives in general also reflects the moral values attached to being a teacher.

#### Images of Past Experiences and Future Aspirations

As expressed in their TPSs, the participants' cognition was shaped by (a) their past and present language learning experiences, including their former language teachers, and (b) their current teacher education program.

Past language learning experiences and former teachers emerged as extremely influential in shaping the preservice teachers' cognition. The influence of these experiences and teachers was evident in the types of instructional practices the participants favored, their motivation to choose teaching as a career, and the ideal classrooms they hoped to have. Most participants perceived their past language learning experiences as negative. All having studied English in the Turkish educational system, they agreed that the rule-governed, grammar-focused language teaching practices to which they were exposed had made language learning a painful experience: "A huge problem for me in the Turkish Education System is the fact that languages, usually English, is taught with formulas, as if it is some sort of mathematical equation" (P17).

These negative language learning experiences were a major reason most participants initially decided to become English teachers. The impact of these experiences was also evident in the value they attached to more communicative and less grammar-based methods and the emphasis they placed on speaking skills. For example, many believed it was essential to help learners develop speaking skills, an area in which many mentioned having the most difficulty despite studying English for years, and on which they now planned to place special emphasis in their future classrooms:

“What shaped my teaching philosophy the most was this issue; teaching a language without practicing speaking, limiting the language classes to grammar and reading is not an effective system” (P17).

While most participants recalled learning English as a painful experience and were critical of their former teachers and the instructional practices they used, some reported more positive experiences, and some were inspired to pursue the profession because of the English teachers they admired. The following excerpts reflect the effect of such influential teachers:

That movie [an English-language movie shown in class] was my favorite movie in those times; moreover, English was my favorite lesson, and that woman became the person who changed my life with all her love to her job and the lessons she taught. I am talking about the time when I first decided to become an English teacher. That woman was my English teacher. (P7)

The teachers that participants admired and took as models usually connected with them and provided stimulating activities that motivated them to study English: “When I take a look at my foreign language learning history, I have found out that I have learnt best with the teachers who connect with me in the real world as well” (P3).

The participants’ current teacher education program emerged as another decisive factor shaping their cognition. In discussions of their prospective teaching practices, there were frequent references to their coursework. While past experiences played an important role in shaping their teacher cognition, their current teacher education program played a complementary role by helping them reflect on their past learning experiences and reevaluate their effectiveness. For example, one participant discussed how he came to realize that the language classes he had enjoyed and benefitted from the most were usually taught with task-based methods:

Also, after having learned different teaching methods, I realized that in my Spanish classes mainly CLT and

TBLT are used. Before knowing these methods, I only knew that I liked the style of my teachers, but now that I know what method they use and how they implement it, it really influenced me in a positive way and shaped my current language teaching style opinion. (P17)

Another participant believed that the coursework in the department provided a strong basis for them to build upon and “avoid the negative consequences” (P9) of the way they studied language as learners.

Although the participants were conscious of their lack of experience, many had a clear idea of themselves as English teachers in the future, which was usually an idealized image of a knowledgeable, responsible, and caring teacher: “Attracting their interests for learning what I teach is another aim because learning happens more effectively when it is cared. As a young language teacher, I aim to teach them by contributing to their real lives” (P2).

Although the TPSs were characterized by high idealism and optimism, the participants had also developed a general awareness of the contexts in which they might be functioning once they started teaching. For example, they referenced private/public school differences, the sizes of classes, learners’ attitudes toward and motivations for learning English, the centralized curriculum, students at different proficiency levels in the same class, and possible lack of materials and textbooks. These potential drawbacks, along with their lack of experience as third-year students who had not yet begun practicum courses, generated some insecurities about their teaching skills. However, they expressed awareness of their great potential for professional growth and change in the teaching process.

In my opinion, teaching is a life-time process which takes place both in and outside of a classroom, and teachers do not only teach in the process, but they constantly learn new things and pass them to their students as well. (P16)

Thus, past and present language learning experiences and their current teacher education program significantly influenced the preservice teachers' cognition, which they synthesized into the personalized images of their envisioned professional selves. The TPSs also showed some understanding that these idealized versions of themselves as teachers had yet to be further tempered and perhaps altered by contexts and experiences as they moved forward in their careers.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the emergence of non-native-English-speaking preservice EFL teachers' cognition as manifested in their TPSs. The largest category of comments in the TPSs comprised definitions of teaching and learning, descriptions of students' and teachers' roles, and evaluations of teaching methods. Three findings in this study stand out. First, the study showed that the preservice teachers' cognition was focused on both the pedagogical (teaching and learning and language teaching methods) and the personal and interpersonal (learners' and teachers' roles and the relationship between them) aspects of teaching. Second, although the participants' cognition was characterized by high idealism and naivete, they also demonstrated a certain level of awareness of the future contexts in which they would be teaching. Third, although their past experiences had a significant role in shaping their cognition, they found that their current teacher education program helped them to develop a critical view of these experiences, which in turn helped them visualize their ideals of the teachers they want to be in the future.

