A CASE STUDY ON THE ROLE OF SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS IN ESL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICE

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Abstract: Pre-service teachers are often involved in the continuous construction and reconstruction of their identities that are shaped by various internal and external factors. This study explores sociocultural factors that influence pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning namely 1) previous schooling experience, 2) teacher education, and 3) curriculum specifications. Participants of the study were three pre-service teachers studying at a local university in Malaysia. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews conducted after their teaching practicum at local government schools. Findings from this study indicate that the three sociocultural factors have a varying degree of influence towards the pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practice. Previous schooling experience and teacher education programme have the most influence on all the pre-service teachers' beliefs and practice while curriculum specifications have the least impact. It is also evident from this study that the formation of teachers' beliefs is complex as sociocultural factors such as ethnicity, gender, school and home are always interactional. The findings provide implications for ESL teacher educators in considering pre-service teachers' beliefs in teacher education programmes as these may significantly impact their pedagogical practices.

Keywords: beliefs; pre-service teachers; professional identity; sociocultural factors; teacher cognition.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' professional identity is shaped by many factors such as schooling and everyday experiences, knowledge from pre-service programmes, personal background, and surrounding people like colleagues, students, family, and friends. Without exposure to the real and authentic context of teaching, pre-service teachers' ideas and principles remain unarticulated making it difficult for them to imagine and start constructing their professional identity (Walkington, 2005). The development of a pre-service teacher's professional identity is claimed to be the most important during teacher training period and pre-service teacher education (Aykac et al. 2017) as this is the stage where their teacher identity starts to form (Cattley, 2007). During this pre-service stage, student teachers are continuously involved in the process of reflection as they begin to develop a more complex understanding of their work as teachers through formal classroom and practicum experiences outside the class. Student teachers will then continue to refine their identity through interpretation and reinterpretation of their experiences (Pillen et al. 2013).

During teaching practicum, student teachers are exposed to more people including colleagues, heads of departments, principals, and school staff, which may be contributing factors to the formation of their professional identity. These people may have different expectations on the roles and responsibilities of beginning teachers which could create tensions for the teacher. This is the period where the pre-service teachers are required to make their judgments on what is acceptable and what is not on the basis of their experiences and personal backgrounds (Tickle, 2000). The influence of personal and professional identity of the teachers often interplay which means that factors such as schooling experience and family background should never be ignored (Tickle,1999). This research aims to explore the extent to which sociocultural factors namely the pre-service teachers' previous schooling experiences,

teacher education programme, and curriculum specifications influence the ESL pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching.

The three sociocultural factors selected were derived from Borg's (2003) framework of teacher cognition that highlights the significance of four elements in teachers' beliefs formation, namely 1) schooling (prior language learning experiences), 2) professional coursework (teacher education), 3) classroom experience, and 4) classroom practice. It is crucial to note that all these elements that define teacher cognition interact with other contextual factors. From Borg's (2005) study, it was found that teachers who had experienced teacher education programmes are more likely to use a communicative, student-centred, and meaning-oriented approach in their language classrooms because those approaches are highly encouraged by teacher educators. However, it should be highlighted that the principles instilled by teacher education programmes might sometimes have lesser long-term effects on the teachers due to other contextual factors. The research reported in this article will explore the extent to which three sociocultural factors influence the ESL pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Beliefs and Teacher Education

Teachers' beliefs are shaped and influenced by a multitude of factors that may or may not be observable such as teachers' experience as learners, teaching experience, teachers' personality, and education/research-based principles (Borg, 2018; Abdi & Asadi, 2011). During the pre-service teacher education programme, student teachers, for instance, can learn how to apply their beliefs into practice and understand links between beliefs and theory. These beliefs play a prominent role in shaping what and how students learn. According to Borg (2003), one of the earliest established beliefs in the pre-service teachers' life is their own experience as a learner and this belief is resistant to change. Borg

(2003) adds that teachers' pre-existing beliefs may not only be influential during the teacher education programme but also throughout their teaching career if left unexamined and unchallenged.

