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Context-related Beliefs about L2 Language Learning and Teaching of the Millennial Pre-service EFL Teachers as a Prognosis for Future Classroom Actions

Abstract

The qualitative study presented in this paper aimed to collect beliefs about learning and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) from individual representatives of the generation frequently referred to as the millennials. The participants were 47 pre-service EFL trainee teachers from four socio-cultural contexts: Finnish, Israeli, Polish, and Spanish. Their voices have been considered because beliefs are dynamically related to actions and soon the millennial EFL teachers may implement them in the course of their teaching. The contextual approach, followed in this research, provided opportunities for discussing similarities and differences in the beliefs of Finnish, Israeli, Polish, and Spanish pre-service teachers. The identified similarities lead to outlining a tentative picture of a universal, future, post-pandemic EFL classroom.

Keywords: pre-service language teachers, beliefs, language teaching, language learning

Research into the beliefs about second or foreign (L2) language learning and teaching processes can be traced back to the 1980s when Horwitz (1987) and Wenden (1986) sparked scholarly interest in what and how these beliefs relate to language learning success or failure. Since then this research has evolved in its methodology and understanding of the key concept. The more traditional approach—the normative approach (Barcelos, 2003)—perceives beliefs as stable pre-conceptions rooted in cognition, which are often researched quantitatively. Its followers aim to establish typologies of beliefs and their relationships or cause-and-effect outcomes with other variables, such as learning strategies (e.g. Yang, 1999; Zhong, 2015). More recent approaches position learners' beliefs as far more multidimensional and multilayered than they have

previously been understood (Kalaja et al., 2016). The metacognitive approach, for instance, defines beliefs as some type of metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1998) that is subjective, fallible, relatively stable but subjected to change over time. In line with this approach, “learners do think about their language learning process and are able to articulate some of their beliefs” (Barcelos, 2003, p. 17). The data is often collected qualitatively through interviews and self-reports. However, only the contextual approach emphasizes the role of learners’ and teachers’ immediate settings in structuring their beliefs. Cultural and contextual factors, for instance education systems in different countries, or distant learning, or teaching in pandemic conditions, can shape and determine a wide range of students’ beliefs about language learning (Lee, 2009) and teachers’ beliefs about teaching (Gabryś-Barker, 2012). Moreover, this contextual approach provides a wide range of interpretative opportunities grounded in specific contexts that additionally shape students’ beliefs about language learning and teaching.

The qualitative study presented in this paper follows this contextual approach with the aim to collect beliefs about learning and teaching English from pre-service EFL trainee teachers, representing the young generation frequently referred to as millennials, coming from four socio-cultural contexts: Finnish, Israeli, Polish, and Spanish. Their voices need to be considered because, as Borg (2006) and Kalaja and Barcelos (2003) state, beliefs are dynamically related to actions. Therefore, there is a high possibility that soon the millennial EFL teachers will implement their beliefs in the course of their teaching.

Context-related Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching

Despite the difficulty in establishing a precise and uniform definition, Skott (2014) proposes four core characteristics of beliefs: they refer to an individual’s mental concepts which are subjectively perceived as true; they entail both cognitive and affective aspects that are value-related; they are relatively stable but may change, for instance, as a result of an individual’s personally significant engagement in social practices, such as “their own schooling, their teacher education programs and their collaboration with colleagues” (p. 19); and they are reflected in actions. Similarly, Kalaja et al. (2016) emphasize the dynamic and emergent nature of beliefs, which, as they underline, are socially constructed and contextually situated. Thus, in this study the beliefs of L2 teacher trainees, who are L2 learners at the same time, are operationalized as a form of cognitive but value-related reflection on various aspects of L2 teaching and

learning that “relates these to experiences of his or her own or those of others, and assigns these aspects his or her own personal meanings” (Kalaja et al., 2016, p. 10). These beliefs are expected to influence future classroom actions (Al Harthy et al., 2013; Borg, 2006; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003). In other words, the experiences of schooling and teacher training, shaped by socio-cultural contexts and practices in which individuals have been embedded, are reflected in their beliefs, and these in turn determine how future teachers may approach their own teaching as soon as they start their classroom careers. These assumptions are also in line with Kalaja et al.’s (2016) comment that “[i]t is important to study the beliefs held by future teachers as these might turn into mediational means and thus guide their teaching practices in foreign language classrooms once they enter the profession” (p. 129).

