

**The evolution of Mexican EFL teachers'  
beliefs about student-centred learning  
in relation to their teaching practices**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study analysed the educational life histories of five EFL teachers at a Mexican university. The aims of the study were: 1) to explore how these teachers' beliefs about student-centred learning had evolved over the course of their lives; and 2) to examine the relationships between their beliefs and teaching practices at different points in time. In order to achieve these aims, a life history approach was adopted, which incorporated a series of extended interviews as well as an innovative timeline activity. Classroom observations and student focus groups were also included, mainly for triangulation purposes. The four main findings which emerged from the study were as follows. Firstly, all five teachers' felt their early beliefs about teaching were predominately teacher-centred, which appeared to be linked to their immersion in the generally teacher-centred Mexican educational culture. Secondly, all five teachers felt that their beliefs eventually became more student-centred over the course of their educational life histories. These changes towards more student-centred beliefs were attributed to a number of experiences the teachers had over the course of their lives, and in particular, the characteristics of certain training courses. Thirdly, despite all the teachers eventually starting to believe in more student-centred approaches, they reported that they were rarely able to fully put these beliefs into practices. These mismatches between beliefs and practices seem to have been linked to a number of contextual constraints which they encountered within their working contexts. Finally, all five teachers started to believe in more "hybrid" approaches to teaching by the ends of their educational life histories. This implied using a combination of teacher- and student-centred practices, depending on how appropriate they were perceived to be within their specific contexts. The emergence of this more "hybrid" approach raises important questions about what we should realistically expect from educational changes and whether student-centred learning should still be considered the undisputed "gold standard" of education.

## **CONTENTS**

<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....</b>	<b>XII</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.1. Current issues in Mexican public EFL learning .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.2. A “thick description” of the context .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.2.1. <i>The Mexican education system.....</i>	<i>8</i>
1.2.2. <i>The University of San Martín (USM) .....</i>	<i>9</i>
1.2.3. <i>The management of EFL learning at the USM .....</i>	<i>11</i>
1.2.4. <i>EFL teachers at the USM .....</i>	<i>14</i>
1.2.5. <i>The EFL classroom at the USM .....</i>	<i>15</i>
1.2.6. <i>Students at the USM .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<b>1.3. My route into the study.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.1. An introduction to student-centred learning.....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1.1. <i>Defining student-centred learning .....</i>	<i>22</i>
2.1.2. <i>Student-centred learning in the context of EFL teaching .....</i>	<i>25</i>
2.1.3. <i>Reasons for introducing student-centred learning.....</i>	<i>26</i>
2.1.4. <i>Criticisms of student-centred learning.....</i>	<i>29</i>
2.1.5. <i>Issues in the implementation of student-centred learning.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<b>2.2. Student-centred learning as an educational change .....</b>	<b>32</b>
2.2.1. <i>General reasons for the failures of educational changes .....</i>	<i>33</i>
2.2.2. <i>The subjective meaning of educational change.....</i>	<i>34</i>
2.2.3. <i>Student-centred learning as a “complex” educational change .....</i>	<i>36</i>
<b>2.3. Beliefs in the context of educational changes .....</b>	<b>37</b>
2.3.1. <i>Defining beliefs .....</i>	<i>37</i>
2.3.2. <i>Factors influencing changes to teachers’ beliefs.....</i>	<i>39</i>
2.3.3. <i>Factors influencing relationships between beliefs and practices .....</i>	<i>43</i>
2.3.4. <i>Three life history case studies .....</i>	<i>49</i>
<b>2.4. Summary and gaps in the literature.....</b>	<b>55</b>
2.4.1. <i>Summary of topics covered in the literature review.....</i>	<i>55</i>
2.4.2. <i>Gaps in the literature and opportunities for study.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>3.1. Rationale for the study and research questions .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>3.2. An introduction to the life history approach.....</b>	<b>61</b>
3.2.1. <i>What is the life history approach?.....</i>	<i>61</i>
3.2.2. <i>Typical methods used in life history research .....</i>	<i>62</i>
3.2.3. <i>The philosophical underpinnings of life history research.....</i>	<i>63</i>
3.2.4. <i>Sampling in life history research.....</i>	<i>64</i>
3.2.5. <i>The role of the researcher in life history research.....</i>	<i>65</i>
3.2.6. <i>Data analysis under the life history approach .....</i>	<i>65</i>
3.2.7. <i>Criticisms of life history research – and the responses of life historians ...</i>	<i>66</i>
3.2.8. <i>“Secondary” benefits of life history research.....</i>	<i>68</i>