These studies highlight the prominent role of teacher training institutes in taking into account teachers' well-established beliefs about teaching and learning before they even start their teacher education. It is also important to understand that the success of any teacher training programmes does not necessarily depend on the ability to change the pre-service teachers' beliefs as the pedagogical knowledge of pre-service teachers are highly subjective and contextual.

Borg (2003) particularly uses the term 'teacher cognition' to refer to 'the unobservable cognitive dimensions of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think' (p.81). The term that he employs may refer to aspects such as beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, theories, and attitudes. He also asserts that teacher cognitions and practices are 'mutually informing' (p.81). The volume of research available worldwide examining the influence of teacher beliefs on the way they act in classrooms is substantial (Macalister, 2012; Yook, 2010). Studies have revealed that both previous learning experiences and recent education within the teacher-training programme influence the pre-service teachers' beliefs. Debleri (2012) found that pre-service teachers mainly derive their beliefs from their previous learning experiences during their school years which may include the influence of previous teachers and learning experiences. Wong (2010) similarly carried out a quantitative research on twenty-five Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) pre-service teachers, and she found that the pre-service teachers conceived their beliefs from their previous learning experiences during their schooling years and their recent education within the English Language Teaching programme. Based on this literature review, it is clear that teacher

education and previous learning experience highly contribute to pre-service teachers' beliefs.

Professional Identity

Researchers' definitions of the term 'professional identity' vary to a great extent. It has been investigated in terms of different constructs such as perceptions of self (Gross et al. 2010), teachers' preparedness and efficacy (Faez & Valeo, 2012), and pre-service teachers' tensions in changing their roles to teachers (Pillen et al. 2013). Although there are differences in how researchers define professional identity, they usually do agree that identity is dynamic (Beltman et al, 2015; Dikilitas & Yayli, 2018; Harun, 2019; Olsen, 2011). It is also believed that this process is influenced by many factors such as teachers' personal characteristics, education background, past experiences and beliefs, workplace, colleagues, skills, and attitudes (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al. 2004). These factors cannot be ignored because the construction of identity is 'socially legitimated' (Lamote & Engels, 2010, p.5). The influence of external factors such as the national curriculum, people's expectations, schooling experience, education backgrounds, personal beliefs and values on teachers' professional identity has been proven to be impactful especially for beginning teachers (Dikilitas & Yayli, 2018; Miyahara, 2015).

Bullough (1997) highlights the importance of understanding student teachers' views on learning and teaching; and themselves as teachers because it is the foundation for 'meaning-making' and 'decision-making'. Lamote and Engels (2010) emphasise the importance of professional identity in their study of more than 100 student teachers' perceived identity at different times during their teacher training. Results revealed that the student teachers began to shift their professional identities after six months in teacher education and also after workplace experience. The researchers concluded that student teachers' professional identities are fragile during the early encounters with practicum experience since that

was the time when they were exposed to the complexity of their workplace.

In the Malaysian context, Harun (2019) conducted a study on 25 ESL pre-service teachers. She discovered that the professional identities of the teachers were continuously constructed and reconstructed. These identities were influenced by multitudes of factors such as positive images of past and current teachers, having one of their parents as teachers, personal identities, and beliefs about teaching and learning. Very few studies have specifically focused on the degree of influence different sociocultural factors may bring to the construction of beliefs and classroom practices. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can fill the gap in studies related to how teachers' teaching beliefs are shaped by sociocultural factors.

Due to these gaps in the research area particularly in the Malaysian context, there is a need to conduct more studies that are qualitative in nature so that more in-depth analysis can be done to look into factors influencing teachers' thinking to gain insights on the sociocultural factors that may impact their pedagogical beliefs and practice.

This study may also be possibly perceived as important because it looks into what teachers think. Borg (2003) states that what teachers think matters as it sets the learning environment for their students. Although it is important to prepare teachers to theories and practices of good instructional habits, having deep understanding of what teachers think, know, and how they come to know are of equal importance as these will lead to the effectiveness of the classroom instruction.

Another significance of this study is it forces the pre-service teachers to reflect on their teaching. There has been much research that supports the idea that teachers, especially new teachers, to reflect upon their classroom practices (Barnard & Burns, 2012; Garza & Smith, 2015). The process of reflection will empower the

pre-service teachers to improve their skills as well as allow them to gain a deeper understanding of their teaching.

