


CHALLENGING BELIEFS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION: a critical-reflective practice

DESAFIANDO CRENÇAS NA FORMAÇÃO DE PROFESSORES DE LÍNGUA INGLESA: uma prática crítico-reflexiva

DESAFIANDO CREENCIAS EN LA FORMACIÓN DE PROFESORES DE INGLÉS: una práctica crítico-reflexiva

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ABSTRACT: The initial training of English language teachers is a multifaceted process, encompassing theoretical and practical knowledge development and critical reflection on the beliefs and assumptions that influence their educational practices. In this context, critical-reflective practice stands out as a promising pedagogical approach. This research aims to explore how critical-reflective practice helps student-teachers free themselves from limiting beliefs during the supervised internship period. The study also investigates the role of this practice in guiding future teachers, with a focus on internship reports from 2014 to 2017. Methodologically, it employs a qualitative-documentary approach, analyzing experience reports produced by interns. The theoretical framework draws on the works of scholars such as Bakhtin, Barcelos, Dewey, Ellis, Freire, Harmer, and Schön, exploring topics like beliefs, reflection, active learning, and foreign language teaching. This research highlights the challenges faced by trainee teachers and their reflective processes within the English language teaching and learning context.

Keywords: Critical-reflective practice; Beliefs; Teacher education; Supervised internship.

RESUMO: A formação inicial de professores de Língua Inglesa é um processo complexo que envolve o desenvolvimento de conhecimentos teóricos e práticos, além da reflexão crítica sobre crenças que influenciam a atuação do educador. Nesse contexto, a prática crítico-reflexiva surge como uma abordagem pedagógica promissora. Este estudo visa discutir como a prática crítico-reflexiva auxilia o aluno-professor a se libertar de crenças limitantes durante o Estágio Supervisionado. A pesquisa também investiga o papel dessa prática no direcionamento dos futuros docentes, com base em relatos de estágio entre 2014 e 2017. A metodologia utilizada é de abordagem qualitativa-documental, analisando relatos produzidos por estagiários. O referencial teórico baseia-se nas obras de autores como Bakhtin, Barcelos, Dewey, Ellis, Freire, Harmer e Schön, abordando temas como crenças, reflexão, aprendizagem ativa e ensino de língua estrangeira. A pesquisa evidencia os desafios enfrentados pelos professores em formação e suas práticas reflexivas no contexto de ensino-aprendizagem de Língua Inglesa.

Palavras-chave: Prática crítico-reflexiva; Crenças; Formação de professores; Estágio Supervisionado.

RESUMEN: La formación inicial de los profesores de Lengua Inglesa es un proceso complejo que involucra el desarrollo de conocimientos teóricos y prácticos, así como la reflexión crítica sobre las creencias que influyen en su actuación como educadores. En este contexto, la práctica crítico-reflexiva emerge como un enfoque pedagógico prometedor. Este estudio tiene como objetivo discutir cómo la práctica crítico-reflexiva ayuda a los estudiantes-profesores a liberarse de creencias limitantes durante el período de Práctica Supervisada. También se investiga el papel de esta práctica en la orientación de los futuros docentes, con base en los informes de prácticas de 2014 a 2017. La metodología empleada es cualitativa-documental, analizando los informes producidos por los estudiantes en prácticas. El marco teórico se apoya en las obras de autores como Bakhtin, Barcelos, Dewey, Ellis, Freire, Harmer y Schön, abordando temas como creencias, reflexión, aprendizaje activo y enseñanza de idiomas. Esta investigación resalta los desafíos enfrentados por los futuros profesores y sus procesos reflexivos en el contexto de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la Lengua Inglesa.

Palabras-clave: Práctica crítico-reflexiva; Creencias; Formación de profesores; Práctica Supervisada.

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Introduction

This research emerges from the desire to understand the various events that occur during the Supervised Internship in English Language Teaching (ELT) programs. These events include planning, observations, teaching practice, evaluation, interactions with the school community, reflection, and feedback. During their internship, student-teachers often tie their teaching practices to certain beliefs.

According to Pires (2013), beliefs can be understood as ideas, mental representations, or cognitive structures that may limit and influence how one leads the foreign language teaching-learning process in the classroom. In Supervised Internship courses, English language students need to reflect upon both theoretical knowledge and how it relates to the reality they encounter in schools. This connection between theory and practice, known as praxis, requires student-teachers to engage with the school context to think about educational improvement in a continuous and dialogical process.

Reflective practice plays a central role in the professional identity construction of teachers. According to Dewey (1979), critical reflection is an evaluation of lived experiences, enabling teachers to better understand the values and principles that guide their practice. It promotes awareness of the living conditions teachers face, encouraging them to seek creative and effective alternatives for the challenges in the classroom. Barcelos (2001) and Freire (1987) emphasize the role of critical reflection and the liberation from limiting beliefs in constructing a transformative educational practice.

Through this reflective process, teachers gain the ability to adapt their teaching strategies to better meet the needs of their students. Schön (1995) highlights the importance of reflection-in-action for professional development, as it allows teachers to adjust their actions creatively during teaching, asking themselves crucial questions like “Why teach? For whom? Where? And with what resources?” This study aims to explore how critical-reflective practice helps English language student-teachers break free from limiting beliefs during their Supervised Internship. Through the analysis of experience reports from interns, this research will reveal the challenges faced by trainee teachers and their reflective processes in the ELT context.

A Look into Beliefs in English Language Teacher Education

This subtopic discusses the paths taken by educators during their initial teacher training, particularly in relation to the teaching of foreign languages. It emphasizes the importance of pedagogical training, which is a complex and ongoing process, involving not only the development of skills, techniques, and theoretical knowledge but also the values and attitudes inherent in teaching practices. Teachers' beliefs can significantly impact both teacher and student performance, motivation, and engagement in the learning process. Although beliefs are shaped by cultural values and experiences, they are subject to change as new teaching and learning methods emerge.