<b>CHAPTER 6: THE EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORY OF ISABELLA .....</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>6.1. Isabella’s interpretation of student-centred EFL learning .....</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>6.2. Key periods in Isabella’s educational life history .....</b>	<b>178</b>
6.2.1. <i>Period 1: 1994-1999: Studying at the USM and first year of teaching .....</i>	<i>179</i>
6.2.2. <i>Period 2: 1999-2008: Living and working in the USA .....</i>	<i>182</i>
6.2.3. <i>Period 3: 2008-2014: Returning to Mexico to work at the USM.....</i>	<i>191</i>
<b>6.3. Summary .....</b>	<b>206</b>
6.3.1. <i>Summary of Isabella’s teaching practices in relation to her beliefs.....</i>	<i>206</i>
6.3.2. <i>Summary of the evolution of Isabella’s beliefs.....</i>	<i>207</i>
<b>CHAPTER 7: THE EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORY OF RICARDO.....</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>7.1. Ricardo’s interpretation of student-centred EFL learning.....</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>7.2. Key periods in Ricardo’s educational life history .....</b>	<b>209</b>
7.2.1. <i>Period 1: 1988-1996: Preparing to become an EFL teacher .....</i>	<i>210</i>
7.2.2. <i>Period 2: 1996-2003: Working at SMELC .....</i>	<i>213</i>
7.2.3. <i>Period 3: 2003-2014: Working at the USM .....</i>	<i>217</i>
<b>7.3. Summary .....</b>	<b>239</b>
7.3.1. <i>Summary of the evolution of Ricardo’s beliefs.....</i>	<i>239</i>
7.3.2. <i>Summary of Ricardo’s teaching practices in relation to his beliefs .....</i>	<i>240</i>
<b>CHAPTER 8: THE EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORY OF ELIZABETH .....</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>8.1. Elizabeth’s interpretation of student-centred EFL learning .....</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>8.2. Key periods in Elizabeth’s educational life history .....</b>	<b>242</b>
8.2.1. <i>Period 1: 1999-2005: Studying at the USM and first two years teaching .</i>	<i>243</i>
8.2.2. <i>Period 2: 2005-2006: The ICELT and “Learning to Learn” courses .....</i>	<i>250</i>
8.2.3. <i>Period 3: 2006-2014: Last eight years working at the USM .....</i>	<i>255</i>
<b>8.3. Summary .....</b>	<b>267</b>
8.3.1. <i>Summary of the evolution of Elizabeth’s beliefs .....</i>	<i>267</i>
8.3.2. <i>Summary of Elizabeth’s teaching practices in relation to her beliefs.....</i>	<i>268</i>
<b>CHAPTER 9: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>270</b>
<b>9.1. Research Question 1: How have the participants’ beliefs about student-centred EFL learning evolved over the course of their educational life histories?.....</b>	<b>271</b>
9.1.1. <i>The forming and perpetuation of teacher-centred beliefs.....</i>	<i>272</i>
9.1.2. <i>Initial changes towards more student-centred beliefs.....</i>	<i>276</i>
9.1.3. <i>The reinforcement of student-centred beliefs .....</i>	<i>282</i>
9.1.4. <i>The movement towards more “hybrid” beliefs .....</i>	<i>283</i>
<b>9.2. Research Question 2: What relationships emerge between the participants’ beliefs about student-centred EFL learning and their teaching practices? .....</b>	<b>284</b>
9.2.1. <i>Path 1: Both beliefs and practices teacher-centred.....</i>	<i>287</i>
9.2.2. <i>Path 2: Practices more student-centred than beliefs .....</i>	<i>287</i>
9.2.3. <i>Path 3: Practices more teacher-centred than beliefs.....</i>	<i>289</i>
9.2.4. <i>Path 4: Both beliefs and practices student-centred .....</i>	<i>302</i>
<b>9.3. Summary of main themes emerging from the cross-case analysis .....</b>	<b>305</b>

<b>CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>10.1. Pattern 1: Early teacher-centred beliefs and practices .....</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>10.2. Pattern 2: Changes towards more student-centred beliefs .....</b>	<b>308</b>
<b>10.3. Pattern 3: A lack of “full coherence” between beliefs and practices .....</b>	<b>311</b>
10.3.1. <i>Contextual constraints as major obstacles to teachers putting their beliefs into practice .....</i>	<i>311</i>
10.3.2. <i>What might be done about the contextual constraints? .....</i>	<i>315</i>
<b>10.4. Pattern 4: The movement towards “hybrid” teaching .....</b>	<b>322</b>
10.4.1. <i>“Hybrid” teaching as a global phenomenon.....</i>	<i>323</i>
10.4.2. <i>Is student-centred learning really “the answer”? .....</i>	<i>325</i>
10.4.3. <i>Incorporating “hybrid” approaches into teacher training.....</i>	<i>327</i>
10.4.4. <i>The “reculturing” of educational decision-makers: Towards a more widespread acceptance of “hybrid” teaching? .....</i>	<i>330</i>
 <b>CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION.....</b>	 <b>332</b>
<b>11.1. Summary of main contributions.....</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>11.2. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research .....</b>	<b>334</b>
<b>11.3. Concluding remarks .....</b>	<b>337</b>
 <b>REFERENCES .....</b>	 <b>338</b>
 <b>APPENDICES .....</b>	 <b>348</b>
<b>A.1. Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms .....</b>	<b>348</b>
A.1.1. <i>Teacher Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.....</i>	<i>348</i>
A.2.2. <i>Student Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form.....</i>	<i>351</i>
<b>A.2. Teacher timelines.....</b>	<b>354</b>
A.2.1. <i>Rebecca’s timeline.....</i>	<i>354</i>
A.2.2. <i>Antonio’s timeline .....</i>	<i>355</i>
A.2.3. <i>Isabella’s timeline .....</i>	<i>357</i>
A.2.4. <i>Ricardo’s timeline .....</i>	<i>358</i>
A.2.5. <i>Elizabeth’s timeline .....</i>	<i>369</i>
<b>A.3. Sample notes from classroom observations .....</b>	<b>369</b>
<b>A.4. Examples of transcription.....</b>	<b>371</b>
A.4.1. <i>Rebecca .....</i>	<i>371</i>
A.4.2. <i>Antonio .....</i>	<i>372</i>
A.4.3. <i>Isabella.....</i>	<i>373</i>
A.4.4. <i>Ricardo.....</i>	<i>374</i>
A.4.5. <i>Elizabeth.....</i>	<i>375</i>
A.4.6. <i>Student focus group – Antonio’s group at the School of Computing.....</i>	<i>376</i>
<b>A.5. Examples of coding in NVivo.....</b>	<b>377</b>
A.5.1. <i>Example of initial chronological/thematic coding (Antonio).....</i>	<i>377</i>
A.5.2. <i>Example of initial chronological/thematic coding (Elizabeth) .....</i>	<i>378</i>
A.5.3. <i>Example of a thematic category (Rebecca – “importance of reflection”) .....</i>	<i>379</i>
A.5.4. <i>Example of coding for triangulation (Rebecca).....</i>	<i>380</i>
A.5.5. <i>Example of coding for triangulation (Isabella).....</i>	<i>381</i>
A.5.6. <i>Example of cross-case coding (Research Question 1).....</i>	<i>382</i>
A.5.7. <i>Example of cross-case coding (Research Question 2).....</i>	<i>383</i>