METHOD

Theoretical Background

Sociocultural theory is employed as this study explores the role of society and culture in shaping one's beliefs. According to Vygotsky, people's interaction with the tools that the culture provides is vital in helping one to form personal and unique views of the world. Vygotsky, as cited in Lantolf (2000) states that the culture that a particular individual lives determines one's way of communicating and viewing the world. Therefore, people's perception, representation, and self-awareness are most likely to vary across various conditions and circumstances.

Research Design

Qualitative study was chosen for this research as this design enables the researcher to study in-depth and gain deeper insights into the phenomenon studied (Fraenkel et al. 2012). Furthermore, qualitative study allows the researcher to investigate sociocultural factors that may affect the pre-service teachers' beliefs, which may not be achieved through quantitative methods. According to Cohen et al. (2007), a case study is used to show, analyse and interpret the distinctiveness of individuals and situations through accessible accounts, study the complexity of behavior, allow us to act and intervene, and present and represent reality to give a sense of 'being there'. The unit of analysis for this case study is based on the perspectives of the pre-service teachers which involves complex cognitive process as it requires the understanding of contextual factors to examine beliefs. This case is also bounded as this study is limited to only three pre-service teachers from only one selected institution and only three sociocultural factors that influence the pre-service teachers' beliefs. Although only three factors were selected, the researcher was aware that these factors may not exist in isolation with other sociocultural factors.

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Context of Study and Participants

The research was conducted in a Malaysian public university. Three ESL pre-service teachers volunteered to be part of the study. They also fulfilled several criteria that are of interest to the researcher. Firstly, the participants had completed their teaching practicum at local government schools. Secondly, they did not come from the same school where they had their practicum teaching experience. Thirdly, they had their previous English learning experience (both primary and secondary) in Malaysia and finally they should have different backgrounds particularly in terms of race and gender. Participants were labelled with pseudonyms for anonymity. Table 1 represents an overview of the participants' background information.

Table 1 Pre-service teachers' background information

Name	Gender	Age	Race	Home-town	Previous Schooling Experience	School / Class Assigned for Practicum
Neela	Female	23	Indian	Johor Bahru	Primary & Secondary: Co-ed school in JB	Two of the best Form 4 classes in an all-girls secondary school in Petaling Jaya
Fei	Female	23	Chinese	Penang	Primary & Secondary: Chinese School in Penang	Co-ed secondary school in Petaling Jaya
Aqil	Male	22	Malay	Taiping	Primary: Co-ed school in Taiping Secondary: MRSM in Perak	An all-boys secondary school in Kuala Lumpur

Instruments

A semi-structured interview protocol was designed to explore the sociocultural factors that may influence the pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching. Questions used in this research were adapted from Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) as the questions fulfilled the objectives of this research. The interview was conducted on a one-to-one basis to give some privacy to the

respondents to share information and reveal much about events in their lives. The interview questions were divided into two sections. Section A (Participants' Background Information) contains questions related to the respondents' background such as their age, where they come from, perceptions on traits of a good teacher, reasons for becoming a teacher, and their primary goal of teaching. Section B (Participants' Image of Professional Identity) focuses on questions related to three sociocultural factors that might influence the pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and practice during their teaching practicum.

Data Collection

The pre-service teachers were informed about the research project after a formal class consisting of approximately 30 students. Three pre-service teachers volunteered and the researcher obtained their contact information. Consent forms were distributed to the participants, and once consent was obtained from all the three participants, interviews conducted at different dates were arranged. Data from the interview were collected using a voice-recorder. The recordings were then transcribed, read, and re-read several times to ensure the accuracy of the transcription.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted in this study as it provides a more systematic way of analyzing qualitative data. Qualitative research demands the most accurate understanding and interpretation of people's actions and thoughts. Therefore, thematic analysis is best as it provides a deeper understanding of any issues. Since this study only involved three participants, themes were obtained through manual recording and highlighting of themes. The three main components of Miles and Huberman's (1994) model for thematic analysis were applied in analysing data in this study. The researcher highlighted words, phrases, and sentences that could help answer the research questions and objectives when analysing the interview data. Next, words, phrases, or events that appeared to be similar across the three participants' interview