The contextual approach has been followed in a number of studies on pre-service and in-service teachers’ beliefs about L2 learning and teaching (for an extended overview see Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Pusparini et al., 2021). Borg (2003) investigated factors and processes underpinning language teachers’ decision-making and pedagogical behaviors in teaching. In his research, context played a role in determining the extent to which teachers teach according to their beliefs. He proposed a framework of contextual factors that co-construct teacher cognitions and beliefs. These included individuals’ schooling, which is associated with subjective classroom experiences; more general contextual factors, for instance, functioning within a specific national education system; professional coursework, depending on the teacher training course content and trainers; and classroom practice, which provides opportunities to confront the existent beliefs with teaching experience. Feryok (2010) studied the dynamic nature of language teacher cognition, including beliefs, and found that context had a mediating impact on language teachers’ cognitions and beliefs. Chong et al. (2011), for instance, found that teacher trainees in Singapore form positive beliefs about a language teaching career because of the high status that the teaching profession holds in this country. In Brazil, however, teacher trainees’ beliefs were revealed to be negative because of the undervalued status of a language teacher (Barcelos, 2016). Overall, the promising outcomes of studies on the role of context in generating beliefs about language learning and teaching justifies the line of enquiry proposed in this paper, which is additionally supported by Li’s (2009) statement that “without understanding what the belief system of a learner [and a trainee teacher] is, how it emerges, and how it functions in learning, our knowledge of human learning will be deficient” (p. 38). The contextual approach to researching beliefs provides additional opportunities to compare and contrast the data generated from teacher trainees from various socio-cultural backgrounds, in order to establish which of their beliefs are similar and different.

Teacher education is dependent on education systems and policies offered in various contexts. More specifically, the approaches to teacher training in Finland, Israel, Poland, and Spain vary, which, in turn, might affect teacher trainees' beliefs. Although the detailed analysis of the systems is beyond the scope of this paper, some selected examples of variability in teacher education systems in the four countries are outlined. Finland, for instance, is famous for its excellency in teacher education and the high status of a teacher (Dolton et al., 2018). Having fulfilled competitive entry standards, trainee teachers complete a four-year M.A. program with an additional two-year supervised school practice (Malinen et al., 2012). Finnish trainee teachers' core competences are described as an amalgam of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and personal characteristics that allow teachers to act professionally and appropriately to the class situation (Koster & Dengerink, 2008). The English teacher training objectives in Israel, included in The Professional Framework for English Teachers 2020 (State of Israel Ministry of Education, 2019), comprise specifications of skills and knowledge needed for an English teacher to function competently and professionally. The teacher training courses provided at higher education institutions relate to seven domains detailed in the document: teacher's language and disciplinary knowledge, learning theories and the language learner, language teaching pedagogy, assessment, the language learning context, global competences and professionalism. After a four-year study program EFL trainee teachers are awarded a bachelor of education degree (B.Ed.) and a teaching licence (Szyszka et al., 2018). In Poland, the qualifications needed to become an L2 teacher are specified in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education (2019). More specific objectives are included in institutional syllabuses detailing knowledge, skills, and social competences enabling students to complete the teacher training courses. Teacher education combined with an M.A. degree provides qualifications necessary for teaching at any education level in Poland. In Spain, the national education legislation provides teacher training requirements for various educational stages. The general and subject-specific competences that trainee teachers develop are included in undergraduate programs for primary school teachers and postgraduate programs for secondary school teachers (Fernández & Hughes, 2013).

The Study

The present study aims to investigate the narratives of pre-service EFL teacher trainees coming from four different socio-cultural and education contexts: Finland, Israel, Poland, and Spain in order to identify their beliefs about

L2 language learning, L2 teaching and how they view the future EFL classroom. For this purpose the following research questions have been proposed:

- RQ1. What are the beliefs about L2 learning of the pre-service EFL teachers from Finland, Israel, Poland, and Spain?
- RQ2. What are the beliefs about L2 teaching of the pre-service EFL teachers from Finland, Israel, Poland, and Spain?
- RQ3. What are the beliefs about EFL teaching in the future after the COVID-19 pandemic situation?

