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## Exploring the Significance of Teachers’ Funds of Knowledge in Language Teacher Learning

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### Abstract

This article emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and considering teachers' funds of knowledge in the domain of language teacher learning. The study explores the concept of funds of knowledge in teacher learning by collecting data from a group of language teachers through written life stories, focus interviews, and individual interviews. The analysis reveals that family-based funds of knowledge influence how these teachers approach their teacher-learning process. Experiences with family, societal perceptions of teachers, and non-educational experiences have an impact not only on teachers' perceptions but also on their teaching practices. Teachers in this study emphasize the importance of taking courses to stay updated in their profession. They view these courses as instrumental in providing them with greater confidence in their work. Learning about methods, theories, and classroom management is considered a crucial asset for teachers, enhancing their teaching practice and instilling a sense of confidence. Understanding and valuing teachers' funds of knowledge can enhance the effectiveness of the teacher-learning process, providing a space for professional development where teachers can validate and utilize their knowledge. This understanding fosters a more inclusive and effective learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of teachers in their professional development process.

**Keywords:** *Funds of Knowledge, Teacher Learning, Teacher Knowledge, Language Teacher Education*

### Introduction

Teacher learning in second language education is crucial for continuous professional development, enhancing pedagogical skills, and fostering reflective practice. However, recognizing the complexity of teacher learning requires more than a mere acknowledgment of the value of diverse knowledge forms.

In language teacher learning, it is important to acknowledge and consider teachers' funds of knowledge, which stem from their own experiences and encompass the knowledge and skills gained from real-life situations. Understanding and valuing teachers' funds of knowledge can

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significantly enhance the effectiveness of the teacher-learning process, providing a space for professional development where teachers can validate and utilize their knowledge.

In this study, the concept of funds of knowledge (FoK) in teacher learning was explored by collecting data from a group of language teachers through written life stories, as well as focus and individual interviews. The analysis drew upon relevant literature on teacher learning and the funds of knowledge framework to investigate the reflection of these funds of knowledge in how the teachers learn to teach and how they ultimately impact their teaching practices.

## **Literature Review**

### *Funds of Knowledge*

The Funds of Knowledge (FoK) concept, originating from immigrant community challenges, highlights the rich knowledge individuals, especially students and their families, gain from daily experiences. It counters cultural deficit theories, emphasizing the valuable resources in all families, irrespective of background. FoK initiatives challenge deficit thinking, integrating learners' experiences into teaching practices, nurturing stronger student-teacher bonds, and bridging school-home gaps (Hogg, 2011; Moll et al., 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1983; González, 1995; McIntyre et al., 2005; McIntyre et al., 2001; Hogg, 2016; Llopart et al., 2018).

Applied across various domains, the FoK framework has garnered attention in STEM education. Civil (2016) and Denton and Borrego (2021) explored its efficacy in infusing students' cultural experiences into curriculum design, resulting in heightened engagement and academic achievement. Verdin et al. (2016) underscored its role in recognizing students' cultural heritage beyond traditional engineering skills. In language teaching, scholars like Moll (2015), Chen, Carger, and Smith (2017), Gupta (2020), and Banegas (2020) delved into its utility in grasping students' lived experiences and refining teaching approaches. Specifically, Banegas (2020) observed educators leveraging individual and community-based FoK to enhance English language teaching knowledge.

### *Recent Studies Addressing Funds of Knowledge*

In contemporary scholarship, the concept of "Funds of Knowledge" (FoK) denotes the vast array of linguistic, cultural, and experiential knowledge and skills retained by migrants across geographical boundaries (Kim & Kwon, 2024). Kim and Kwon's study explored Ms. Tao's experiences and pedagogical approaches as an Asian migrant teacher in New York City, revealing how her diverse background shaped her commitment to translanguaging pedagogy within a monolingual school setting. Their findings underscored the importance of recognizing and leveraging varied FoK to advocate for more inclusive and culturally relevant educational practices.