transcripts were grouped into the same theme. Any themes with insufficient data to support them or are too diverse were discarded during this data reduction process. Additional coding was done for Section A (Previous Schooling Experience) as more sub-themes were identified in all the participants' interview transcripts. The sub-themes that emerged throughout the process of data analysis for Section A (Previous Schooling Experience) include the positive and negative experiences about learning English.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study shows that the pre-service teachers derived their pedagogical beliefs and practice through multitudes of lived experiences. It should be noted that the three pre-service teachers are of different backgrounds which may affect their beliefs. The analysis of the participants' profile demonstrates many factors that may contribute to the formation of their beliefs such as ethnicity, gender, school and home environment although this study intended to study only three sociocultural factors. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasises the influence of social factors in contributing to one's cognitive development. The role of context, in particular, is significant as 'teachers' psychological functions, skills, competence, knowledge, and their attitudes toward students are shaped in the context in which they are teaching' (Shabani, 2016, p.8).

The Sociocultural Influence on Teachers' Beliefs
Neela's Previous Schooling Experience

During the interview, Neela recalled positive memories about her previous teachers when she was in both primary and secondary school, and these experiences somehow managed to inspire her to be a teacher as her previous teachers. She recalled her Mathematics teacher who inspired her to become a teacher because 'she really captured the essence of teaching very well'.

Table 2 Pre-service teachers' positive and negative experiences of learning English

Pre-service Teacher	Positive Experience about Learning English
Neela	• *Most of my English teachers were all fun (line 90-91)* • *I always loved English lessons in both my primary and secondary school (line 91-92)* • *I really don't have any bad experience learning English (line 95-96)* • *She would generate new ways or methods to help us understand. (line 111-112)* • *She would never get angry or scold us for not understanding or repeating the same questions (line 112-114)* • *She really captured the essence of teaching very well (line 115-116)* • *She exuded charisma and passion (line 118)* • *She was vivacious, bubbly, and very very loud (line 157-158)* • *She had the heart for teaching and shared the love for education with us (line 164-166)* • *She wasn't just a teacher but an individual who imparted knowledge to us, not just academic...but life lessons as well (line 166-168)* • *She knew what was useful for us and how to teach us in a way we could understand. (line 177-179)* • *She taught us relevant things like writing a resume and how to speak during an interview. (line 180-182)*
Fei	• *I think I have always loved English. English has always been my safe haven (line 72-73)* • *I think the English teachers were slightly more fun and creative compared to other teachers (line 83-84)*
Aqil	• *I like learning English just because of the teachers, I think they are quite cool and fun (line 37-38)* • *I just like the way they present themselves as a teacher, the way they interact with students, being concern for the students, ask a lot about us..not creating gaps between students and teachers (line 43-47)*
	Negative Experience about Learning English
Neela	• *I think the teacher had to step up on grammar a bit (line 201-202)* • *Most of the English lessons especially in my primary were very much exam-oriented and weren't that engaging as well (line 202-204)* • *I wasn't exposed to the grammar rules when I was young (line 206-207)*
Fei	• *They could've done more, as in don't just stick to what's in the textbook (line 85-86)* • *Teachers used the conventional methods of teaching (line 116)* • *They can be slightly more engaging with the students (line 90-91)* • *Have to be more creative in implementing activities, using drama in class. (line 94-96)* • *they have lost that passion to impart the love of the subject to the students…they no longer have that connectivity they just want to finish the syllabus (line 129-132)* • *That motivation to learn is lost in the dryness of fulfilling exam obligations (line 138-139)*
Aqil	• *Usually they focus much on writing, less on speaking, so they need to focus more on speaking (line 52-53)*

She also listed down positive values about that particular teacher who was described as very patient, hardworking, and would find ways to help her understand any Math problems. On top of that, she talked about her MUET teacher when she was in Form 6, Madam Jothy who was very 'bubbly' and 'vivacious' and had a

different style of teaching English. According to Neela, the teacher knew what was relevant to them at that time like learning tips on how to sit for an interview and she even made the lessons comprehensible to everyone. Neela described her as someone who 'had the heart for teaching and shared that joy and love for education' and 'who wasn't just a teacher but an individual who imparted knowledge to [them] ... not just academic … but life lessons as well'. Neela added, 'she was also the type of teacher who could make the sun shine on a cloudy day'. It can be assumed from this finding that her positive experience as a learner and role models/ inspirations that she had around her during her previous schooling experience has contributed to her beliefs on what constitutes a good teacher.