Participants

The participants of the study were 47 EFL pre-service teachers who simultaneously studied English at a tertiary level. Their age ranged from 20 to 24, with an average of 22.61. They might be referred to as digital natives (Prensky, 2001) or new-millennium learners (Howe & Strauss, 2000), who will soon enter the profession of teaching English as a foreign language. The majority of them ($N = 33$) came from Poland, five of them were Finnish, the same number declared they had Israeli citizenship and four individuals were Spanish. The average length of L2 learning for the sample was 15 years. Most of the participants ($N = 44$) declared they had some sort of L2 teaching experience. For instance, they had completed their teacher training internship at various educational levels: kindergarten, primary and secondary; some of them used to teach in private schools; others gained experience in teaching online. At the time of data collection, they were all enrolled in teacher training programs at their home institutions in Finland, Israel, Poland, and Spain.

Instruments

The instrument applied to collect the data was an open-ended questionnaire on the Beliefs of Pre-service Teachers about Foreign Language Learning and Teaching, designed for the purposes of this study. This type of tool has been frequently used for investigating beliefs (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2013; Navarro & Thornton, 2011; Pan & Block, 2011; Vieira-Abrahão, 2006). Open-ended questionnaires aim for rich and detailed answers that frequently change into longer narratives, which provide more in-depth access into teachers' beliefs and a rich account of the complex contextual factors (Kubanyiova, 2012). The questionnaire included a biographical part and seven sets of open-ended questions in English related to the participants' beliefs about L2 learning and teaching, for example, *What are your beliefs about foreign language learning? What is important to learn to be a proficient L2 user? What do you believe is the best*

method for teaching English? What are your beliefs about being a professional language teacher? What does it mean to you? In November 2020, a set of questions was added: What are your beliefs about teaching English after the COVID-19 pandemic situation? How do you think this pandemic experience will change English language teaching in schools?

Procedure and Analysis

The data collection instrument was prepared in an online form with the help of Google Drive. Subsequently, a link to the questionnaire was generated and it was published in February 2020. In order to reach the targeted groups, the researcher used personal contacts. The online survey was open till December 2020. To investigate beliefs from the perspective of the pre-service teacher, in a changing teaching situation triggered by the global pandemic, the researcher decided to include in the questionnaire the additional open-ended question regarding beliefs about L2 teaching after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data were analysed following the procedures of qualitative research. More specifically, content analysis followed the steps suggested in Creswell (2013). This involved: reading the data from the instrument multiple times and identifying themes; coding the themes into significant units and grouping these units into larger categories; and revising the categories repeatedly to check for consistency, cohesion, significance, and repetition. The responses of individual participants were coded with a letter representing the country of origin and the number, for example, F2 is the response of the participant number two from Finland, I1 is the response of the first participant from Israel, etc.

Results

The responses to the first research question regarding the beliefs about L2 learning were analyzed and categorized into eight groups. Examples are provided in Table 1. The belief that exposure to the target language in the process of learning is valuable was repeated by 47% participants (22 out of 47) coming from all four contexts. More than a half of the trainee teachers (55%) reported that, apart from linguistic exposure, L2 use was essential in L2 learning by individuals. These beliefs were sometimes supported with examples from the participants' experiences of learning, for example,

I2: *First of all you must be exposed to English. I've learnt English through songs and movies;*

P10: *[A] big leap happened when I started watching TV shows, playing video games, and looking for information about my interests in English (in other words, using English in context, in situations I was interested in and mattered to me);*

I1: *It's important to give us [L2 learners] the chance to speak the language in order to master it. We can't just read and listen. We need to talk. That's what helped me in the first place.*

S2: *I started learning English at primary school in a traditional way by learning different language skills separately. However, I was taught the most mechanical skills and content (reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar). Thus, speaking and listening were less taught to me. Personally, I strongly believe that communicative skills are the basis to learn a language.*

Next, the participants (17%) affirmed that the process of L2 learning may be strongly supported by a teacher. For instance, two Finnish individuals believed that a teacher as a provider of formal education is important in L2 learning. Spanish participants emphasized the affective (e.g., S3 in Table 1) and motivational role of an L2 teacher, as, for example, expressed by S4: *[A teacher] should motivate students because the more motivated they are the more knowledge they will acquire.* The belief of one Polish pre-service teacher centered around the role of positive feedback given by a teacher in the process of language learning (P34 in Table 1). However, none of the Israeli respondents mentioned the positive role of an L2 teacher.

