



Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching Writing: A Case Study in Two Chilean Universities

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to identify the beliefs of 37 prospective EFL teachers in their final year of a teacher training undergraduate degree program in two Chilean universities about the teaching of writing. At the same time, it attempts to recognize the source of these beliefs. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview. The data were analyzed through the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti, following the coding and categorizing of the data. The results of this study suggest that the participants possess beliefs concerning the teaching of writing production based on the use of grammar and vocabulary, the replication of text types, and the consideration of successive stages at the moment of production. At the same time, it was identified that these beliefs were acquired within the contexts of school instruction and university training. It is suggested that teacher training programs encourage new teachers to implement practices based on the communicative approach to the teaching of the skill, urging them to critically reflect on their tradition-based beliefs.

1 Introduction

In the Chilean educational system, English as a foreign language (EFL) is taught as a compulsory subject from the fifth grade of primary education to the last grade of secondary education (Ministerio de Educación de Chile, 2016). In this sense, Chilean students are expected to achieve a B1 or low-intermediate level of English based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) when finishing their formal education. Therefore, teachers of English are required to integrate the teaching of the receptive and productive skills into their pedagogical practices (Ministerio de Educación de Chile, 2014). From this view, future teachers should develop their students' writing skills by the implementation of pedagogical practices based on the communicative and functional approaches of the English language.

In spite of the obvious relevance to these approaches directed by the guidelines of the Chilean Ministry of Education, it has been shown that some pre-service EFL teachers, in the national context, perceive teaching as a process of information transmission concerning linguistic contents (Tagle, Díaz, Alarcón, Quintana, & Ramos, 2014). In this context, the future English teachers tend to implement writing activities where the presentation and reproduction of grammatical structures are prioritized. These practices are linked with the participants' personal theories or beliefs, which influence and guide their pedagogical decisions in the classroom and their ways of teaching writing in English.

Blázquez and Tagle (2010) contend that, within the national context, one challenge for professional training programs is the transformation of the beliefs about teaching and learning that the future English teachers acquired at the primary and secondary levels. These representations often perceive language learning as a habit formation process and teaching as the transmission of linguistic contents (Díaz, Alarcón, Vergara, Ortiz, & Tagle, 2014). These beliefs would be translated into teaching practices, which could be of little significance for the learners to communicate in the foreign language.

Erkmen (2014) points out that it is difficult for teachers to modify their own system of personal beliefs. According to the author, it is because they are implicit, which would make them, in many instances, unnoticeable to one's conscience. However, it has been suggested that beliefs can be transformed through pedagogical practice and subsequent reflection about one's own professional experience (Blázquez & Tagle, 2010).

Related to the processes of initial teacher training, the beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English tend to be prolonged over time (Shin, 2003). This would occur due to the fact that writing production is often one of the least emphasized skills in teaching or learning a foreign language (Viáfara, 2008). For this reason, as prospective teachers of English were exposed to limited writing practices, their beliefs would be a replication of their past teachers' performance. Therefore, future professionals should have the possibilities, in their undergraduate education, to carry out reflective practices.

The teacher training programs in the two universities where the participants of the study are enrolled deem it necessary to include English writing activities during the entire five years of the students' professional preparation. These students also carry out pedagogical practice and teaching activities in educational institutions beginning with their second year of training. In this way, it is anticipated that, as the students advance in their training process, they will develop their communicative competence in English and, moreover, question and modify, in a gradual manner, their beliefs concerning how a foreign language is taught and learned.

In this context, the general objective of this study is to identify the future teachers' beliefs concerning the teaching of the writing in their last year of professional training in two Chilean universities. The assumption underlying this investigation is that, as the trainee teachers advance in their formative process, they continuously modify their beliefs concerning how to teach writing in English. University courses in which future teachers develop their communicative competence and the reflection on their classroom performance are expected to contribute to their belief change.

This investigation aimed at answering two research questions:

- (1) What are the beliefs about teaching of writing and the approaches underlying them held by pre-service EFL teachers from two Chilean universities?
- (2) What are the sources of the beliefs about teaching of writing held by pre-service EFL teachers from two Chilean universities?