Despite her positive experiences when she learned English in Form 6, she wished that her previous English teachers could have focused more on grammar instead of focusing too much on what was going to come out in the exams. She revealed that English lessons 'albeit exam-oriented were still some of the best periods of the school hour'. Now that she is a beginning teacher, she believes that it is important for English teachers to focus on grammar rules.

Fei's Previous Schooling Experience

Fei, similarly had some positive experiences about learning English, but she did mention that there were weaknesses in some of the teaching practices of her previous teachers. For instance, she indicated that her previous English teachers 'were slightly more fun or creative compared to other teachers', but there are certain parts of their teaching that can be improved such as to reduce their reliance on textbooks and focus on more on current issues like ICT to suit the students' needs. Other than that, she also did not favour the way her previous English teacher taught her literature where students were only asked to read through the book and answer questions written on the board. These methods according to her

were conventional methods of teaching which is of less relevance now. She remarked,

> *'My schooling experience has taught me that it is very important to inspire students instead of merely just teaching them. That's something that I strongly believe in. ... so for instance, it is very unfortunate that many teachers have, perhaps through many years of hard work, lost that passion to impart the love of the subject to the students. Let say you are teaching history, you no longer have that connectivity, you just want to finish the syllabus. For instance, if you're teaching language, then you just want to cover the specific topics that you know might come out. ... But language is so broad, and the love of the language can be applied for perhaps job prospects in the future, perhaps communication among friends. So that motivation to learn is lost in the dryness of fulfilling exam obligations'.* (Interview Transcript, Fei, line 123-139)

Because of the weaknesses that she found in her previous schooling experience, she felt that she had to find ways to make her lessons appealing to her students by using more relevant resources and being more creative in implementing activities. One of the activities she implemented during her practicum was that she encouraged students to perform skits during literature lessons and it turned out that students could remember the plots better when they acted it out themselves.

Aqil's Previous Learning Experience

However, Aqil had a different experience in the school that he was assigned to. He generally had positive experiences learning English at his previous primary and secondary school as his teachers interacted with the students a lot, presented themselves well, did not create gaps between students and teachers and were concerned about the students, but unfortunately, his experience during his practicum was contradictory as there was limited interaction between himself and the students due to language barriers. According to Aqil, 'the students couldn't speak Malay and English, so it was really difficult'.

During the interview, all the three participants could actively relate their previous schooling experience to their pedagogical beliefs. For instance, all the pre-service teachers in this

study could recall episodic memories of their previous schooling experience such as the teachers who have inspired them, the teaching techniques used, as well as positive and negative images of their previous teachers. They could also identify if there were any conflicts between their beliefs on language learning and their own experience of learning during their schooling days. These conflicts indirectly inspire them to be better teachers than their previous teachers.

This finding is consistent with the findings from other studies such Wong (2010). Research conducted by Wong (2010) was a quantitative research on 25 Bachelor of Education (TESL) pre-service teachers and found that they came to their beliefs from their previous learning experiences during their schooling years and recent education. Thus, the findings of the current study are consistent with the aforementioned case study which claims that the pre-service teachers' experiences as language learners can be one of the sources of their beliefs (Abdi and Asadi, 2011). These results are however not without limitations as the participants merely relied on recalled experience which may or may not be a valid recount of their experience no matter how influential it may be.

Teacher Education Programme

This study demonstrates that teacher education programmes have different degrees of influence towards the pre-service teachers' beliefs. For instance, only Neela reported that the teacher education programme is influential in the formation of her identity while Fei and Aqil stated that the programme is 'somewhat influential'.

Debreli (2012) reported that teacher education programmes have a very powerful influence on the development and change of new teachers' beliefs. The researcher highlighted that the pre-service teachers who underwent a nine-month teacher training programme tend to modify their beliefs according to what is

learned in the programme and what they experience during their teaching practicum. Some of the participants in the study also retained some of the beliefs that they had at the beginning of their teacher training programme. This was also the case in Borg's (2011) study who states that teacher training can change teachers' worldview, 'be the source of new belief', and even strengthen their conviction (p. 378).