The next two categories of beliefs concerned affective and motivational aspects of L2 learning, reported by seven and six participants respectively. There were voices underlining the need for a positive atmosphere (e.g., F4), enjoyment (e.g., I5) and building linguistic self-confidence (e.g., P5). Motivational factors were present in the beliefs of Finnish (e.g., F5), Polish (e.g., P34), and Spanish (e.g., S4) participants; whereas Israeli pre-service teachers did not refer to this openly.

Table 1

Examples of beliefs about L2 learning given by pre-service EFL teachers from Finland, Israel, Poland, and Spain

Category	Examples			
	Finland	Israel	Poland	Spain
L2 exposure	<i>F2: One needs real-life exposure combined with formal teaching.</i>	<i>I2: First of all, you must be exposed to English.</i>	<i>P16: The contact with language is crucial.</i>	<i>S3: Watching TV series is an outstanding method to improve [an L2].</i>
L2 use	<i>F4: In order to be a proficient L2 user, one has to actually start using the language, both in writing and speaking.</i>	<i>I3: I believe practice makes perfect. So in order to be proficient in a language you need to practice it more often.</i>	<i>P10: Practice and context matter more than formal, explicit instruction.</i>	<i>S2: Communicative skills are the basis to learn a language.</i>
Teacher's role	<i>F2: One needs real-life exposure combined with formal teaching.</i>	–	<i>P34: It is essential to have a positive feedback from the teacher.</i>	<i>S3: What really matters is the passion of the teacher.</i>
Affective needs	<i>F4: There needs to be this safe environment where the learners can start putting to practice what they have learnt.</i>	<i>I5: I learnt English through songs, movies, reading short stories. All of them were fun [...] so teaching must be fun.</i>	<i>P5: It is important to learn self-confidence in foreign language conversation.</i>	–
Motivation	<i>F5: Language learning is most effective when the motivation for it is intrinsic.</i>	–	<i>P34: It is essential to have great motivation to learn [an L2].</i>	<i>S4: Motivation is very important to learn not only English but all the subjects.</i>
L2 knowledge	–	<i>I4: The important thing is to expand your knowledge and try to learn as much vocabulary as you can.</i>	<i>P2: It is important to learn vocabulary and grammar.</i>	–
Language learning strategies	<i>F3: I think it is important to learn the tools for how we learn new things in a language.</i>	–	<i>P22: It is important to repeat new things and be systematic.</i>	–

Finally, two more categories—the value of L2 knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and language learning strategies—were identified in the narratives of the participants. As many as two Israeli (e.g., I4) and four Polish (e.g., P2) pre-service teachers believed that knowing L2 grammar and vocabulary is important in order to be a proficient L2 user. Two Finnish (e.g., F3) and three Polish (e.g., P22) participants expressed their belief in the value of knowing how to learn.

The second research question was directed towards beliefs about foreign language teaching. Here six categories were identified: preferred teaching method or approach, teacher status, the role of emotions, characteristic features of the good L2 teacher, the need for improved teaching and critical incidents. Table 2 presents these categories and examples of the participants' beliefs regarding RQ2.

The question regarding the beliefs about the most effective method or approach to L2 teaching revealed interesting context-related differences. Pre-service teachers from Finland opted for flexibility in the choice of methods, with more interest given to task-based teaching and group projects. These beliefs were often rooted in their experiences, for example,

F5: *The best method for teaching changes, [depending] on the group. But the one I learnt the best with is task-based teaching.*

F4: *In my opinion, task-based language teaching, in general, is very interesting and the most effective way to learn a foreign language.*

F1: *Group projects hold students' interest.*

Israeli participants believed in student-centered and meaningful learning. They emphasized that the teaching approach should be relevant and engaging, for example,

I1: *[The method] should be relevant to the daily life.*

I2: *[The method] should be student-centred.*

I3: *Teaching should activate meaningful learning (through meaningful activities, useful games).*

A cognitive approach to L2 learning was supported by one Polish individual:

P19: *The awareness of different methods is valuable to assess what works and what doesn't. In my opinion, cognitive approach is the one that really influenced my teaching. The idea of brain-friendly learning made my lessons more meaningful and creative, which resulted in higher motivation of my students and [their] better remembering.*