Meanwhile, Woods and Copur-Gencturk (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of United States teachers' learning approaches, contrasting student-centered with teacher-centered methods. Their research emphasized the empowerment of students through student-centered teaching, leading to enhanced engagement, exploration, and problem-solving skills in mathematics. Conversely, teacher-centered approaches were found to hinder critical thinking and creativity. Although this study provided limited insights into contextual factors, it highlighted the importance of comprehending how such elements influence teaching practices.

Similarly, Schwartz and Konchiki (2024) investigated how teachers' backgrounds shape their practices with diverse students in a religious secondary school in Israel. Their findings emphasized the significance of understanding and valuing students' FoK, which enhanced motivation, self-esteem, and academic success. The study underscored the role of teachers as agents of change, utilizing culturally responsive strategies to empower students and foster inclusive learning environments.

Furthermore, Domke et al. (2024) explored how dual language bilingual education (DLBE) preservice teachers develop students' sociocultural competence by incorporating their cultural backgrounds into teaching practices. The study highlighted the importance of recognizing and utilizing students' FoK, advocating for better support in teacher education to enhance sociocultural competence.

Finally, Le Pichon et al. (2024) delved into immigrant student integration in Canadian schools, stressing a reciprocal knowledge approach to enrich STEM curricula. Their findings underscored challenges for newcomer students and emphasized the importance of strong school-family ties and the development of digital resources to promote inclusion.

Expanding the geographic scope of FoK research, particularly in international settings like Mexico, can foster a holistic approach to teacher development among second language educators, benefiting both teacher educators and supported teachers.

### *Teacher Learning*

In the realm of second language teacher education (SLTE), the evolution of teacher learning, as delineated by Freeman (2002) and Freeman et al. (2019), spans three distinct periods. The initial period, predating 1970 and continuing through that decade, focused on mastering teaching methods and adopting behaviorist approaches to language instruction. The subsequent period, spanning from 1980 to 2000, witnessed a paradigm shift towards understanding teacher knowledge and learning, encompassing topics such as teachers' knowledge, decision-making, beliefs, and the apprenticeship of observation. Since 2000, SLTE research has advocated for a transition towards a sociocultural interpretive paradigm (Lantolf, 2000, 2006; Johnson, 2006, 2009), which acknowledges the influence of social and physical contexts on teacher learning. This interpretive paradigm considers various dimensions of teacher learning, including their mental lives, beliefs, previous learning experiences, emotions, reflection, identities, and communities of practice, among others (Burns et al., 2015; Borg, 2009; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009; Korthagen, 2010; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Farrell, 2014; Pennington & Richards, 2016; De Costa & Norton, 2016; Lengeling, 2010; Tsui, 2007; Yazan et al., 2020; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018; Tajeddin & Yazan, 2014; Barkhuizen, 2019; Hayes, 2019; Romero & Vasilopoulos, 2020). Johnson (2003) characterizes teacher learning as a socially negotiated process influenced by diverse factors, emphasizing the transformation of existing knowledge and practices. Borko (2004) underscores the intricacy of professional development, advocating for further research to discern optimal learning conditions, despite the potential efficacy of robust professional learning communities. Putnam and Borko (2000) highlight the substantial impact of social and situational contexts on teacher learning, exploring perspectives like social, situated, and distributed cognition as potent lenses for scrutinizing teacher education practices.

Recent studies have underscored the multifaceted and dynamic nature of teacher learning, closely tied to teacher identity. This connection is evident through various elements such as

context, personal histories, cognition, and social interactions (Yazan, 2023). Contextual factors like curriculum and student needs require teachers to adapt their practices and identities to meet external expectations and student requirements. Personal histories, including past experiences and cultural backgrounds, inform teachers' perceptions and approaches to teaching. Cognitive beliefs and knowledge about education guide instructional decisions and identity formation. Participation in professional communities allows teachers to share practices and reflect on their experiences, further refining their identities. Uştuk and Yazan's (2024) study examined how teacher candidates navigated identity tensions during a TESOL practicum course in Turkey. Using a dialogic approach, the researchers found that teacher candidates engaged in identity work by constructing self and community dialogues through identity-oriented learning activities. The study highlights the importance of identity-focused learning opportunities in teacher education programs to support teacher candidates in managing identity tensions and developing their professional identities. Yazan's (2015) research examined how the teaching practicum fosters learning in pre-service ESOL teachers. Using a sociocultural perspective, the study highlights the importance of social interactions and the practicum environment (students, curriculum, school) in shaping teacher development. Reflection emerges as a key tool, allowing candidates to refine their teaching approaches based on their experiences. Yao and Slater (2024) explored the identities of Chinese English teachers in a private English institution. These teachers adopted various roles, such as friends to students, classroom participants, facilitators, and language role models, to motivate their students. However, they encountered challenges related to teacher training, burnout, and balancing student autonomy with institutional demands. The study suggests revising teacher training programs, addressing teacher burnout, and re-evaluating English teaching goals in China.