Findings from these researchers are consistent with Neela's opinion on the impact of the teacher education programme it had on her. Neela informed that she learned theories like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs during her teacher education programme. This theory emphasises the importance of fulfilling people's basic needs which are linked to her beliefs on the importance of being sensitive towards her students' needs. She also acknowledged the idea of individual differences and therefore, she would need to adapt to the students' needs to bring out the best in them. For instance, she had to plan different lessons to fit the needs of her students which vary depending on their proficiency levels.

Apart from that, Neela stated that the courses taught in the teacher education programme such as Sociology of Education, Ethics, and Educational Psychology did influence the way she taught her students during her practicum. In the interview, she pointed out that the teacher education programme has the most influence on her beliefs about teaching compared to her previous schooling experience and curriculum specifications unlike others. According to Neela, 'most [of the new knowledge learned] come from whatever I've learned here [teacher education programme] …because with this knowledge then I know how to manipulate it to use it to gauge my strength and try to boost up my weakness.'

Fei and Aqil, on the other hand, believe that the courses taught were only 'somewhat influential' in the formation of their beliefs compared to previous schooling experience. This is consistent with the findings from research done by Mattheoudakis (2007) and Peacock (2001) in which they concluded that teacher

training does not significantly contribute to the development of the pre-service teachers' beliefs. In a quantitative study involving 351 pre-service teachers in the United States, Fives and Buehl (2008) highlighted the importance of understanding future teachers' beliefs because these beliefs influence what they 'value' and 'devalue' in teacher education programme (p.172). This study has found that teacher education programme has limited influence over the pre-service teachers' beliefs which maybe because of the profound impact that other factors have on the teachers' beliefs such as their previous learning experience or personal background. It should be noted that although Fei and Aqil think that the teacher education programme is less influential on their beliefs compared to previous schooling experience, they conveyed that they had the opportunity to implement methods which were taught in the teacher education programme and the most prominent is the emphasis on the use of ICT in the classroom. As opposed to Neela, Fei believes that although teacher education programme does somehow influence her beliefs and practice, she is still convinced that her previous learning experiences influence her beliefs and practice more compared to the teacher education programme and curriculum specifications. As she puts it,

> *'the university equips us but ultimately I believe that the students' perspective comes first … so it's good that I have a structure of how a lesson plan ought to be...but in the end I will always prioritise putting myself in the shoes of the children ... and whether or not I would respond likewise if my teacher did the same to me'.*

Based on her explanation, it is clear that her experience as a student has taught her to prioritise her students' perspective rather than follow what has been taught in any teacher training courses rigidly. In terms of her lesson plans, for instance, she feels that even though she follows the five stages of the lesson plan taught in her teacher education programme, she is aware that she should always be flexible in adjusting the lessons according to the needs and conditions of the students. For example, if the students are very tired, she would accommodate the students by probably

skipping the introduction of the lesson and teach the essence of the lesson.

The findings from this study show that the teacher education programme does provide the pre-service teachers with new knowledge but whether or not this knowledge has altered or extend their belief is beyond the focus of this study.

Curriculum Specifications

A curriculum generally involves the objectives of the course, the content to be taught, and how teaching is expected to be carried out. Although the pre-service teachers have a common set of objectives, the way different teachers interpret these specifications varies. It is claimed that teachers' subjective interpretations about the syllabus may be influenced by both epistemological and pedagogical beliefs (Ireland et al. 2017). In this particular study, it is discovered that the national curriculum specifications have varying degrees of influence on the participants' beliefs about teaching.

For example, Neela claimed that the prescribed curriculum was only used as a guide during her practicum. She often followed the themes prescribed but she made adjustments by planning specific activities to make her lessons engaging for her students. Even though the curriculum document does suggest activities that teachers can use in class, she preferred using ideas from the internet as her source of information to plan lessons. For Fei, '[she] did her level best to follow' the curriculum but she also modified the content of the document. Just like Neela, Fei often followed the themes prescribed by the ministry and found that 'the curriculum is fine ... and the direction of the ministry is right', but she would plan her own activities to fit the needs of her students like incorporating a quiz in her lesson on Wawasan 2020. Aqil, on the other hand claims that the curriculum specification is influential to him during his practicum and said the he referred to the curriculum every time he had to plan his lessons.