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Pedagogical beliefs

According to Pajares (1992), the belief system represents a personal guide, since it helps individuals define and understand the world and themselves. Different authors categorize teacher beliefs within a larger system, identifying them as pedagogical beliefs (see e.g. Borg, 2006; Farrell & Kun, 2007). In this sense, Díaz and Solar (2011) point out that pedagogical beliefs correspond to complex networks of processing that are part of the long-term memory of teachers. From this perspective, beliefs would operate as theoretical knowledge filters, transforming it into subjective, personal and practical knowledge. In this sense, beliefs would be associated with conceptual schemata or mental constructs which would influence the teachers' way of learning and teaching (Wallace, 2002).

Future teachers, at the start of their professional training, already bring with them previously defined beliefs about how to teach and learn (Borg, 2006). According to some studies, pre-service teachers' beliefs could remain static throughout their undergraduate education, especially those which associate teaching with a process of information transmission (Mattheoudakis, 2007; Özmen, 2012). This would suggest that beliefs would tend to be resistant to change, persisting over time.

The tendency that pedagogical beliefs have to remain within the teachers' cognition for prolonged periods of time, making their modification a difficult task, would be attributed to their sources. Relative to the aforementioned nature of the beliefs, it has been argued that these would be constructed by the individuals throughout the stages of their schooling (Erkmen, 2014; Richards & Lockhart, 2007). Therefore, the school context would directly influence the way in which persons construct ideas about the development of teaching and learning. This fact is also confirmed by the results of some studies, which indicate that pre-service teachers tend to copy and replicate their own teachers' pedagogical practices (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2016; Mak, 2011).

As previously mentioned, pedagogical beliefs can be modified. With respect to this, it has been suggested that education professionals reconstruct their representations concerning teaching through reflection (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). In other words, teachers can carry out reflective processes, which involve examining and questioning their pedagogical practices in order to transform them. Farrell and Ives (2014) argue that, by reflecting on their classroom performance, teachers can be more concerned about the impact of their beliefs on their teaching practices.

Beliefs and pedagogical knowledge are intimately related to each other, since it is necessary to construct new knowledge in order to modify beliefs. However, the modification of these views is not a simple task due to the implicit nature of beliefs and also because they are deeply rooted at the cognitive, affective and attitudinal level (Borg, 2006; Farrell, 2016).

2.2 Approaches to teaching writing

As pedagogical beliefs are transferred into the teachers' classroom practices, these can be connected to approaches to teaching writing skills (Hasan & Akhand, 2010; Khanalizadeh & Allami, 2012). Within this framework, these are placed within two foci: product and process. The product focus places special attention on the correct mastery of linguistic contents, such as grammar and vocabulary (Kroll, 2003). This focus is related to traditionalist methodologies concerning how to teach language, whose main objective is memorizing specific contents in order to correctly include them in written texts (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). According to a study conducted by Viáfara (2008), these kinds of beliefs and their underlying teaching practices tend to be promoted by the primary and secondary school contexts.

Writing, as a product, would be found among other foci that contribute to the teaching of this skill, these are: controlled composition and the genre-based approach (Matsuda & Silva, 2010). In the controlled approach, learning to write involves habit formation in terms of language accuracy. This includes practicing the structure of sentences and vocabulary. The genre-based approach, for its part, combines the teaching of writing with the identification and imitation of textual structures (Matsuda & Silva, 2010). In this respect, some studies have concluded that the teaching practices associated with this approach can help language learners to identify text types' communicative purposes and their corresponding audience (Myskow & Gordon, 2010; Wang, 2013).

On the other hand, the development of the writing skill can be framed in the process approach. The purpose of this approach is to create the conditions such that the learners produce a text through successive stages, which emphasize the use of language and constructions of a comprehensible message (Hyland, 2003; Seow, 2002). These stages include: planning, writing, revising and editing of the text. In this sense, the writing production can be considered as a recursive process (Manchón, Roca de Larios, & Murphy, 2009). In other words, the writers can repeat a specific stage. From this view, this approach can be beneficial for students to develop writing and cognitive skills (Liu, Surasin, & Brudhiprabha, 2015). However, they may experience learning anxiety when receiving feedback.

3 Methodology

This study is of a qualitative descriptive type. Case studies were employed, which are characterized by their interpretive nature. This methodology design was selected, because the intention was to deepen an understanding of teacher trainees' beliefs in the two national universities within the framework of the teaching of the writing production skills in English.