Overall, these studies emphasize the importance of teacher learning and identity development in teacher education programs. They highlight the need for identity-focused learning opportunities, effective teacher training, and support for teachers to manage identity tensions and develop their professional identities.

Several perspectives and frameworks have emerged to elucidate the intricacies of teacher learning. Farrell (2019) delineates four conceptualizations: skill learning, cognitive process, personal construction, and reflective practice, each emphasizing different facets of teaching competencies, beliefs, active knowledge construction, and systematic reflection, respectively. Korthagen (2017) underscores the importance of integrating cognitive, affective, and motivational dimensions in Professional Development 3.0, a model that empowers teachers to merge theory with practice and take ownership of their learning journey. This approach not only facilitates reflective practice but also underscores the significance of personal qualities in nurturing professional growth. In a Vygotskian sociocultural framework, Golombek and Johnson (2019) advocate for dialogic interactions in teacher training to internalize effective instructional practices. Johnson and Golombek (2020) further introduce responsive mediation as a psychological tool for teacher educators, proposing eight key principles to guide structured pedagogies for language teacher development. These principles encompass tailoring professional development, understanding individual teachers, communicating teaching goals, linking academic concepts to practical teaching, creating mediating spaces for growth, investing time in teachers, encouraging self-inquiry, and emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between teacher and student learning in language teaching.

**Method**

This qualitative case study examined the learning processes of a group of language teachers at a technological university in Mexico. The research employed various methodological approaches, following Creswell's (2017) guidelines for studying social or human processes. The interpretive paradigm was utilized to gain a nuanced understanding of the data, emphasizing the influence of social and linguistic practices on human actors and their interpretation of reality (Duff, 2008; Grix, 2004). The interpretive lens allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the complex social and cultural factors involved in the study.

Data collection involved written life stories, focus groups, and individual interviews. The use of life stories allowed participants to share their experiences and reveal deeper meanings (Mattingly, 1991). Focus groups provided unique insights not always apparent in individual interviews (Morgan, 1998). Interviews allowed access to participants' perceptions and constructions of reality (Punch, 2009).

The study involved five participants (Fabiola, Tania, Javier, Gustavo, and Mariana), all with different educational backgrounds and teaching experiences. Their names were changed to protect their identities. They had varying degrees in language teaching or engineering and have been teaching English for 7 to 15 years.

I employed Hedge's (2012) classification of teachers' funds of knowledge to examine its influence on teachers' learning processes. The classification of teachers' funds of knowledge can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Taxonomy of Funds of Knowledge (Hedges, 2012)*

Context	Funds of knowledge
Family-based funds of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal and family experiences (support, emotions, experiences as learners)</li> <li>• Relationships with own children</li> </ul>
Centre-based funds of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships with children i.e. learners.</li> <li>• Teachers' beliefs and values</li> <li>• Teacher education program influences</li> <li>• Professional learning programs (e.g., workshops and conferences).</li> </ul>
Community-based funds of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other study (e.g., courses on general education)</li> <li>• Professional and academic self-directed learning</li> </ul>

The classification distinguishes between family-based funds of knowledge, which are developed through personal and family experiences, and center-based funds of knowledge, which are influenced by educational settings and interactions with other educators. Additionally, community-based funds of knowledge include professional sources that shape teachers' professional knowledge and practice. Despite considering various types of knowledge from different models (Freeman, 2020), the taxonomy of teachers' funds of knowledge aims to emphasize the contexts and situations that influence how teachers acquire their knowledge and expertise.