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 2.1.2(i). Characteristics of a more teacher-centred EFL classroom as opposed to a more student-centred EFL classroom .....	26
Table 2.1.5(i). Summary of Schweisfurth’s review of issues in the implementation of student-centred learning in developing countries .....	31
Table 2.3.3(i). Four theoretical “Paths” of belief and behaviour change.....	44
Table 2.3.3(ii). The four “Paths” of belief and behaviour change in terms of the change from teacher-centred to student-centred learning .....	44
Table 2.3.3(iii). Commonly cited contextual constraints.....	47
Table 3.3(i). Stages of the data collection process.....	70
Table 3.3.2(i). Key biographical information of the teacher participants.....	75
Table 3.3.8(i). Summary of student focus groups.....	89
Table 9.1(i). Summary of key themes emerging from Research Question 1 .....	272
Table 9.2(i). The four “Paths” of belief and behaviour change in terms of the change from teacher-centred to student-centred learning .....	285
Table 9.2(ii). Summary of key themes emerging from Research Question 2.....	286
Table 10.2(i). Summary of case studies cited in the Literature Review relating to the characteristics of training courses which were considered more likely to have an impact on teachers’ beliefs.....	309
Table 10.3(i). Summary of case studies cited in the Literature Review relating to contextual constraints which were seen to prevent teachers from putting their beliefs into practice .....	312

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Fig. 3.3.7(i). Rebecca's timeline (with explanations in yellow boxes).....	88
Fig. 3.3.13(i). Graph summarising how Rebecca's beliefs evolved in relation to her teaching practices over the course of her educational life history .....	94
Fig. 4.2.1.1(i). Summary of Rebecca's beliefs about teaching between 1991 and 2000 (extract from timeline) .....	111
Fig. 4.2.1.1(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1991 and 2000 .....	112
Fig. 4.2.1.1(iii). Words Rebecca used to describe the way she saw herself as a teacher between 1991 and 2000 (extract from timeline) .....	113
Fig. 4.2.1.1(iv). Rebecca's concept map showing her perceived relationships with students, authorities and other EFL teachers between 1991 and 2000 (extract from timeline) .....	114
Fig. 4.2.1.2(i). Summary of Rebecca's perceived teaching practices between 1995 and 2000 (extract from timeline) .....	116
Fig. 4.2.1.2(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1991 and 2000 .....	116
Fig. 4.2.2.1(i). Summary of Rebecca's beliefs about teaching between 2000 and 2007 (extract from timeline) .....	117
Fig. 4.2.2.1(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1991 and 2007 .....	118
Fig. 4.2.2.2(i). Summary of Rebecca's perceived teaching practices between 2000 and 2007 (extract from timeline) .....	119
Fig. 4.2.2.2(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1991 and 2007 .....	120
Fig. 4.2.2.2(iii). Summary of obstacles preventing Rebecca from implementing Communicative Language Teaching after the ICELT course (extract from timeline) .	121
Fig. 4.2.3.1(i). Summary of Rebecca's beliefs about teaching between 2007 and 2008 (extract from timeline) .....	122
Fig. 4.2.3.1(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1991 and 2008 .....	123
Fig. 4.2.3.1(iii). Words Rebecca used to describe the way she saw herself as a teacher after the Master's (extract from timeline) .....	126
Fig. 4.2.4.1(i). Summary of Rebecca's beliefs about teaching between 2008 and 2014 (extract from timeline) .....	128
Fig. 4.2.4.1(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1991 and 2014 .....	129
Fig. 4.2.4.1(iii). Rebecca's concept maps showing her perceived relationships with students, authorities and other EFL teachers (Pre- and Post-Master's) (extracts from timeline) .....	131

Fig. 4.2.4.2(i). Summary of Rebecca’s teaching practices between 2008 and 2014 (extract from timeline).....	134
Fig. 4.2.4.2(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1991 and 2014.....	134
Fig. 4.2.4.2(iii). Extract from timeline showing Rebecca’s transition towards a more “hybrid” approach (extract from timeline).....	137
Fig. 4.2.4.2(iv). Summary of obstacles preventing Rebecca from putting her beliefs into practice between 2008 and 2014 (extract from timeline).....	138
Fig. 4.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Rebecca’s beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of her educational life history.....	142
Fig. 4.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Rebecca’s beliefs in relation to her teaching practices over the course of her educational life history .....	143
Fig. 5.2.1.1(i). Graph summarising Antonio’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 2003 and 2007 .....	147
Fig. 5.2.1.1(ii). Antonio’s concept map showing his perceived relationships with students between 2003 and 2007 (extract from timeline) .....	150
Fig. 5.2.1.2(i). Graph summarising Antonio’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 2003 and 2007 .....	151
Fig. 5.2.2.1(i). Graph summarising Antonio’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 2003 and 2009 .....	153
Fig. 5.2.2.2(i). Graph summarising Antonio’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 2003 and 2009 .....	157
Fig. 5.2.3.1(i). Graph summarising Antonio’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 2003 and 2014 .....	159
Fig. 5.2.3.1(ii). Antonio’s concept map showing his perceived relationships with students between 2003 and 2007 (extract from timeline) .....	162
Fig. 5.2.3.1(iii). Antonio’s concept map showing his perceived relationships with students between 2007 and 2014 (extract from timeline) .....	162
Fig. 5.2.3.2(i). Graph summarising Antonio’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 2003 and 2014 .....	167
Fig. 5.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Antonio’s beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of his educational life history .....	175
Fig. 5.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Antonio’s beliefs in relation to his teaching practices over the course of his educational life history.....	176
Fig. 6.2.1.1(i). Graph summarising Isabella’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1994 and 1999 .....	179
Fig. 6.2.1.2(i). Graph summarising Isabella’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1994 and 1999.....	182
Fig. 6.2.2.1(i). Graph summarising Isabella’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1994 and 2008 .....	183
Fig. 6.2.2.2(i). Graph summarising Isabella’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1994 and 2008.....	187