This study reports on the beliefs of pre-service teachers who were in their fifth year of training to become a fully qualified teacher of English. Even though the participants came from two different universities, they were enrolled in teacher education programs that had been designed and implemented based on the common disciplinary and pedagogical standards provided by the Chilean Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación de Chile, 2014). Both undergraduate programs, for example, aimed at developing an advanced English language level in their trainee teachers and at making them experience practicum activities at an early stage of their curriculum; therefore, these similar training conditions contributes towards data reliability.

3.1 Participants

The participants of the study were 37 student teachers from the English Teaching programs at two Chilean higher education institutions: one institution in the south of the country with 21 participants, and another from the central region with 16 participants. Among the informants, 14 were male and 23 were female. The average age was 22, with a range between 21 and 32, and a standard deviation of 2.7 compared to the mean.

The students were enrolled in the 5-year training programs. The participants in this study were in their ninth semester of preparation; that is, in the following semester, they would be carrying out their teacher practicum at high schools.

During the formative process, the trainee teachers participated in distinctive curricular activities to strengthen the development of their communicative competence in English. For this reason, from the first to the ninth semester of their teacher preparation, they took courses focused on helping them to achieve an advanced level of English regarding the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing).

Moreover, the subjects participated in practicum activities beginning in their second year of teacher preparation. During this year, they were engaged in classroom observation practices. Additionally, in the third year, they designed and implemented lesson plans in the school system. These had integrate the four language skills of English. In their practicum activities, the trainee teachers

were encouraged to reflect on their classroom performance and on the beliefs which might influence their teaching actions.

3.2 Data generation techniques

A semi-structured interview was utilized as a technique to collect the study's data (see the protocol in Appendix). The purpose of this technique was to engage in a dialogue with the subject to collect information, permitting the formulation of new related questions in accordance with the study's objective.

3.3 Procedure

Students from the English teaching programs were invited to participate on a voluntary basis. The ninth semester was chosen because, the participants were to carry out their teaching practicum during the tenth semester; that is, in the ninth semester, the participants had taken several courses associated with the development of communicative competence in English and the development of pedagogical competence. It is important to note that all the participants signed a consent form, which indicated the related procedures of the study and, moreover, that anonymity would be strictly observed.

An interview protocol was designed (see Appendix 1). Once the interview protocol was created, this was validated by a group of knowledgeable experts. Consecutively, a semi-structured interview was developed, which lasted approximately 40 minutes. This was implemented in the research subjects' mother tongue (Spanish) so that they could provide meaningful and realistic data for the investigation.

The interviews of all the participants were transcribed into digital format. Additionally, the transcripts, which included the interview questions and the subjects' responses, were translated from Spanish into English. Consecutively, the ATLAS.ti program was utilized to organize the information for the analysis. By using this software, the researchers identified and coded transcript segments which were linked to the objectives of this study. Once the above procedure was carried out, the data were organized, establishing categories and subcategories related to two units of analysis. These were: 1) the pre-service teachers' beliefs and their underlying approaches to teaching writing in English; and 2) the sources of these beliefs. The aforementioned procedure was carried out to establish relationships of meaning among the recognized codes. Based on this, conceptual networks were created to illustrate the findings. These included the investigation's categories and subcategories.

4 Results

4.1 Beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English and their underlying approaches

The results associated with the category of *beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English and their underlying approaches* are displayed in the following conceptual network (see Fig. 1). This allows the identification of the following subcategories: *controlled composition approach*, *genre-based approach* and *process approach*.