## Results

The process of learning to teach is complex and influenced by various factors that go beyond formal education. Data analysis has revealed a blend of formal and informal knowledge, unveiling the complexities of teacher learning. This knowledge not only molds teachers' perceptions of teaching but also influences their actual teaching practices.

### *Family-based Funds of Knowledge (Personal and Family Experiences)*

Javier, a participant with a wealth of teaching experience, mentioned that:

*“...another factor that influences the construction of my identity is **my family**. **If they see me as a teacher, then I must act as such**. Also, when I hear them say “**they say you’re very...**”, it tells me that **this is the identity I should follow**, but what others say somehow shapes my identity as a teacher.” (JAV P1FGI)*

This excerpt describes how Javier’s identity and teaching practice as a teacher is shaped by significant people in his life, including his family and society. He values their opinions and strives to maintain a positive reputation by being committed and well-prepared. His desire to make his family proud and avoid losing face aligns with societal expectations of teachers. This type of experience can make teachers engage more deeply in their professional development and seek to excel in their teaching practices.

Javier also reported that

*“... **I worked as a sales agent’s assistant** and although I had just finished junior high school when they told me they would promote me to a salesperson, **I adopted that identity** and did, learned what a salesperson was supposed to do.” (JAV P1FGI)*

Reflecting on his transition from sales to teaching, Javier adopted a similar mindset, embodying the qualities he associated with being a good teacher. This past experience significantly influenced how he approached and embraced his teaching career.

These personal encounters played a pivotal role in Javier's journey of teacher learning. Beyond merely assuming a predefined role or identity as a teacher, Javier drew upon his funds of knowledge to imbue meaning into his role as an educator. While family-based funds of knowledge can be invaluable assets for teachers, they may also pose challenges and constraints in certain scenarios. Javier's inclination to maintain a positive image based on societal expectations could limit his willingness to explore innovative teaching approaches deemed unconventional. This pressure to conform might impede his adaptability to evolving educational demands.

Diana also shared her perspective:

*“**The demands of society are constantly changing**, and as a teacher, one must be up-to-date. There is a relationship between what **we, as teachers, must do** and the commitment that we must have.” (DIA’14’ GI)*

Diana emphasizes that teachers do not operate in isolation; rather, they are deeply embedded in a broader social framework that sets specific expectations for them. This insight suggests that her journey of teacher learning was significantly shaped by societal pressures. When asked about these societal expectations, Diana mentioned the negative portrayals of teachers in the media, stressing her desire to distance herself from being perceived as an indifferent educator. This realization motivated her to pursue further academic training and enhance her professional competencies. However, it is crucial to approach these self-imposed expectations with caution, as they may stem from her funds of knowledge and could lead to unrealistic standards. Diana's interpretation of societal expectations influenced by media depictions might trigger feelings of inadequacy or constant performance pressure. This could result in unnecessary stress, potentially impacting her overall well-being and teaching effectiveness. Here, we observe that funds of knowledge can also have adverse effects on teachers.

Gustavo also expressed:

*“There are times when I have many things to do, and I think about doing nothing, but then I think about my students and believe that they deserve respect. Not like many of my teachers who didn't make us work. If you don't believe in what you do, it doesn't work.” (GUSP4FCI)*

These kinds of experiences seem to have instilled a strong work ethic in Gustavo. Negative encounters with teachers who failed to engage students in active learning appear to have emphasized the value of diligence and commitment in the educational setting. This underscores the potential positive impact of funds of knowledge: inspiring educators to exert additional effort for their students. However, it is essential to consider whether Gustavo's emphasis on "making students work" may stem from a narrow view of effective teaching. This perspective could underestimate the significance of fostering student involvement, creativity, and intrinsic motivation. This raises a potential concern: relying solely on past learning experiences may restrict a teacher's exploration of diverse pedagogical methods.

#### *Centre-based Funds of Knowledge (Teachers' Beliefs and Values)*

The beliefs individuals hold about a particular issue can profoundly influence their perception, and this principle applies to teaching as well. Teachers' beliefs have the power to shape, inform, strengthen, or even hinder their learning processes. As Borg (2007) explains, these beliefs can take various forms, including attitudes, values, judgments, opinions, perceptions, and conceptual systems. The data gathered in this study exemplify how the funds of knowledge held by the teachers influence their learning process as educators.