Both Spanish and Polish participants believed that the best method should be communicative, for example,

S2: *Communicative methods, in which students have an active role while learning in a [...] contextualised way.*

P34: *I personally believe that the best method for teaching English is based on speaking and active listening [...]. Ability to speak and listen is the most important in communication in a foreign language.*

However, there were many voices stating that no single method is best, and the choice depends on both teacher preferences and learners' needs, for example,

P13: *It [the method] really depends on the teacher's both preparation and attitude, and students' needs as well;*

P20: *[It is fine to] mix all methods [according to] students' needs and requirements.*

P32: *The teacher should mix all of the methods and approaches in order to get what's best for students and also give them opportunities to develop different language skills.*

The next category that emerged in the course of data analysis specified the beliefs regarding the status of a teacher in each context. Two Finnish participants (F1 and F2) confirmed the high status of the profession in Finland. The belief of respect towards the education system was also identified among Israeli pre-service teachers (I1 and I3). However, Polish and Spanish contexts triggered differing beliefs from Finnish and Israeli participants, for example,

P11: *Teachers in Poland are underestimated, S4: [A teacher's status] should be higher in our society.*

Table 2

Examples of Beliefs about L2 Teaching Given by the Pre-service EFL Teachers from Finland, Israel, Poland, and Spain

Category	Examples			
	Finland	Israel	Poland	Spain
Teaching method/approach	task-based L2 teaching, group projects	student-centred, engaging, relevant to a daily life, meaningful learning	Communicative Language Teaching, meaningful conversations, mixing methods depending on the needs	communicative, contextualised, engaging learners
Teacher's status	F1/F2: <i>Language teacher is a respected profession.</i> F3: <i>Most people respect teachers but [some] complain that teachers have too good salary, long holidays.</i>	I3: <i>I believe in our system.</i> I1: <i>Teaching English is an essential job.</i>	P1/P11: <i>Teachers in Poland are underestimated.</i> P2/P7: <i>English teachers have a higher status in Poland than other teachers.</i> <i>Teaching is a vocation/mission.</i>	S4: <i>Should be higher in our society.</i>

Emotions	happiness	joy	pride (regarding learners' progress), joy, happiness	joy, pride, happiness, passion
Teachers' characteristic features	<i>F3: A guide for others to learn the language and all the wonderful things you can do and learn with it. well qualified; keen on working with other people; creative, innovative, adaptable.</i>	<i>I5: Responsible (because they educate another generation).</i>	<i>P15/P7/P3: Teachers should be patient, knowledgeable, inspirational, supportive, progressive.</i>	<i>S2: A teacher needs to be a good model. S4/S1: High expertise is important.</i>
Need for improved teaching	<i>F5: My experiences have taught me what not to do.</i>	<i>I5: I want to be a different teacher from the ones in my country. I2: I don't want to teach the way I observed teachers teach.</i>	<i>P4: Teachers in my country, especially in primary and high schools, are old-fashioned, strict and literal-minded. It is very sad. Always just books, exams, tests. I definitely do not want to be that ordinary teacher. I'd like to be "oh she is the teacher who showed me that English is wonderful."</i>	<i>S2: I believe that a professional L2 teacher needs to make the effort of changing what s/he has observed [...] in order to improve.</i>

Several similarities were identified in the beliefs about positive affect in L2 teaching among the participants from Finland, Israel, Poland, and Spain, for example,

S3: [...] when I see that something [that] I have invested my time in is giving results in my students, I feel happy.

I5: [...] teaching must be fun [...]. I want to be a teacher who makes pupils say "we want to learn English all day."

I2: [I want] to make my students love the language although they might not be proficient in English. It means a lot, especially in my [Bedouin] society.

P3: I enjoy tutoring, and when I see my students get better grades and [are] happy because of it, it makes me happy as well.

P4: A professional language teacher is not only a person who instructs or trains others, but a person who makes positive difference in the lives of many, I mean, who inspires and motivates further learning.

P15: [...] motivating them [learners] to learn is something that brings me joy.

P20: A person who is a teacher has to be passionate about what he/she does.

F4: I would like to be able to make the learning process as interesting and rewarding as possible [...] I want to be a language teacher because I want to give others the same happiness which I have received from education.