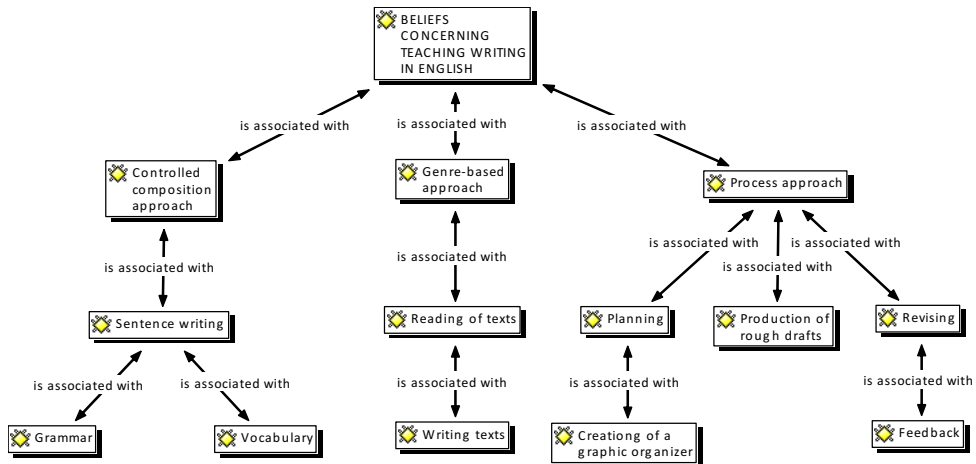


Fig. 1. Conceptual network associated with beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English and their underlying approaches

When the participants were asked about how they would teach writing in English, first, they placed this process within the information transmission of linguistic contents. These beliefs are consistent with the *controlled composition approach*. Within this framework, the interviewees indicated that to teach the English language learners how to produce, it was necessary to foster the *writing of sentences*. This task would be associated with practicing the foreign language's form, that is to say, *grammar*. From the participants' perspective, the teacher should teach the skill, requiring the students to replicate, in a correct manner, the language structures previously taught. This is illustrated by the following interview segment: "The teacher should make the students apply what he/she teaches. If he/she finds him/herself teaching the simple present verb tense, the students can produce sentences according to this content." (E02 [07:07]) Likewise, another future teacher appears to have a similar perspective: "Upon teaching writing, students should know and put into practice the grammar. They can produce sentences that demonstrate that they have learned the verbs, nouns, etc." (E10 [26:26])

In terms of the interviewees' beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English, which are associated with a *controlled composition* approach, they also indicated that, in order to teach students to produce in a written way, the teacher of the foreign language should consider the writing of sentences utilizing *vocabulary* lists. These are usually memorized. This practice was shared by one of the future teachers: "Teaching to write is carried out by helping a student to expand his understanding of vocabulary. They should apply this content through sentence production. The memorization of words is rather useful in this activity" (E17 [06:06]). In this context, another participant seemed to provide further evidence of this type of representation by pointing out a writing activity in English from his pedagogical practice experiences: "In the last writing activity that I implemented, the students did not have an advanced level of English; therefore, they should write sentences, employing words which had already been taught, having to remember them." (E01 [28:28])

The prospective teachers' beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English are also framed in the *genre-based approach*. With respect to this, the participants pointed out that, to teach writing to foreign language students, it would be necessary to consider textual models and their structural/organizational patterns. As it relates to the interviewees' responses, this pedagogical vision would be associated with the *reading of texts*. This task would be considered to help learners to identify the characteristics of the same texts. This is reflected in a commentary from one of the participants: "By reading, I would teach students to recognize the text type that I want them to write. If I ask them to write a descriptive text, I should teach them how this is organized, making them read." (E27 [32:32])

In reference to the aforementioned remark, it is possible to draw a connection with another interviewee's response, which is also related to the beliefs based on this approach: "One should present both kinds of text types, and their characteristics, by means of reading activities. When students read, one can ask them to identify what are the parts, that is, the introduction, the thesis statement, among others." (E16 [07:07])

In terms of the beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English which are linked to the *genre-based approach*, the teacher trainees state that, after reading, the students should carry out *writing texts*, based on the models they had previously reviewed. The purpose of this teaching practice would be that the learners replicate/imitate, in their writing production, the textual characteristics of what they read. An example of this perspective was provided by one of the participants: "After presenting the text type, I would ask the students to write one of the same, placing special attention on the structure that it has." (E06 [22:22]) With respect to this, upon being asked about the writing production activities that were implemented prior to teaching the skill, another future teacher made a similar comment:

Before the students begin writing a letter, they had to read one. It was at that point that I taught them the structure of this type of text so they could have it in mind at the moment of production. (E21 [26:26])