Gustavo reported that:

*“... living in the ideal context, the teachers never took advantage of that to make me produce language, which is why I decided not to finish the course. **Therefore, it is very important for me to develop all the skills in students, emphasizing language production.**” (GUS'14'GI)*

Reflecting on a past learning experience where he felt the teacher missed opportunities to help him enhance his proficiency in the target language, Gustavo emphasized the need for a stronger focus on oral production in second language acquisition. These core experiences influenced by his interactions with his former professor have shaped his approach to language teaching. This experience has made Gustavo aware of the importance of adapting teaching to meet students' needs, particularly in providing ample opportunities for the development of oral language skills. However, this awareness could potentially lead Gustavo to overly emphasize speaking skills, potentially creating an imbalanced approach that overlooks other essential language competencies like grammar, reading, and writing. While speaking is crucial, Gustavo's emphasis on "making me produce language" suggests a limited understanding of how language skills evolve. Language acquisition is a multifaceted process that benefits from a comprehensive approach encompassing grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and speaking practice. Relying solely on his personal learning experiences may limit Gustavo's grasp of effective language teaching methodologies, highlighting a potential drawback of funds of knowledge.

Mariana also stated:

*"... Obviously, all the skills are integrated... because you can't just teach, for example, listening without teaching writing..." (MAR'GI9)*

When asked to expand on this statement, she added

*"When I started studying English, a very grammatical and **non-communicative form of English was taught.**" (MAR' 14'GI)*

And another moment she mentioned:

*"... (the English speakers) They made **me realize the need for something more communicative and that has helped me a lot, it has changed my beliefs a lot, so to speak.**" (MAR' 14' GI)*

Mariana's personal experience as a language learner has led her to question the effectiveness of a grammar-centric classroom approach. Interacting with English speakers from diverse backgrounds significantly boosted her language skills and likely influenced her current pedagogical beliefs. Her current beliefs on effective English learning methods starkly contrast with her earlier experiences. She recalls grammar-heavy classes with minimal focus on communication. Engaging with native speakers marked a turning point, accelerating her learning process. This shift prompted Mariana to reassess her views on language acquisition. Her dissatisfaction with grammar-focused instruction underscores her dedication to nurturing communicative competence in students, reflecting the motivating influence of personal learning experiences. However, it is also crucial to note that Mariana's negative encounter with grammar-centric teaching may lead her to potentially undervalue grammar or overlook student needs assessments. While emphasizing communication is vital, neglecting grammar entirely could hinder students' ability to grasp language mechanics and handle complex structures



accurately. Balancing communicative skills with a solid grammatical foundation is essential for effective language use (highlighting a potential limitation of relying solely on personal experiences).

Tania also mentioned:

*“When I studied, as a student, you had to do what the teacher said and if not, that’s how it went for you. It didn’t matter if you wanted to learn or not.” (TAN’14’ II)*

When asked to expand on the previous statement, she added the following:

*“We work day by day with our students, **human beings filled with such diverse emotions – joys, sorrows, frustrations, fears, etc.** and this influence how they will perceive learning. The relationship between teacher and student should be cordial and respectful. As teachers, **we must be empathetic with them** and have a special “sense” to motivate our students and encourage them to give their best effort.” (TAN’14’II)*

Tania's negative encounter with a teacher who overlooked students' emotions underscores her dedication to cultivating a positive learning atmosphere. This reflects the potential benefit of funds of knowledge: encouraging educators to address deficiencies in their own learning experiences and prioritize student well-being. Tania's case illustrates how past experiences not only shape teachers' actions but also guide their rejections. Her adverse interaction with an emotionally detached teacher led her to embrace a more empathetic and student-focused teaching approach. While few would argue against the importance of considering students' well-being, it is also crucial to emphasize the significance of not neglecting learning and classroom management, among other aspects. A structured and inclusive learning environment can instill a sense of security and enhance student engagement. Disregarding this aspect may impede students' ability to concentrate and make academic progress (highlighting a potential limitation of relying solely on personal experiences).