Findings from this study also indicate that textbooks were not the main source in defining the curriculum for all the pre-service teachers. Hence, this finding contradicts the findings by Noordin and Samad, (2003) that English teachers in Malaysia rely heavily on textbooks. It can also be concluded here that the pre-service teachers in this study were very proactive in terms of planning lessons as they did not follow the curriculum rigidly and chose to plan own activities creativity instead of carrying out the activities specified in the curriculum specifications.

It can be concluded from this study that curriculum specifications provided by the Ministry of Education do have varying degrees of influence towards the pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching. Moreover, an important finding of this research is that none of the pre-service teachers mentioned in the interview that all the three factors examined that are previous schooling experience, teacher education programme, and curriculum specifications have little or no influence on their beliefs.

In summary, the above-mentioned discussion provides evidence that all the three factors listed do influence the pre-service teachers' beliefs. However, it is worth to note that studies on beliefs are indeed complex, and beliefs may stem from many different sources including the pre-service teachers' personal experience as language learners; exposure to teaching styles, techniques or strategies that work best; established practice; education-based or research-based principles; and many others.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended for teacher educators to pay more attention to students' individual beliefs (Sheridan, 2016) as these beliefs are very dynamic and may highly impact the way they act in the teacher education programme and their teaching practices in the actual classroom. As highlighted by Poehner and Lantolf (2005), it is impossible to separate the individual and the environment in bringing about one's development as an

'interpersonal functional system formed by people and cultural artifacts act jointly'. This view is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach in which he believed in the dynamic nature of human functioning that develops and changes when exposed to the environment. Moreover, further research can also be conducted to examine how other sociocultural factors like instructional practices in a specific school, cooperating teachers, school setting, colleagues, and experiences during their practicum influence the pre-service emerging identities as teachers.

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Appendix: *INTERVIEW PROTOCOL*

Time of interview :   **Interviewer :**
Date   :   **Interviewee:**
Place   :

Section A (Personal Self)
1. Tell me about yourself
2. Why did you decide to become a teacher? Can you recall specific influences?
3. In your opinion, what are the important traits of a good teacher?
4. What is your primary goal of teaching?
5. Do you have any new insights about the metaphors that you wrote in your reflective essay assignment last time?

Section B (Image of Professional Identity)
1. Previous Schooling Experience
   a) Could you tell where you learned English during your primary and secondary school?
   b) What made you like/ dislike about learning English during your primary and secondary school?
   c) How can you describe the way your teacher taught you English at school? How did you like those ways of teaching English?
   d) Are there anything that you wish you could have done differently?
   e) How has your previous schooling experience shaped your beliefs about teaching or influenced the way you conducted your own classroom during your practicum?
   f) On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being the most influential and 1 having no influence), how far do you think your previous schooling experience influences your pedagogical beliefs and practice?

2. Teacher Education Programme
   a) How has the teacher education programme affected your beliefs about teaching or influenced the way you had conducted your own classroom during your practicum.
   b) What specific aspects of the programme (courses, practicum, etc) influenced your perceptions?
   c) How did student teaching differ/ similar to your expectations?
   d) Did you have any opportunity to teach in a particular way that you were taught in any of your teacher education courses?

e) On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being the most influential and 1 having no influence), how far do you think the teacher education programme influences your pedagogical beliefs and practice?

3. **Curriculum Specifications**
   a) Are you aware of the syllabus/ curriculum specifications used by English teachers in Malaysia?
   b) Were you exposed to the content of the curriculum during your practicum?
   c) Which level did you have to teach during your practicum?
   d) How often did you refer to the curriculum specifications during your practicum?
   e) On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being the most influential and 1 having no influence), how far do you think the curriculum specifications influence your pedagogical beliefs and practice?

4. **From the factors listed above, which (if any) do you think influences your pedagogical beliefs and practice most? Explain why/why not.**