The future English teachers who were interviewed emphasized, moreover, that the teaching of writing should be associated with a set of successive stages, which are implemented by the learner upon producing a text. These types of beliefs are consistent with the *process approach* to the teaching of the writing. In this sense, the participants contend that, prior to writing, they need to teach the students to think and order the ideas that will be included by *planning* their writing production. According to the future teachers, this activity would be based, principally, on the *creation of a graphic organizer*. This point of view is shared by one of the interviewees upon being asked how he would teach English language writing production: "Before writing, the students must be taught to design a schema in order to organize their ideas. In this way, they will learn that writing doesn't mean recording on a paper the first thing that comes to your mind." (E18 [07:07]) In this context, another future education professional seemed to also hold beliefs consistent with the process approach:

The students, initially, should think about the ideas that would be integrated in their production. This implies creating a list, a table or a diagram to organize, in a better way, their respective ideas about the written text that they would be writing. (E02 [23:23])

From the teacher trainees' perspective, after teaching the students to organize their production by creating a graphic organizer, they would have to develop their *rough drafts*. With respect to this, one of the future English teachers indicated: "Since the students are not accustomed to writing, they should start their writing task, elaborating a first draft. This would have to be done after they had organized their ideas." (E14 [26:26]). Along the same lines, the responses from another future teacher seem to also allude to the production activities in a manner similar to those previously presented:

Many of them could feel frustrated when trying to write perfect texts and not being able to. Therefore, they should start by writing drafts of their work so that, later, they can continue improving. (E31 [35:35])

According to the *process* perspective to teaching writing, which is reflected in the future English teachers' responses, the final stage of the development of this skill should be the *revision* of the production by the students. This, in turn, would be linked to the teacher's *feedback* as a means of helping the learners to improve their writing production. In related to the previous point, one of the interviewees indicated that:

The teaching of writing in English should not be limited to merely one class. On the contrary, you need several sessions to be able to continue revising what has been written by the students and indicating what was done well and poorly. (E03 [38:38])

In the same way, the response from another future teacher seemed to also make reference to the aforementioned procedure when he indicated how writing should be taught:

It is necessary to provide constant feedback to the students about their writing when you teach them to write. In the school system, they only write one text and the task is over; therefore, there should be more extensive follow-up. (E19 [28:28]).

4.2 The source of the beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English

The results associated with the category of *the source of beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English* are summarized in the following conceptual network (see Fig. 2). This allows the identification of the following subcategories: *school instruction* and *university training*. The above is based on the participants' responses in the semi-structured interview.

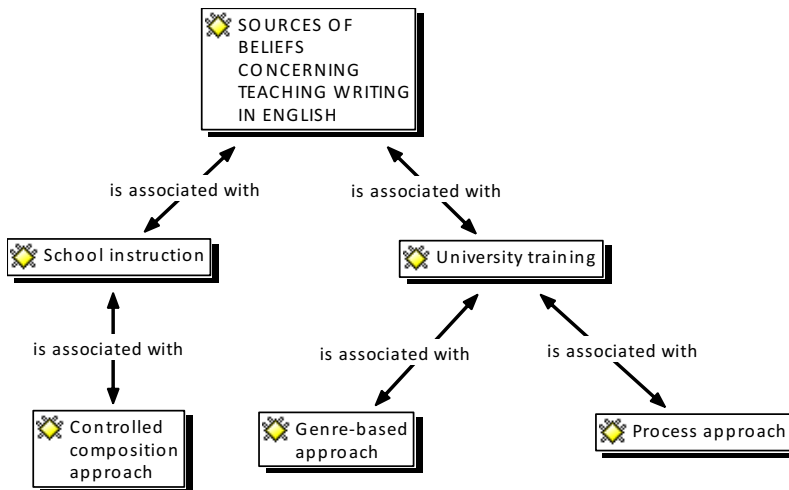


Fig. 2. Conceptual network associated with the sources of the beliefs concerning the teaching of the writing production skill in English