Fig. 6.2.3.1(i). Graph summarising Isabella’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1994 and 2014 .....	192
Fig. 6.2.3.2(i). Graph summarising Isabella’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1994 and 2014.....	199
Fig. 6.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Isabella’s beliefs in relation to her teaching practices over the course of her educational life history .....	206
Fig. 6.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Isabella’s beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of her educational life history.....	207
Fig. 7.2.1.1(i). Graph summarising Ricardo’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 1988 and 1996 .....	210
Fig. 7.2.2.1(i). Graph summarising Ricardo’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 1996 and 2003 .....	214
Fig. 7.2.2.2(i). Graph summarising Ricardo’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 1996 and 2003 .....	216
Fig. 7.2.3.1(i). Graph summarising Ricardo’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 1988 and 2014 .....	218
Fig. 7.2.3.2(i). Graph summarising Ricardo’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 1988 and 2014 .....	228
Fig. 7.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Ricardo’s beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of his educational life history .....	239
Fig. 7.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Ricardo’s belief in relation to his teaching practices over the course of his educational life history.....	240
Fig. 8.2.1.1(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1999 and 2005 .....	243
Fig. 8.2.1.2(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1999 and 2005 .....	249
Fig. 8.2.2.1(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1999 and 2006 .....	251
Fig. 8.2.2.2(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1999 and 2006.....	254
Fig. 8.2.3.1(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1999 and 2014 .....	256
Fig. 8.2.3.2(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1999 and 2014.....	263
Fig. 8.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Elizabeth’s beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of her educational life history .....	267
Fig. 8.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Elizabeth’s beliefs in relation to her teaching practices over the course of her educational life history .....	268
Fig. 10.3.2.2(i). Diagram suggesting some of the people who might need to change in order to facilitate the implementation of student-centred EFL learning in Mexico.....	319

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ANUIES	Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior (National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions)
BA	Bachelor of Arts
CA	Conversation Analysis
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CEFR	Common European Framework for Languages
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EGP	English for General Purposes
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ICELT	International Certificate in English Language Teaching
IELTS	International English Language Test System
LCE	Learner-centred Education
MA	Master of Arts
MEd	Master of Education
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PIDE	Plan Institucional de Desarrollo (“Institutional Development Plan” at the University of San Martín)
RQ	Research Question
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Mexican Ministry of Education)
SMELC	San Martín English Language College
TBL	Task-Based Learning
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UED	University English Department (at the University of San Martín)
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US / USA	United States / United States of America
USM	University of San Martín

## **INTRODUCTION**

The movement from traditional “teacher-centred” approaches towards more “student-centred” approaches is one of the most prominent educational changes which is happening all over the world (Elkind, 2004; UNESCO, 2008; Schweisfurth, 2013). Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, where traditional grammar-based approaches are increasingly being replaced by more communicative, student-centred approaches (Kurihara and Samimy, 2007; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Tsui, 2007; Smotrova, 2009). However, the implementation of student-centred learning in EFL classrooms has generally not been as successful as hoped, especially in developing countries (Zappa-Hollman, 2007; Matear, 2008; de Segovia and Hardison, 2009; Obaidul Hamid, 2010). Mexico, the country in which this study took place, has not been an exception to this trend. Indeed, despite student-centred approaches being introduced in various forms over the last few decades, the majority of Mexican classrooms have remained generally teacher-centred (OECD, 2009; Sayer, 2012; Ramírez Romero and Pamplón Irigoyen, 2012; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014).

Perhaps one of the main reasons why the implementation of student-centred EFL learning has been so unsuccessful in Mexico is that educational planners have failed to recognise the inherent complexity of this educational change. Fullan (2007) defines a “complex change” as one which not only implies a change in teachers’ practices, but also changes in their fundamental beliefs about education. Indeed, a common theme within the educational change literature is that both beliefs *and* practices may need to change if “complex changes” like the introduction of student-centred (EFL) learning are to have a greater chance of being successful (Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Cross and Hong, 2011).

With this in mind, this thesis aims to shed light on some of the factors which influence teacher belief and behaviour change. In order to do this, I carried out a research study with five EFL teachers at a Mexican university. Using a life history approach, I explored how these five teachers’ beliefs and practices evolved over time and what they felt were the reasons for these changes. The methodological approach incorporated two extended interviews and a timeline activity, as well as classroom observations and student focus groups for triangulation purposes.

Over the five cases, the teacher participants identified several examples of experiences which they felt had been more or less successful at influencing changes in their beliefs. Several examples also emerged of conditions which the teachers felt had either helped or hindered them from putting their beliefs into practice. Moreover, all five teachers eventually started teaching in a more “hybrid” way, in which they used a mixture of teacher- and student-centred approaches depending on their perceived appropriateness within particular situations. As I suggest in the Discussion chapter, these findings may have important implications for the way educational changes like the introduction of student-centred (EFL) learning are conceptualised and implemented.

This thesis is made up of 11 chapters. In Chapter 1 (Contextual Background), I introduce the main issues which led me to carry out the study. I briefly describe the current EFL learning situation in Mexico, before providing a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the context in which the study took place. At the end of the chapter, I explain my personal route into the study, and my individual motivations to embark upon the research.