Recognizing the significance of teachers' funds of knowledge is crucial, shaped by their educational backgrounds and interactions with former teachers. These experiences profoundly influence their core beliefs as educators, established long before formal teaching education begins. These entrenched convictions significantly impact their approach to the teacher-learning process. Strong pre-existing beliefs can lead to resistance towards new methods, hindering adaptation to proven effective practices. Teachers' ideal teaching styles may not universally benefit students with diverse learning preferences or cultural backgrounds. Teacher education programs must acknowledge the impact of funds of knowledge and provide opportunities for reflection, transformation, and growth of these beliefs. This process enables educators to enhance their teaching methods, ensuring a more effective and inclusive learning environment. By recognizing both the strengths and limitations of center-based funds of knowledge, educators can collaborate to develop teaching practices that cater to all students' needs effectively.

*Community-based Funds for Knowledge (Professional Learning)*

Three of the teachers hold a bachelor's degree in language teaching and the Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English (COTE). Another teacher holds a degree in engineering and also has the COTE certification. One more teacher holds a degree in sales and marketing and the COTE certification as well. In general, they have between 7 and 15 years of teaching experience. When asked about their academic background, most of the teachers mentioned that when they decided to enter the teaching profession, the first thing they thought about was pursuing formal studies. They believed that this would provide them with the necessary knowledge and the credentials required to navigate the field of second language teaching.

The analysis of the data shows that teachers consider formal education as an important tool that supports their teacher-learning process. Several teachers expressed their views on this matter.

Mariana stated

*“... I took the **Diploma in English Teaching** from the University of... That Diploma was a very important foundation for me as it motivated me to take the COTE.” (MAR '14 GI)*

Tania also mentioned

*“I had knowledge of English and French, and that's how I started teaching. Then, I realized that knowing a language is not enough to teach it; many other things are required. So, I joined the University of ... **to pursue the In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT)**.” (TAN'14 II)*

The accounts above underscore teachers' appreciation for the knowledge gained from teacher education programs. Mariana found her participation beneficial, enhancing her content and pedagogical knowledge and motivating her to seek further professional growth. Tania's experience highlights the limitations of relying solely on personal language proficiency. Enrolling in the ICELT program (community-based funds of knowledge) addressed this gap by providing her with essential pedagogical skills for effective teaching. Teacher education programs play a vital role in equipping educators with foundational knowledge, instilling confidence, and fostering a drive for continuous learning. These teachers' journeys exemplify funds of knowledge as an ongoing process where they continually acquire new insights through engagement in professional learning communities.

Fabiola mentioned:

*“...It is **important to stay updated** because every day there are new theories and methodologies, but it's not just about updating ourselves, it's also about putting them into practice. **I could attend 10 or 20 conferences** and study many things, but if I don't believe in what I do or if **I don't put it into practice, it doesn't make much sense.**” (FAB'14 GI)*

Javier explained:

*“... it is important to stay updated... students update themselves with new technologies, and it is also important to be open-minded and **accept those updates.**”* (JAV'14 GI)

Gustavo also mentioned:

*“Updating is another very important aspect because **it is necessary to be informed about new methodologies and strategies in teaching.**”* (GUS'14 GI)

Fabiola emphasized the importance of not just acquiring knowledge but also critically evaluating and implementing it in practice. Javier stressed the need to adapt to students' utilization of new technologies, showing an understanding of the evolving educational landscape. Gustavo underscored the necessity of staying updated to validate himself as an educator. These teachers advocate for continuous professional development through courses to remain current in their field. They perceive these courses as essential for boosting their confidence in their work. This collective perspective indicates a shared belief in the pivotal role of learning about methodologies and theories as a fundamental asset for educators. Such knowledge not only enhances their preparedness and confidence but also reinforces their sense of professional competence.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study illuminate how participants' diverse funds of knowledge impact their teaching identities and practices. Family-based funds shape their perceptions of teaching, with personal experiences driving their commitment to professional growth. Centre-based funds influence their pedagogical beliefs, prompting a reevaluation of traditional teaching methods. Community-based funds emphasize the importance of continuous professional development. Overall, these findings underscore the intricate relationship between participants' funds of knowledge and their teaching approaches. These results have significant implications for both language teacher education programs and the development of teacher agency.