In terms of the participants' beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English, the teacher trainees indicate that, in the first place, the source of these representations is found in their *school instruction*. In respect to this, they recognized that, in primary and secondary school, they had few opportunities to develop this competency, which was focused, principally, on the reinforcement of linguistic contents, such as grammar and vocabulary. From this view, the school seemed to have facilitated the construction of the beliefs based on the *controlled composition approach*. This was because the teaching of this skill had been perceived as a process of information transmission, in this case, linguistic contents, which would require practice. This point of view is reflected in the following interview excerpt: "Considering my elementary and high school instruction, I didn't have experiences associated with writing in English. We only had to write sentences, putting in the subject, verb and object." (E27 [12:12]) Another future teacher also shared that there was a lack of emphasis given to this skill in school instruction: "In high school, they didn't teach me much about writing production in English. We didn't have to write long pieces of texts, but rather sentences, using the vocabulary words that the teacher had taught us." (E05 [13:13])

Secondly, the participants in this investigation stated that they acquired their ideas and knowledge concerning the teaching of writing skills by means of their *university training*. According to the interviewees' responses, the construction of the representations in this area would be based on, principally, the observation of their own teachers through their implementation of strategies in order to teach this skill.

Within the framework of *university training*, some of the informants argued that, in this context, they would have acquired perceptions concerning the teaching of this skill based on the *genre-based approach*. This is due to the fact that, according to them, writing at the university level required the reproduction of specific text types' structures and organization. This point of view is reflected in the following interview excerpt: "I learned about the teaching of writing, watching how my university professors taught it. They employed strategies, which were based on model texts and their characteristics that we should learn." (E29 [10:10])

On the other hand, considering the participants' responses, the beliefs that they would have constructed in the university context also seemed to be related with the *process approach* to teaching writing in English. This is due to the fact that, according to the interviewees, this skill was taught to them by considering successive stages when producing. This perspective was illustrated in the following commentary stated by one of the informants: "I learned to write in English at the university. I had classes with an English language professor who carried out many English writing production activities. These involved thinking of ideas, writing drafts and revising." (E11 [13:13]) In the same vein, another informant claimed the following:

A professor of a university course told us that in order to write a rough draft in English, it was necessary to request feedback in order to, later, edit it. I could observe that this strategy was effective. Personally, I would implement it upon teaching this skill. (E30 [09:09])

5 Discussion

According to the trainee teachers' responses, it is possible to establish that their beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English are connected to the transmission of information in terms of linguistic contents and structural/organizational patterns of a text. At the same time, they associate the teaching of this skill with the consideration of successive stages for the effective production of a manuscript. The informants declared having acquired these representations in their school instruction and university training.

The participants' beliefs about teaching writing skills in English are based, first of all, on a controlled composition approach. In this sense, they indicated that they should teach students linguistic concepts, such as grammar and vocabulary, of the foreign language so that, afterwards, they can replicate this knowledge through correct sentence-level production. This type of representation would equate the teaching of writing with information transmission procedures. This would be based on form-focused teaching principles, which involve replicating language structures and producing correct examples of the foreign language (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). This kind of practice would neither favor the language production in authentic learning contexts nor promote meaningful language learning (Ferede, Melese, & Tefera, 2012; Matsuda & Silva, 2010). Therefore, the teaching practices associated with these beliefs would only help students learn by practicing and memorizing linguistic contents rather than fluently producing in English.

Future teachers also possess beliefs about the teaching of writing which are governed by principles of the genre-based approach. Within this framework, they suggest that one way to help learners to develop this skill is by having them read different types of texts. Afterwards, students would identify how these are organized and their structural patterns. From this perspective, the teaching practices linked with these representations would help foreign language learners to mimic or reproduce the same type of texts by writing them.

According to Hyland (2007), the focus of teaching based on the genre-based approach would present certain strengths in the language learning process. In respect to this, the author suggests that reading different types of reading texts can be useful for learners to understand their structure and why they are written in a particular way. Hyland (2007) also contends that this teaching practice helps students identify the communicative and social intention behind each kind of written text and recognize how the language is employed in specific contexts.

However, considering the results of a study by Hasan and Akhand (2010), learners may experience problems when a genre-based approach is implemented in the language classroom. From this

view, it is complicated for students to create and express their own ideas in written form, since their primary concern is to apply memorized patterns of texts. In this context, the aforementioned authors suggest that the teaching practices framed in a genre-based approach could reinforce the passive role of the students by limiting the autonomous process when attempting to develop this skill.

The representations concerning the teaching of writing that are framed within the genre-based approach, as with those based on a controlled approach, would perceive writing as a product. With reference to what Hyland (2003) argues, the focus of this vision of teaching is that students achieve some final result more than the development of the skill itself; for example, the correct imitation of a model text or using the correct grammar and vocabulary at the moment of production.