Barcelos (2007) defines beliefs as ways of perceiving and interpreting the world, shaped by interactive experiences. Dewey (1979) also highlights that beliefs about language learning are influenced by the environment and experiences, and they are crucial in the teaching process. Teachers' beliefs, formed through their roles in society, influence their teaching approach, whether they are students in the early stages of learning or teachers in training. Thus, teachers' individual beliefs also reflect their values and

objectives regarding the teaching and learning process. According to Barcelos (2004), beliefs can greatly influence the learning process, either positively or negatively.

Effective language learning requires educators to mediate the process flexibly, considering the specific contexts and realities of their students. Teacher training should aim to develop educators who can provide a positive, dialogical, and belief-free teaching experience, respecting students' unique perspectives. Teacher education must equip future teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies, not just in language mechanics, but also in pedagogy, teaching methodologies, assessment, and classroom planning.

Furthermore, teachers' beliefs about the role of grammar, communication, and the use of technology can impact classroom dynamics. Overemphasizing grammar, for instance, may make lessons monotonous and hinder students' engagement. Conversely, focusing solely on communication may neglect the structural aspects of the language that are essential for comprehensive understanding. Therefore, teacher education should foster a balanced approach that integrates grammar with communicative skills, cultural understanding, and the use of technology in teaching.

Freire (1996) suggests that teacher education is a continuous process, where teachers constantly reflect on their practices and challenge their beliefs. This reflection leads to critical thinking and adaptation, which are essential for teaching a language effectively. Dewey (1979) also stresses that education should not be isolated from students' sociocultural realities, and teachers should guide students in critically reflecting on their own experiences. Teacher education programs must help pre-service teachers recognize and challenge their beliefs to avoid limiting students' potential for language learning.

Classrooms today are diverse spaces, influenced by multiple identities—cultural, social, gender-based—that require teachers to be flexible, reflective, and open to change. As Maher (2007) points out, the identities within a classroom are not fixed; instead, they interact, transform, and influence each other, creating a space of interculturality. Teachers must embrace these interactions to enrich their students' learning and foster a broader intercultural awareness.

The supervision of teacher training programs can broaden future teachers' perspectives on diversity and the complexities of teaching, fostering a deeper understanding of how these factors influence both teaching and learning in a multicultural context.

The Role of Supervised Internships in Shaping English Language Teachers

The Supervised Internship marks the first contact that prospective teachers have with their future profession. Through observation and teaching practice, student-teachers engage in reflective moments about their future pedagogical actions. This stage contributes significantly to the formation of teachers by offering them opportunities for reflection on personal and collective identity. It highlights the importance of their role in education, with a focus on social advancement and the intellectual and life transformation of their students. According to Piletti (2004), the main objective of the internship is to refine the necessary teaching skills, providing real-life classroom experiences.

The internship should foster a reflective environment where future teachers can reconsider their beliefs about language learning. Freire (1996) asserts that critical reflection on practice is essential for the relationship between theory and practice. The internship allows student-teachers to understand the school environment, question their methods, and learn from their successes and failures. Freire (1996) emphasizes

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that reflective practice is a dynamic and ongoing process, requiring a critical understanding of the context in which it occurs.

Moreover, Ellis (1994) notes that teachers must have a clear understanding of the theories underlying language teaching and apply them effectively in the classroom. Bakhtin (1997) stresses the importance of dialogue in knowledge construction and identity formation. Teachers of English need to create a dialogue-rich environment in the classroom, enabling students to express themselves comfortably in the target language.

Harmer (2007) highlights motivation as essential for language learning, and teachers must provide an engaging and challenging environment. The internship offers student-teachers the opportunity to connect the theoretical methodologies studied at university with real classroom practice, enriching their learning process. Piletti (2004) also stresses the role of teachers as agents of social transformation, underlining the importance of self-reflection and critical evaluation in teaching practices.

During the internship, student-teachers engage in exchange experiences and discuss selected theoretical texts. This fosters a democratic space for critical-reflective thinking, which is crucial for preparing citizens for the 21st century. These experiences help future teachers develop problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and creativity.

Teachers bring their personal universe to the classroom, including their worldview, values, cultural marks, and a set of beliefs that reveal their conceptions of teaching and language learning. Reflective practices refer to a process of analysis and critical reflection on one's pedagogical actions, aimed at continually improving the quality of teaching. Barcelos (2003) emphasizes that reflection is not just a cognitive activity but also involves emotional and value-based aspects. According to Freire (1996), reflection on practice can only be adequately achieved when analyzed by the subject performing it. It is a dynamic and ongoing process, carried out dialogically, considering both personal and shared experiences.

This practice can take various forms, such as teaching journals, collaborative discussions with colleagues, participation in study groups, or pedagogical guidance. Reflective practices help teachers identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching, allowing for self-reflection on methodologies and activities that broaden students' sociocultural knowledge. Dewey (1979) defines critical-reflective thinking as a process of serious and consecutive examination of subjects. He outlines five stages of reflective thinking, starting with the identification of a problem, followed by intellectualization, hypothesis generation, reasoning, and testing the hypothesis.

In the context of modern English language teaching, it is crucial for teachers to engage in continuous reflection to adapt to the demands of an increasingly technological, globalized, and multicultural world. Reflective thinking plays a key role in fostering intercultural understanding and overcoming language barriers, preparing students to communicate effectively in diverse contexts, including technological and professional environments where English is predominant. As Dewey (1979) suggests, freeing oneself involves becoming aware of the environment and one's actions, with problem-solving leading to transformation. Reflective practices are therefore essential for creating a critical and transformative teaching approach.

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