Similar teacher characteristics were identified as important for those who want to enter this profession. These were, among others, high level of linguistic expertise, teaching skills and soft skills, for example,

P4: A professional language teacher is someone who provides knowledge, skills and willingness.

P6: Being a teacher requires a lot of patience and understanding.

P9: [Teachers] educate the next generation of citizens, not only equipping them with skills and knowledge required as per curriculum, but also social skills, critical thinking; they can influence learners' approaches to learning.

I3: I believe that a teacher should be supportive, a good listener, and [he/she should] encourage his/her pupils to do their best.

S2: A professional language teacher needs to be a good model for his/her students in order to expose them to a correct input of the language.

F3: Being a professional language teacher means that I can be a guide for others to learn the language and all the wonderful things you can do and learn with it.

Next, in each context-related group of pre-service teachers, there were instances of the beliefs that were rooted in negative experiences of either previous schooling or observation of teachers. Individual participants expressed their need for improved teaching in the future (examples in Table 2).

Additionally, some participants described critical incidents which, as they claimed, had changed their beliefs about teaching, for example,

I4: Discovering the importance of teacher-student relationship (teacher asking Ls for opinion).

P9: Reflecting on a wrong assumption about one student who refused to work on a Mother's Day card.

S1: English Day at school as a motivational tool for students' L2 communication.

Although critical incidents seem to be crucial in the development of every teacher (Gabryś-Barker, 2012), they occurred as a result of single experiences, and because of their individual character, they will not be further analyzed here from the perspective of a contextual approach.

The third research question aimed to analyze the beliefs concerning L2 teaching in a post-pandemic situation. As the item regarding the beliefs about post-pandemic teaching was added to the questionnaire at a later stage of data collection, only five Finnish and twenty Polish participants provided the answers. For this reason, only the main common themes, without regard for context, have been traced and analyzed. Participants (ten out of 25 individuals) generally agreed that teaching will involve the use of technology, for example,

F3: *We will learn to use more digital resources in class.*

F4: *L2 learning in the future after this pandemic could include more technology and virtual possibilities [but] we need classrooms in order to be able to practice our skills.*

P9: *I think the pandemic may bring more tech solutions into classrooms.*

P12: *Many teachers will rely on technologies that are currently used in online teaching; [they] will use many interesting things that they have found to engage their students.*

P14: *Teachers will be more open to use media, helpful websites, etc.*

P20: *Some teachers will more often apply innovative methods of teaching, like using online sources, technical equipment, etc., to improve their methods.*

Three participants believed that distance learning will be continued, though in a changed form, for example,

F1: *More classes will be held online, e.g. a Remote Learning Friday.*

F2: *More distant learning.*

P13: *Society should consider the remote learning strategies in the case another pandemic breaks out.*

However, some participants (six out of 25) denied any changes, for example,

F5: *I think that when the COVID-19 situation is over, language teaching will be pretty much the same as it was before it.*

P1: *I think no visible changes will occur.*

Interestingly, an individual identified the need for millennial teachers to enter the profession in order to meet learners' expectations—P15: *I think that [the] pandemic has shown that schools may require younger generation of teachers or teachers must be more and more creative in order to motivate Ls.* Another one predicted a new role that a language teacher may be challenged to take in the classroom—P19: *Maybe teachers will become less important and the influence of the internet as the source of knowledge will be bigger.*

Many individuals (11 out of 25) were concerned about the immediate post-pandemic outcomes, such as lowered motivation of learners, their competence levels, and psychological needs for social contacts, for example,

P5: *I think that the level of not only language learning, but also general knowledge of students will drop significantly.*

P6: *[COVID-19 pandemic] may have an impact on the level of motivation and responsibility in students.*

P16: *I believe that students and teachers will appreciate the classes in a school environment.*

F1: *Teachers and students are going to appreciate close proximity again.*

Generally, the beliefs regarding teaching in the post-pandemic classroom centered around technology, teaching skills, and affective factors in L2 learners.