In Chapter 2 (Literature Review), I describe my journey through the educational change literature which would eventually lead me towards the specific focus of my study. I begin the chapter by introducing the concept of “student-centred learning”, which, as we shall see throughout this thesis, is by no means straightforward to define. I then focus on some of the general reasons why educational changes (such as the movement from teacher-centred to student-centred learning) have tended to be unsuccessful in so many contexts across the world. At this point, it became clear that implementing student-centred learning represented a “complex change” (Fullan, 2007), given that it implied not only a change in teachers’ practices, but also a change in their beliefs. I therefore decided to focus in more detail on the role beliefs play during educational changes, and the often complex relationships between teachers’ beliefs and their practices. At the end of the Literature Review chapter, I establish the main gaps in knowledge and opportunities for study which emerged from my reading.

In Chapter 3 (Methodology), I outline the research questions of the study, and explain the specific steps I took to try and answer them. I begin the chapter by establishing the main methodological approach I chose to adopt, which was that of “life history”. I then describe in detail all 15 stages of data collection and analysis, justifying some of the most

important decisions I made at each stage. I consider some of the main ways in which I attempted to maximise the “trustworthiness” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the findings, and address some of the main issues regarding my role as a researcher and my relationships with the participants. I conclude the Methodology chapter by briefly mentioning some of the key ethical considerations of the study, and explaining how I decided to present the findings in the Data Analysis chapters.

In Chapters 4-8 (Data Analysis), I present the educational life histories of each teacher participant. Over these five chapters, I analyse how the teachers felt their beliefs and practices had evolved over time, and what might have been the reasons for these changes. Each teacher case is presented chronologically, and is divided into key time periods which were established by the participants. Within these chapters, I draw upon a variety of sources, including interviews, timelines produced by teachers, as well as triangulation from classroom observations and student focus groups. Furthermore, I attempt to illustrate the main changes in participants’ educational life histories through the use of summary graphs (these are explained in the Methodology chapter).

In Chapter 9 (Cross-Case Analysis), I attempt to bring together some of the most common themes which emerged over the previous five cases. Here, I utilise summary tables in order to visually depict which themes were explicitly mentioned by which participant(s) in their educational life histories. From the Cross-Case Analysis, four main “patterns” emerged; these would form the basis of the following Discussion chapter.

In Chapter 10 (Discussion of Findings), I consider how the four main “patterns” established in the previous chapter relate to the wider literature on the implementation of student-centred learning and educational change in general. I compare the experiences of my five participants with other case studies in the educational change literature, both in terms of EFL teaching in Mexico as well as other more general examples from other countries. From here, I consider what the findings might mean in terms of how we conceptualise and implement educational changes such as student-centred (EFL) learning.

Finally, in Chapter 11 (Conclusions), I summarise the main contributions and implications and of the study. I outline the key findings which emerged from the research, and summarise its main contributions to the literature. I briefly acknowledge some of the

main limitations of the study, and propose some ideas for further research. Finally, I make some reflections about how the study has contributed to my own personal and professional development.

## **CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND**

This chapter introduces the key issues which initially guided me towards carrying out this study. I begin this chapter by outlining some of the main issues in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Mexico. I then provide a “thick description” of the context in which the study took place, in order for the reader to be in a better position to make sense of the data. Finally, I introduce myself, and describe how my experiences at the USM (and in Mexico in general) sparked my curiosity to explore these issues in greater depth through this research project.

### **1.1. Current issues in Mexican public EFL learning**

In the vast majority of countries across the world, a great deal of importance is placed on learning English as a Foreign Language. There are few, if any, national education systems in which English does not form part of the public curricula; for example, every country in Latin America has introduced English classes in public secondary schools or earlier (Cha and Ham, 2008). When justifying the inclusion of English, curriculum documents tend to cite how important English is expected to be in order for countries to remain competitive in an increasingly globalised world, for example in Argentina (Zappa-Hollman, 2007), Bangladesh (Obaidul Hamid, 2010), Chile (Matear, 2008) and Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009). Mexico, the country in which this research project took place, has followed very similar tendencies to the rest of the world in this respect (Sayer, 2015). English has been taught in Mexican public secondary schools since at least 1954, and has more recently been introduced in Primary and even Pre-Primary Education (SEP, 2010b). In practical terms, this has meant that millions of Mexicans have studied English from as early as kindergarten right through to the end of their undergraduate degrees.

However, despite what must be a considerable investment of time, effort and resources, reports from various sources around the world have indicated that results have not been as successful as hoped (Zappa-Hollman, 2007; Matear, 2008; de Segovia and Hardison, 2009; Obaidul Hamid, 2010). Unfortunately, Mexico is no exception to this trend. While Mexican students are expected to reach at least Common European Framework (CEFR) Level B2 by the time they finish high school (SEP, 2010a), very few actually do, with the

majority beginning their university degrees with little or no English at all (Davies, 2009; Sayer, 2012; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014; Rodríguez-Ramírez, 2014). González Robles et al. (2004) assessed the English language levels of almost 5000 students at nine universities in the Mexico City area, and found that only 8% of those who had entered university from the Mexican public education system could be classified as CEFR Level B1 or higher. This figure only increased to 25% for those at the end of their degrees. This research was conducted over a decade ago, which might cast doubt over its validity today. However, most of what has been written since then, coupled with my own experience of working in Mexico, suggest that the findings of González Robles and her colleagues are as relevant now as they were back then.

Davies (2009: 7) has called the Mexican public EFL teaching situation a “general failure”, and if the statistics from González Robles and her colleagues are accurate, then it is difficult to disagree with this assessment. As he highlights, it will no longer be feasible to continue to allocate so much time, effort and resources to the teaching of English in public education systems if programs continue to fail to come close to their hoped-for outcomes.