### *Implications for Language Teacher Education*

The influence of family-based funds of knowledge on language teachers' practices and identities is significant, shaping both their professional growth and imposing constraints. While these funds of knowledge can motivate teachers, they may also limit their willingness to explore innovative teaching methods. For instance, Javier's desire to uphold familial expectations constrains his pedagogical creativity. This underscores the need for language teacher education programs to promote deep, critical reflection on teachers' personal histories. Without such examination, entrenched norms may persist, hindering innovation and the adoption of effective teaching practices (Guitart, 2016, 2023; Waddington et al., 2020). Incorporating funds of knowledge into language teacher education can bridge the gap between in-school and out-of-school experiences, enhancing teacher motivation and engagement (Llopart & Guitart, 2017). By integrating these experiences, teacher education programs can develop a more comprehensive understanding of students' lives, leading to more effective

teaching practices. However, the implications of family-based funds of knowledge on language teacher education are complex. While they motivate teachers, they also pose constraints that must be addressed to foster innovation and contemporary practices in language teaching. Thus, language teacher education programs must encourage critical reflection on personal histories and integrate funds of knowledge into curricular design and classroom activities.

Center-based funds of knowledge, which encompass teachers' beliefs and values, play a significant role in shaping their identities and teaching practices. Gustavo's experience exemplifies this influence, as he prioritized certain teaching practices, he deemed important based on perceived shortcomings in his own education. Similarly, Mariana's past classes lacking in oral activities led her to strongly advocate for ample opportunities for student language use. These examples illustrate how past learning environments profoundly shape teachers' beliefs and practices. However, beliefs are often deeply ingrained and resistant to change, as highlighted by Borg (2011), posing a significant challenge for teacher education programs. Unchallenged beliefs risk perpetuating entrenched norms, hindering innovation, and impeding the adoption of effective teaching practices. Gustavo's and Mariana's experiences underscore how unquestioned beliefs can narrow the focus of teaching methods, potentially neglecting other critical aspects of language teaching. Engaging teachers in reflective practice (Farrell, 2022) and critical pedagogy (McLaren, 2020) is crucial for unpacking the influence of their center-based funds of knowledge on their teaching identities and practices. Reflective practice prompts educators to critically examine their experiences, revealing the underlying beliefs and values that inform their teaching approaches. Simultaneously, critical pedagogy encourages teachers to interrogate broader educational contexts and power dynamics shaping their instructional decisions. Through this process, teachers gain deeper insights into how their center-based funds of knowledge contribute to their teaching identities. By reflecting on past experiences and beliefs, educators can identify potential biases or limitations in their pedagogical approaches and challenge traditional norms, exploring innovative, inclusive teaching methods. Integrating reflective practice and critical pedagogy into teacher learning initiatives is paramount for empowering educators to develop a nuanced understanding of their identities and teaching practices. This transformative approach fosters continuous professional growth, equipping teachers with the tools to create dynamic, culturally responsive learning environments. Borg (2011) and Burns et al. (2015) emphasize the need for teacher education programs to challenge existing beliefs and promote evidence-based practices. The experiences of Gustavo and Mariana highlight the critical need for teacher education programs to comprehensively address the influences of center-based funds of knowledge. By promoting critical reflection, challenging entrenched beliefs, and encouraging evidence-based practices, these programs can cultivate more innovative, effective, and inclusive approaches to language teaching, developing reflective, adaptive, and responsive teachers.

The importance of professional growth in language teacher education is underscored by participants' reliance on community-based funds of knowledge, particularly through formal education and continuous professional development. However, this reliance also reveals a critical tension within the field. While formal education and certifications, exemplified by Mariana and Tania's experiences, are undoubtedly essential, they can inadvertently foster a rigid adherence to prescribed methodologies. This adherence may come at the expense of embracing innovative teaching practices that are essential for addressing contemporary

challenges in language education. Moreover, there is a risk that such rigid adherence to standardized methodologies can hinder the advancement of more inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogical approaches. The uncritical acceptance of prescribed methodologies may impede efforts to decolonize foreign language education (Macedo, 2019), implement culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2021), and foster culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018). By prioritizing standardized approaches over culturally responsive practices, teacher education programs inadvertently perpetuate educational inequities and fail to meet the diverse needs of learners from various cultural backgrounds. The reliance on community-based funds of knowledge underscores the importance of professional growth in language teacher education. However, this reliance also exposes the need for a critical examination of existing practices within teacher education programs. By fostering a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach to professional development, these programs can better prepare educators to meet the evolving needs of language learners and promote equitable educational outcomes.