Discussion

The beliefs about L2 learning generated data that were assigned to eight categories: value of exposure to the target language, L2 use, the L2 teacher's supportive role in the process of learning, affective needs, motivation, knowledge of an L2 and language learning strategies. The analysis of the data for the purposes of responding to RQ1 disclosed more cross-contextual similarities than differences. The participants frequently reflected upon their own experiences of learning before disclosing their beliefs, which complies with the operational definition of beliefs provided earlier (Kalaja et al., 2016). Regardless of context, they generally agreed that exposure to language and language use in a communicative and meaningful way are the foundations of L2 learning. The belief in the immense role of exposure and communicative use of the target language goes in line with the input and interaction approach to L2 acquisition (Gass & Selinker, 2008), which describes L2 learning as a process that moves from linguistic input, understood as exposure to language, through linguistic

output, or the production of language, to “feedback that comes as a result of interaction” (p. 317). The last component of the interaction approach was partially reflected in the participants’ responses on the role of an L2 teacher (cf. P34). However, apart from a few instances, the role of feedback was generally neglected in the narratives of the EFL pre-service teachers. There were also few participants who believed that positive affect (e.g., joy) and motivation are critical factors, which is widely supported in the psycholinguistic literature (e.g., Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

Some very tentative remarks regarding context-related differences might be outlined on the basis of the beliefs about the teacher’s role in the process of language learning. Finnish individuals held the belief that a teacher, being a representative of the education system, plays an important supportive role in L2 learning; Polish beliefs focused on specific teaching skills that help in L2 learning; Spanish participants’ beliefs referred to the affective side of an effective teacher. The difference was also visible in the last two categories of beliefs: some Finnish and Polish pre-service teachers expressed their belief that learning strategies—knowing how—are important, whereas Israeli and Polish individuals believed in the value of knowing grammar and vocabulary—knowing what. These provisional remarks, however, should be approached with caution because of the scant and unevenly distributed evidence.

The beliefs about L2 teaching of the pre-service teachers were grouped into six categories: preferred teaching method or approach, teacher’s status, emotions, characteristic features of the good L2 teacher, and the need for improved teaching. The beliefs about the most effective method or approach to L2 teaching revealed that the pre-service teachers opted for communicative, task-based and learner-centered language teaching, encouraging group projects. As the participants reported, these beliefs were often rooted in their own experiences and compatible with beliefs about the value of L2 use in the process of learning. However, there were also voices favoring the EFL teacher’s freedom of choice of method. The beliefs about a teacher’s status reflected contextual differences. The high status of the profession in Finland (Malinen et al., 2012) was confirmed by the Finnish individuals. Despite a low score for Israel on the Teacher Status Index scale (Dolton et al., 2018), Israeli participants expressed their respect towards the education system and teaching profession. This might be explained by their cultural background—three of them came from the Bedouin minority that limits professional choices for females—and their gratitude for educational opportunities they had received. Unlike Finnish and Israeli participants, Polish and Spanish held the beliefs that teachers coming from their contexts had low status. Next, the affective side of the teaching process was underscored by several participants, regardless of context. They believed that teaching should mostly be associated with positive emotions of joy, happiness, motivation, and passion, which goes in line with a growing body of

research into the role of positive psychology in L2 learning (cf. Gabryś-Barker & Gałajda, 2016). Such teacher characteristics as high level of linguistic expertise, teaching skills and soft skills were believed to be important for those who wanted to enter the EFL teaching profession. These characteristics might be compared with the trainee teachers' core competences: knowledge, skills, and social competences, included in legislative documents in the four contexts (see Section: Context-related Beliefs about Language Learning and Teaching). Finally, the need for improved teaching was voiced by several participants who had shared their negative past classroom experiences and stated that they would act differently in the future. They often declared they would teach professionally in contrast to their past teacher(s). These beliefs were identified in each of the four contexts. Similar results were reported by Yüksel and Kavanoz (2015).

The beliefs about EFL teaching in the future after the COVID-19 pandemic situation might be roughly divided into those referring to technology, describing changes in EFL teaching, and those concerning learners' problems and needs. In general, the distant form of teaching during COVID-19 pandemic induces the use of digital resources, which add a different dimension to in-class teaching. For this reason, as several participants of the study believe, a post-pandemic teacher with increased virtual teaching abilities might create a classroom in which more digital tools and resources would be used than ever before. Moreover, emotional, post-pandemic effects are clearly identifiable among the beliefs regarding the future EFL classroom. Low motivation and decreased responsibility for one's own learning exemplify the negative issues, whereas the need for student-teacher proximity in the real classroom represents the positive beliefs about the future classroom. A tentative picture of a future classroom inspired by the beliefs of the trainee teachers from the four contexts will be drafted in the concluding section.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the beliefs of the millennial pre-service teachers coming from four different socio-cultural and educational settings: Finland, Israel, Poland, and Spain. The findings might help to create a preliminary account of future L2 teaching excellence informed by these beliefs because "individual teachers bring to teaching very different beliefs and assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching" (Radwan, 2019, p. 39). Nevertheless, acting is not possible without suitable affordances—the possibilities for action that the environment offers to the individual (van Lier, 2004, p. 79). Therefore,