It is understandable, then, that educational policymakers would want to do something in order to address such poor results. A somewhat radical proposal, suggested by Davies (2009), is to make EFL learning non-compulsory. Davies proposes that Mexican public EFL classes should not be forced upon students after their first year of secondary school, and that instead free English classes could be provided in government-run language centres for those students who were genuinely interested in them. However, as the author himself recognises, the likelihood of this idea being put into practice is low, given the continued worldwide perception that English is important for development in countries like Mexico (Davies, 2009; Sayer, 2015). Indeed, instead of reducing the hours English is taught in the public system, the exact opposite strategy has tended to be employed, with English being introduced to Mexican children at an increasingly early age (SEP, 2010a).

Aside from the number of hours dedicated to English, the other main plan of action has been to introduce new teaching approaches. Following international trends, one of the main themes has been to attempt to replace traditional grammar-based methods with new approaches which are thought to make it more likely that students will actually be able to use the language in real situations. Numerous new teaching strategies have been

encouraged over the last few decades, such as Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Learning, “Competency”-Based Learning, and English for Specific Purposes (SEP, 1996; 2006; 2010a). All of these approaches are different; however, they arguably belong to a much broader educational change: the movement from predominately “teacher-centred” approaches towards more “student-centred” approaches (Jacobs and Farrell, 2001; de Segovia and Hardison, 2009; Griffith and Lim, 2010).

The change from teacher-centred to more student-centred approaches is a complex phenomenon, and I will not be able to do justice to such complexity until the following chapter. However, what is most important to bear in mind at this stage is that reports from various countries across the world have suggested that the transition towards student-centred learning has not been very successful, especially in developing countries (Elkind, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011; Song, 2015). Indeed, despite the fact that several of these new student-centred approaches have been introduced in Mexico over the last few decades, the literature suggests that most EFL classes in Mexico remain largely teacher-centred (OECD, 2009; Sayer, 2012; Ramírez Romero and Pamplón Irigoyen, 2012; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014).

EFL learning in Mexico therefore finds itself with a significant problem. Clearly, traditional teacher-centred approaches to teaching English are not producing desired results, but the proposed alternatives do not seem to be visible in the vast majority of classrooms. In the next chapter, I begin to explore some of the reasons why this might be the case. However, before this, it is important to familiarise ourselves with the context in which this research was carried out.

## **1.2. A “thick description” of the context**

The place in which this research project took place was the “University of San Martín” (USM) in Mexico. This section aims to describe the USM in detail. By providing such a “thick description” of the context (Geertz, 1973), it is hoped that the reader will have a greater chance of making sense of the data when it comes to the Data Analysis chapters. It is important to mention that the real name of the institution has been replaced by a pseudonym for reasons of confidentiality, and certain other pieces of information which might make the university identifiable has also been changed or omitted. Furthermore,

although some of the information in this chapter has been taken from official University documents, I am not able to reference these texts, as this would reveal the USM's true identity (see Section 3.6.3 of the Methodology chapter for more details).

Drawing on the work of Wedell and Malderez (2013), I have decided to divide this section into various "layers". There are numerous ways in which I could have arranged these layers; however, in the end, I decided to start from a more general perspective (Mexico; its educational system and its dominant educational culture) and move towards more specific aspects (the USM; the management of EFL learning at the USM; EFL teachers at the USM; the physical classroom setup; the students). I will therefore begin by describing some of the key features of the Mexican education system.

### *1.2.1. The Mexican education system*

Education in Mexico is administrated by the National Ministry of Education (in Spanish the Secretaría de Educación Pública – SEP). The Mexican education system is divided into five main levels: "educación preescolar" (preschool education – ages 3 to 6), "educación primaria" (primary education – ages 6-12), "educación secundaria" (secondary education – ages 12-15), "educación media básica" (high school – ages 15 to 18) and "educación superior" (higher education – ages 18 and over). The SEP is responsible for regulating standards at all of these levels except that of higher education. Mexico's public or "state" universities (one of which being the University of San Martín) are designated as "autonomous", meaning they are largely free to make their own decisions regarding teaching, learning, and research. There are also numerous private schools and universities in Mexico who are also granted a certain degree of autonomy. However, all of these institutions must acquire permissions and licences from the Ministry of Education before they can operate.

I do not think it would be unfair to say that Mexico is a generally traditional country, and its education system certainly reflects this. Indeed, despite attempts since the 1970s to "modernise" Mexican education, the dominant education culture to which most Mexicans are exposed to continues to consist of traditional, teacher-centred approaches (Davies, 2009; Ramírez Romero, 2010; Sayer, 2012; 2015). As mentioned in the previous section, although the SEP has followed international trends in trying to introduce new teaching

approaches such as student-centred learning (SEP, 1996; 2006; 2010a), most Mexican classrooms have remained predominately teacher-centred (OECD, 2009; Sayer, 2012; Ramírez Romero and Pamplón Irigoyen, 2012; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014). Of course, it must be pointed out that not all teachers teach in this way. As we shall see throughout this thesis, many teachers have made a conscious effort to diverge from the teacher-centred approaches which seem to characterise the Mexican educational culture.

### *1.2.2. The University of San Martín (USM)*

The University of San Martín (USM) is a public university in a medium-sized city in Mexico. It is the only public university in the state, although it is made up of a number of different regional campuses which are distributed in a number of towns and cities throughout the state. In total, the University offers 60 undergraduate courses and 20 postgraduate courses, covering a wide range of disciplines. The University also administrates a number of state-run high schools, and students who are accepted into these high schools tend to continue to study at the USM when they finish school. There are approximately 10,000 undergraduate students at the USM and around 1,000 postgraduates.