The participants of the investigation declared, moreover, that the teaching of writing in English should be delivered by way of different stages: planning, writing, revising and editing. This vision is framed within the process approach. These kinds of teaching practices help students organize their ideas, prepare, revise and correct their written texts (Cushing Weigle, 2014). From this perspective, writing production is a recursive process rather than a linear one (Manchón, Roca de Larios, & Murphy, 2009), allowing the learners to learn from their errors and acquire diverse strategies at the moment of producing a text.

It has been argued that the process approach would help students by lowering their anxiety and/or feeling of insecurity when writing in a foreign language (Bayat, 2014; Demirel, 2011). However, due to the active creation and autonomy that is involved in this approach, it has also been suggested that the teaching practices based on it could generate difficulties for those students with a low level of linguistic competence (Hasan & Akhand, 2010; Ho, 2006) and these students could require extensive periods of time in working with them.

Within this framework, some authors state that both product and process approaches concerning the teaching of writing could complement each other (Badger & White, 2000; Kim & Kim, 2005). From this perspective, Kumaravadivelu (2003) points out that an exclusive language teaching method might not be appropriate for all contexts or educational scenarios. Therefore, he indicates that the teacher should adapt the selection of his/her pedagogical strategies, basing it on where, when and whom he/she teaches.

Considering the source of the pedagogical beliefs concerning the teaching of writing in English, the participants' statements suggest that they acquired their ideas about teaching this skill in two educational contexts. Firstly, they made reference to their primary and secondary education, where the subjects' opportunities to develop writing competences were scarce. These instances were mainly focused on the correct and segmented use of linguistic contents. This vision would be based on a controlled approach of the teaching of writing production.

The aforementioned position is consistent with what has been pointed out by Viáfara (2008), who states that the school system would generate little significant impact on the development of writing production in English. This may be associated with some primary and secondary school teachers in Chile, who would teach this language skill in a limited way, imparting it rarely in functional (authentic) communicative contexts (Correa, Tapia, Neira, & Ortiz, 2013).

With respect to the previous point, Mak (2011) argues that the pedagogical beliefs most difficult to change in the process of teacher formation are those acquired in the formal educational context in the role of a student. The former would be due to the centralized character ingrained in the beliefs, because they have been stored for a long period of time at the unconscious level. Accordingly, it appears to be problematic for future teachers to teach writing being influenced by those beliefs they constructed in primary and secondary education. This is because these individuals, as has been argued, would visualize teaching writing as transmitting information, memorizing, and practicing linguistic contents (grammar and vocabulary). This vision does not favor the meaningful construction of language in the context being described.

Secondly, future teachers indicated that they had acquired representations concerning the teaching of writing in English in their university training. Judging by the participants' responses, they had apparently constructed these representations upon observing their own university professors

implementing teaching practices based on this skill. In this respect, the pedagogical strategies imparted for teaching writing in this context would have been framed in the genre-based (product) and process approaches.

With respect to the aforementioned declarations, professors of university courses who focus on English communicative competence could play an important role in the trainee teachers' modification of their traditional beliefs. In this sense, it is important to note that if prospective teachers learn to produce texts in English, primarily in the university context, the professors of those courses should assist teacher candidates of English pedagogy programs to make explicit those beliefs they had constructed in school. Similarly, these professors should also help trainee teachers question these representations by considering their impact on the learning of a foreign language. In the same vein, it is necessary to promote opportunities for future teachers to develop this skill in authentic and practical contexts where language can be used for communicative purposes.

Furthermore, the professors of courses associated with teaching methodology should urge the future teachers to design and implement pedagogical practices in the school system, also based on the use of language for the development of the writing skills. Simultaneously, they should be encouraged to reflect on the impact of these practices upon the learning process of the students in the school system. The aforementioned point is made while bearing in mind that beliefs are modified when reflecting on their associated teaching actions (Farrell & Ives, 2014; Özmen, 2012). From this perspective, transformation of beliefs occurs when one identifies that traditional beliefs are not useful to help others to develop production skills in a foreign language.