the contexts that the pre-service teacher trainees live and learn in play a role in generating their beliefs about L2 learning and teaching. Furthermore, any two disparate contexts definitely offer diverse affordances, based on socio-cultural and education systems. However, despite the contextual differences of the study participants, numerous similarities in their beliefs regarding L2 learning and teaching have been traced. These similarities, in turn, form a database for drafting an image of a universal and cross-contextual future L2 classroom.

Tentative as it is, the picture of a post-pandemic classroom conducted by a millennial foreign language teacher might be sketched from three perspectives: the teacher, the learner, and technology. First, an enthusiastic and creative L2 teacher with a high level of linguistic knowledge and passion for the target language and culture would create a supportive and motivating environment. The teacher's main role would be to guide and manage the process of language learning. Teaching would entail student-centered communicative tasks and projects that reflect the real life needs of the learners. Since the L2 learning process is believed to be supported by ample exposure to the target language, learners would be exposed to linguistic input based not only on the teacher's model but also on digital resources and multimedia. Generally, the Internet would be an important provider of linguistic knowledge and input. Following from this, the teacher's role would be to give learners plentiful opportunities to communicate and practice the L2 in a meaningful way. Communicative language teaching supported with task-based and project-based language teaching might serve these purposes. Apart from the student-centered learning that might take place in the classroom, teachers would occasionally be able to organize remote teaching days as an alternative and motivating form of L2 learning. This picture, however, should be addressed with caution as the scope of data collected does not allow for far-reaching generalizations. Moreover, despite the evidence supporting the positive relationship between beliefs and actions (e.g., Al Harthy et al., 2013; Borg, 2006; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003), there is no guarantee that the participants of the present study will actually implement what they believe in.

Despite the limitations of the study, the results provided rich data regarding the beliefs about learning and teaching a foreign language that come from the new generation of pre-service teachers, being trained in four different socio-cultural settings. The similarities in their beliefs have been summarized in the form of a tentative picture of the future classroom of a millennial teacher. Context-related differences were identified in the participants' beliefs about the teacher's role in the process of language learning, preferred teaching methods or approaches and the status of the teacher. These findings may inform and inspire L2 teacher educators and stakeholders whose aim is to bring excellence to the L2 teaching profession that is to serve future generations.

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Überzeugungen angehender Englischlehrkräfte der Millennials-Generation aus verschiedenen soziokulturellen Kontexten über das Fremdsprachenlernen und -lehren als Prädiktor für künftiges Lehrerhandeln im Unterricht

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel der im vorliegenden Artikel geschilderten qualitativen Studie war es, Überzeugungen über das Lernen und Lehren des Englischen als Fremdsprache (EFL) von einzelnen Vertretern der sogenannten Millennials-Generation zu sammeln und einer Analyse zu unterziehen. Die Teilnehmer der Studie waren 47 Lehramtsstudenten in vier soziokulturellen Kontexten: des Finnischen, Israelischen, Polnischen und Spanischen. Ihre Meinung ist von Bedeutung, denn oft sind Überzeugungen dynamisch mit Handlungen verknüpft, und schon bald können EFL-Lehrer aus der Millennials-Generation sie im Unterricht umsetzen. Der in der Studie verwendete kontextbezogene Ansatz bot die Möglichkeit, Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede in den Überzeugungen finnischer, israelischer, polnischer und spanischer Lehrkräfte in den Fokus der Diskussion zu nehmen. Die festgestellten Gemeinsamkeiten bildeten die Grundlage für das Konzept eines universellen, künftigen, post-pandemischen EFL-Unterrichts.

Schlüsselwörter: Lehrerbildung, Überzeugungen, soziokultureller Kontext, Fremdsprachenunterricht