Despite being a public university with highly-subsidised and therefore affordable tuition fees, the USM has a good reputation in the state and in Mexico in general. Although there are several other private universities in the state, many students prefer to study at the USM, considering it a more prestigious option. Additionally, many of the most highly-qualified teachers and researchers have opted to work at the USM rather than at the private universities, as it offers good working conditions, competitive salaries and high levels of job security.

As mentioned at the beginning of this sub-section, the USM is one of Mexico's "autonomous" state universities. This means that, in general terms, it is able to manage itself independently, without a great deal of interference from the national Ministry of Education (SEP). Furthermore, it is relevant to note that the University has a policy called "libertad de cátedra", which might be loosely translated as "academic freedom". This means that, although certain educational approaches may be suggested or even

encouraged by the University's central authorities, each teacher has the choice to decide how they feel is best to teach.

The USM is a member of the Mexican National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES in Spanish), a non-governmental organisation which provides a series of guidelines in order to improve standards of higher education in the country. In addition, the USM produces an Institutional Development Plan (PIDE in Spanish) every four years, which sets out its general agenda for the period. These Institutional Development Plans have tended to follow international trends and fashions. For example, over the last decade, some of their main themes have been "promoting student-centred learning", "the teaching of real-life competences", and most recently to encourage students to have "social responsibility". However, these changes seem to have been introduced in rather general terms, and have not necessarily been followed-up by concrete changes. Furthermore, the University's policy of "academic freedom" means that each teacher is still relatively free to teach in the way that they think is best.

There are 25 different university departments or "Schools" at the USM, which are spread over the University's numerous regional campuses. Each of these Schools is run by a Head of School, who is granted a great deal of responsibility and a certain degree of autonomy in its running. Most of the academic and administrative staff at the University have "full-time" contracts, which means they effectively have "jobs for life". Given the highly stable nature of these jobs, it is understandable that they are highly sought after. The Heads of School, as well as "full-time" academic staff, have their own offices.

The USM is located in city of San Martín, the capital city of the state with a population of approximately 500,000 inhabitants. The city is currently experiencing a period of rapid growth, and has modernised considerably over the last few decades. However, many areas of the city, including its historic centre, still retain a mixture of colonial and indigenous culture and architecture. Like the rest of the country, Spanish is the main language spoken in San Martín, with only a very small minority speaking indigenous languages. Although most people will have attempted to learn English at one point or another over the course of their lives, very few actually use it on a daily basis. There are few companies in the state which require their workers to use English regularly, although many still include a certain level of English as a pre-requisite in order to apply for better positions. The climate in San Martín is hot and humid all year round, although it is slightly cooler in winter time.

It is dry most of the year, except in the rainy season which usually extends from July to October. When it rains in San Martín, it pours, and flooding can become an issue in the rainy season. The main industry in the city is services, and the main industry in the state is agriculture. A number of tropical fruits grow in the state and are exported to different countries around the world. San Martín is not particularly touristy.

The main campus of the USM (where this research project took place) is located in the city of San Martín. The campus, which is located in a lower-middle class area towards the outskirts of the city, is very pleasant and well-kept, with lots of palm trees and green spaces. Most of the buildings at the university have a unique design from the outside, although most are two-stories high, and look very similar from the inside (see Section 1.2.5 below). There is a large fence around the University, with several entrances guarded by security personnel. Teachers and students are supposed to carry identification in order to enter, but security does not seem to be taken particularly seriously (possibly because crime levels in the city of San Martín are comparatively low, or at least they were at the time of data collection). On the other side of the fence, there are a several open-air street food stands, which sell typical Mexican food (tacos, burritos, etc.). Many students and teachers (as well as the researcher) have been known to visit these stalls to have “almuerzo” (second breakfast) between 9 and 11am. There are many small cafes and seating areas in the campus, and a quite popular “student service area” which also serves food. Every School has at least one computer room, each of which is administrated by a full-time attendant. When these computer areas are not being used for teaching, they can be used by the students.

### *1.2.3. The management of EFL learning at the USM*

The teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the USM has experienced a number of developments over the last three decades. In 1993, English was made a compulsory subject on all of the USM’s undergraduate programs (as well as at all of the University’s high schools). At this time, a specialised language department was created called the University English Department, receiving funding from the central University administration. The main aims of this department were to:

1. Hire and allocate potential EFL teaching candidates;
2. Manage teacher training for the USM's EFL teachers;
3. Create and manage an "Independent Learning Centre" for students to practice English outside of the classroom; and
4. Propose policies to improve EFL learning at the University.

The creation of the UED signified a considerable commitment on the part of the USM's authorities to invest in EFL learning. However, those who were involved at the UED have commented that the first two years of its existence were characterised by a general lack of structure and direction. In response to this, in 1995, a standardised, mainly grammar-based syllabus was introduced onto all of the University's degree programs. This was generally seen to be more successful than the previous; however, a significant issue was that students' English levels were not taken into account, meaning there were a wide range of different levels in each group. Therefore, in 2000, the decision was made to separate students into groups depending on their language levels.

This way of organising English continued without significant changes for the next eight years. During this period, the UED provided a number of training courses for its EFL teachers. Many of these courses were based around topics related to student-centred learning. However, the USM's policy of "academic freedom" meant that these courses were not compulsory, meaning that only those teachers who were interested in taking them decided to attend. The vast majority of teachers have attended at least one of these courses.

In addition to the support provided by the UED, EFL teachers were also overseen, to a certain extent, by the Heads of the individual Schools in which they worked. Within the budget of these Schools, funds were also allocated to certain professional development opportunities for English teachers. Some teachers chose to participate on these courses, but again, this took place on a purely voluntary basis.