6 Conclusions

The beliefs concerning the teaching of writing that future teachers of English from two Chilean universities possess are found to be framed in terms of information transmission, especially of linguistic contents, and in the reproduction of organizational patterns of written texts. At the same time, the beliefs concerning how to teach this skill are associated with text production in different successive stages.

According to the answers provided by the participants in the semi-structured interviews, those beliefs about writing teaching that are based on transmitting information on linguistic contents would have been acquired by individuals in their primary and secondary school contexts. With respect to this, it appears difficult for university training programs to transform these representations. This fact could facilitate the prolongation of teaching actions based on promoting the practice and memorization of grammar and vocabulary by students. With this in mind, it becomes highly necessary for teacher trainers to implement metacognitive strategies, reflection and the questioning of their beliefs. This is particularly relevant, if it is considered that these participants will soon become teachers of English in Chilean primary and secondary schools and will have to teach writing to their own students; therefore, their beliefs about how to teach writing will impact on their own students' learning of this skill. In addition, the Chilean educational system is formed by three different types of school (public, semi-public and private) and these could also impact the teachers' way of teaching writing. In other words, these teacher candidates may be employed by either an educational institution that has a robust writing program for their students or a school that regards grammar activities as a synonym for writing.

It is then observed that teacher candidates enter university programs holding their own beliefs on writing, which are reinforced or challenged by their teaching training. These representations are later mediated by the English language program and their fellow colleagues in the schools where they will be eventually working. Thus, beliefs are clearly influenced by the participants' primary and secondary school background, their studies and practicum at the university and the place of work. Beliefs are context-based constructs, which are constantly shaped by the interaction with others and the context.

On the other hand, those beliefs concerning the teaching of the skill that are focused on the reproduction of text patterns and on the consideration of successive stages for the development of

the same would have been acquired in the university context. In reference to this, it is important to point out that prospective teachers declared that they developed the skill of producing texts, essentially, in tertiary education. For this reason, it is relevant that university professors generate learning situations in which future teachers reflect on the beliefs constructed in primary and secondary school contexts. This reflection process should also consider the negative impact these traditional beliefs and practices have on prospective teachers' foreign language learning. Moreover, it is necessary that they are encouraged, in English language teaching methodology courses, to design and implement pedagogical practices in the school system that emphasize specific uses of the foreign language.

It is also suggested that the teacher education programs, by way of courses related to the learning of English and its teaching methodology, create learning opportunities so that trainee teachers develop the communicative competence and the professional competence within a framework of language use. This is recommended due to the fact that, as was previously mentioned, those beliefs which were acquired in the school system are very centralized and are difficult to modify. Therefore, meaningful and contextualized language practice is necessary to help candidates to construct new knowledge.

It is probably still a challenge for EFL teacher preparation programs in Chile to introduce effective mechanisms for eliciting prospective teachers' beliefs before they initiate their teaching practices in the schools. This belief elicitation action should lead to robust processes of reflection and awareness guided by teacher educators. These should also be based on empirical and theoretical evidence that supports the development of strong and effective writing strategies when teaching in schools. Teacher training programs at the university level should always be guided by the constant virtuous cycle of belief elicitation, reflection and action-based research, in such a way that teacher candidates can reshape their beliefs as a result of never-ending classroom interventions and professional reflection.

Acknowledgments

This study was financed by research grant FONDECYT 1150889, which is titled 'Las dimensiones cognitivas, afectivas y sociales del proceso de planificación de aula y su relación con los desempeños pedagógicos en estudiantes de práctica profesional y profesores noveles de pedagogía en inglés' (cognitive, affective and social dimensions of EFL pre-service/in-service teachers' lesson planning process and their teaching performance). This was sponsored by the National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research (Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica, CONICYT) of the government of Chile.

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Appendix 1

Interview protocol

1. How does one teach writing in English?
2. In what contexts have you constructed the representations, ideas and knowledge associated with how to teach writing in English? What contexts have impacted you the most in this process of construction? Why?
3. What objectives should an English class have that is focused on the development of writing? Why?
4. What contents should be integrated in an English class focused on the development of writing? Why?
5. What kinds of activities should be considered for an English class focused on the development of writing? Why?
6. What resources should be included in an English class focused on the development of writing? Why?
7. What assessment types should be integrated in an English class focused on the development of writing?