The TPSs written by the participants in this study covered a wide range of topics, including materials, curriculum, teaching and learning styles, and teaching methodologies. It can be said that the topics covered overlap the practical knowledge categories proposed by Golombek (1998) and Meijer et al. (1999). In addition to describing a variety of topics, the participants in

this study also discussed the underlying principles of particular practices and reasons for implementing them, which is referred to as breadth by Buitink (2009). Therefore, it may be said that the participants in this study were able to produce well-developed learner-centered TPSs, given that their practicum experiences were still ahead of them. In this sense, the findings contradict previous studies in which it is argued that preservice teachers at this point in their training tend to be focused mainly on their learning experiences and eventual teaching behaviors, with little attention to the experiences of their future learners.

Some previous research showed that preservice teachers usually focus on the observable aspects of teaching, such as the environment or teacher behavior, whereas they pay less attention to their own beliefs and identity (Maaranen & Stenberg, 2017). In this study, however, the participants were well aware of their beliefs and were able to articulate these by making connections to their coursework. As discussed by Borg and Sanchez (2020), being aware of their beliefs is one of the characteristics of good language teachers.

Chmarkh (2021), based on his review of teacher cognition research, notes that any teacher education program should take into account and value preservice teachers' beliefs based on their experiences as language learners and facilitate the formation of new beliefs based on their coursework. The TPSs also showed the influence of past learning experiences, positive and negative, on shaping the participants' cognition, as has been widely documented. In this study, the participants' developing cognition was also strongly influenced by their former language learning. This finding corroborates Warford and Reeves's (2003) finding that non-native-speaking TESOL students' thinking is influenced more by past learning experiences than native-speaking TESOL students who did not have to learn the language they would be teaching. Moodie's (2016) anti-apprenticeship of observation also holds true for many of the participants in this study. The participants' comments pointed to

the tension between the more traditional methods they were exposed to while learning English and the contemporary approaches they were expected to use in their teaching. However, this study also found that negative past experiences can be reevaluated through lenses provided by current teacher education programs focused on contemporary, largely student-centered, and communicative teaching approaches.

The high level of idealism that the preservice teachers projected into their future selves as teachers was also a notable finding in this study (Wall, 2016). This finding corroborates the findings of Anspal et al. (2012) and Maaranen et al. (2016), which documented that preservice teachers in Estonia and Finland, respectively, expressed enthusiastic but naïve views of the roles of teachers. As teacher education programs prepare preservice teachers for the transition from coursework to practicum experiences and eventual teaching as novices, it is important to help them maintain their commitment to their ideals while developing resilience to situational factors that may become a hindrance.

### **Implications and Suggestions for Further Research**

This study offers a major implication for teacher education programs. Preservice language teachers without any formal teaching experience have the potential to imagine and reflect on their future teaching practices through the experience of writing a TPS, which may function as a bridge for preservice teachers to connect their past experiences to their future aspirations. Through thinking critically about their former experiences, they can clarify their future aspirations. Also, these written TPSs can be a useful tool to shed light on the preservice teachers' developing cognition at a critical juncture before they engage in formal teaching and, in this way, help teacher educators tailor programs to the needs of prospective teachers. Therefore, writing a TPS at such junctures should be part of language teacher education coursework.

It is also worth thinking what the consequences of the high idealism prevalent in preservice teachers might be when they face the situational limitations they will inevitably encounter as novice teachers. How should teacher educators prepare them for harsh realities without damaging their optimism?

This qualitative study is an initial exploration of the emerging cognition of 30 non-native-speaking English language preservice teachers in an EFL context. Although the conclusions drawn from the study may be applicable in other EFL contexts, the study findings should still be interpreted with caution. The sole data source for the study was the TPSs written by the participants as part of a language teaching methods course. Interviews and observations were not conducted as the aim was to gain an understanding of their unprompted, self-reported cognition. Also, these preservice teachers were in the third year of their training program and had not yet begun practicum teaching experiences, so their statements could not be related to actions. Rather, this study captured their knowledge, beliefs, and values at the point of transition to actual teaching practice.

Further studies are needed to understand how teachers' cognition may guide or be shaped by their actions. For example, teacher candidates could write TPSs during and/or after their practicum teaching, revealing a trajectory of their early cognition development. Also, semi-structured interviews could be conducted to complement the TPSs. For insight into the impact of professional experience on cognition, the TPSs of in-service and preservice teachers might be compared, or from a longitudinal perspective, a series of TPSs by the same individuals at different points of their training and careers.

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