### *Implications for Teacher Agency*

Teacher agency is a multifaceted concept influenced by individual traits and environmental factors, as scholars agree (Miller et al., 2018). In language teacher education, agency is often defined as the intentional authority to make decisions within one's local context (Kayi-Aydar, 2019, p. 15).

Teachers' funds of knowledge play a critical role in shaping their agency, influencing both positively and negatively how they navigate their professional roles. These funds of knowledge, encompassing family, centre and community-based experiences, can empower teachers by providing a rich foundation of skills and perspectives. For example, Javier's background in sales enabled him to adopt a proactive mindset in teaching, showing how diverse life experiences can empower teachers to take initiative and make informed choices in their classrooms. Similarly, Diana's awareness of societal expectations and negative media portrayals motivated her to pursue further academic training and improve her teaching practices, demonstrating how external validation and the desire to maintain a positive reputation can drive professional growth. Additionally, funds of knowledge that include cultural and community insights help teachers make their lessons more relevant and relatable to students, enhancing engagement and learning outcomes, thereby reinforcing teachers' sense of efficacy and agency. However, these same funds of knowledge can also hinder teacher agency. Teachers' reliance on familiar methods and norms from their past experiences can sometimes inhibit innovation. Javier's inclination to adhere to societal expectations of a teacher's role might limit his willingness to experiment with unconventional teaching methods, potentially stifling creativity and adaptability. Furthermore, the pressure to conform to societal or familial expectations can create a significant emotional and cognitive load, leading to stress and performance anxiety. Diana's experience illustrates how the weight of societal expectations can negatively impact well-being and effectiveness, as teachers may prioritize meeting external demands over exploring innovative teaching strategies.

To address these challenges and optimize the positive impacts of funds of knowledge on teacher agency, teacher education programs must encourage critical reflection. Teachers should be guided to reflect on their personal and professional experiences, identifying both the strengths and limitations of these influences on their teaching practices. Programs should also

promote adaptive learning, emphasizing the importance of integrating new methodologies and technologies while valuing existing knowledge bases. Creating collaborative learning environments where teachers can share their diverse funds of knowledge can lead to a richer professional community, fostering a culture of continuous learning and mutual support.


Moreover, supporting teachers' emotional and professional well-being is essential. Providing systems to manage stress and balance societal expectations with professional growth can help maintain teachers' well-being and enhance their ability to exercise agency effectively. By recognizing the dual role of funds of knowledge in both fostering and hindering teacher agency, educators and policymakers can better design teacher education programs that support dynamic, reflective, and adaptive teaching practices. This comprehensive approach ensures that teachers are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of their profession, ultimately benefiting their students and the broader educational community.

Finally, despite the growing interest in this area, current research on teacher agency predominantly originates from Western developed countries, as evidenced by a recent study by Cong-Lem (2021). This geographical concentration highlights a glaring disparity, emphasizing the urgent need for a more global and inclusive approach to studying teacher agency. Exploring agency from diverse cultural, socio-economic, and educational contexts in regions such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon. Therefore, continued research from diverse perspectives is crucial for advancing our knowledge and informing effective practices in language teacher education.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of teachers' funds of knowledge in shaping teacher learning. Despite their significance, these valuable resources are often overlooked in the process of teacher development. Understanding the intricate relationship between teachers' funds of knowledge and their learning is a complex challenge that scholars and educators continue to grapple with. A deeper understanding of these factors is essential, as it benefits both teachers and teacher educators by enhancing their ability to navigate the intricacies of English language teaching and second language teacher education. Continued research in this area is vital for fostering more effective and inclusive educational practices.

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