In 2008, the UED again made another significant change to the way EFL teaching was taught. It decided to abandon the teaching of English for General Purposes (EGP), and started to encourage teachers to adapt their English classes to the contents of the students' degrees (as in English for Specific Purposes; ESP). At this stage, most Schools decided to revert back to including a wide range of different language levels in the same group.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was also introduced at this time. CLIL is an approach to language learning in which teachers try to adapt the content of English classes to the content of different area disciplines. There are two kinds of CLIL: “soft” CLIL and “hard” CLIL. “Soft” CLIL is when EFL teachers try to integrate specific area content into their English classes. “Hard” CLIL, on the other hand, is when “content teachers”, ideally those who have a decent command of English, teach some or all of their classes in English. Since 2008, a combination of “soft” and “hard” CLIL has been introduced at the USM, and both English teachers and “content teachers” have been working together to try and make it successful. All English teachers at the USM were invited to attend the introductory CLIL courses, but as mentioned previously, the “academic freedom” of the University meant that none of them were forced to do so.

A final important change came in 2014, when the USM’s central authorities decided to significantly reduce the responsibilities of the UED, transferring decision-making for English teaching to its individual Schools. What this has meant is that the way English is taught in a particular School now largely depends on its Head of School. Some Heads of School have been very much in favour of more student-centred approaches to EFL learning, whereas others have tended to favour more traditional teacher-centred approaches.

At the time of data collection, English has continued to be taught on every degree program at the USM. Each of these degree programs includes three contact hours of English per week (usually divided into three one-hour classes), with certain exceptions such as at the School of Languages, which understandably dedicates more hours to English. Given the movement towards ESP/CLIL which began in 2008, students usually take English in the same classrooms and with the same classmates as their main degree subjects, and are generally *not* divided into language levels.

One of the general aims of the University is for all its students to possess at least CEFR Level B2 by the time they graduate, but this is not an official University requirement, and final grades are left to the discretion of the teacher. There are some exceptions to this, such as the School of Languages and the School of Tourism, where students must attain certain scores on the “institutional” TOEFL exam in order to graduate. Generally, students’ levels of English tend to be quite low, although this varies by School and by

individual student. In reality, most students “pass” their English classes, but still leave the University with minimal proficiency in the language.

#### *1.2.4. EFL teachers at the USM*

The USM hires over 150 different English teachers, the majority of whom divide their time between several of the University’s different departments or “Schools”. In contrast to most other academic and administrative staff at the University, English teachers are almost always hired on non-permanent contracts, and are paid on an hourly basis. Because of this, several of them also work in other jobs at other schools and universities. This means that the time and energy they have to plan classes and consider changes to their teaching practices is often somewhat limited.

The ages of the teachers vary considerably. Some of the younger teachers at the USM are still in their early twenties, whilst some of the older teachers are over sixty. Almost all the teachers at the USM are native Mexican Spanish-speakers, with only one or two exceptions. The teachers’ level of English is generally very good, with most at CEFR Level C1 (advanced), and almost all at Level B2 (upper intermediate). As is often the case in Mexico, many of the EFL teachers have spent considerable time living in the United States and/or have family or relatives who live there.

A considerable proportion of the teachers (including all five participants of this study) graduated from the USM’s own undergraduate degree at the School of Languages. The general consensus seems to be that this degree was largely theoretical in nature, and not overly relevant in terms of their practical teaching. In addition to their undergraduate degrees, most teachers have attended at least one additional course offered to them by the USM or the University English Department. As mentioned previously, some of these courses were related to topics linked in some way to the core concepts of student-centred learning. Some of the teachers have clearly made a conscious effort to try and introduce more student-centred activities (for example by employing communicative activities or practical tasks related to students’ degree subjects). However, other teachers continue to adopt considerably more teacher-centred approaches (for example, lecturing about grammatical structures and giving the students gap-fill exercises to fill in).

As generally seems to be the case in Mexico, EFL teachers are generally treated with a high level of respect by the students. One example of this is that they are almost always referred to using the formal “usted” form, as opposed to the more informal “tú” form. English teachers also seem to be respected by the academic and administrative staff, in terms of the way they are spoken to at the University. However, it would not be unfair to suggest that English is not taken as seriously as the main “content” subjects of the students’ degrees. For example, while other teachers are given their own offices, English teachers are not (although some Schools, such as the School of Marketing, have provided EFL teachers with small communal cubicles to share). Another example of English perhaps not being taken as seriously as other subjects is the time that English classes are programmed. Indeed, English teachers are often given the “graveyard shifts” of first thing in the morning (7am) or right on Mexican lunchtime (2pm). Furthermore, English teachers are not provided with a shared space to teach, meaning that they often have to rush from classroom to classroom. As the USM has several campuses, this often means travelling to different sides of the city to teach at different Schools in the same day.

#### *1.2.5. The EFL classroom at the USM*

As mentioned earlier, most of the classrooms at the USM look fairly alike. Almost all of them consist of four rows of four small desks. Each of these desks has space for two chairs, thus accommodating two students (both facing forwards towards the teacher). There is also a desk at the front of the class for the teacher, with a small filing cabinet. If the teacher wishes to move the desks around, these must be put back in place at the end of the lesson. In some classrooms, there is an elevated “stage” for the teacher to stand on. This, together with the arrangement of the desks, seems to encourage a rather teacher-centred “lecturing” style. The number of students varies, but there are typically between 25 and 35 students in each group.

Each classroom has its own whiteboard. Most classrooms are also equipped to use overhead projectors, although these do not always work effectively. There are sometimes board markers and an eraser in the classroom, although these tend not to be in the best condition, meaning that teachers often bring their own. If teachers wish to use photocopied material, they must produce and pay for these themselves. Because of the intense heat in the city of San Martín, there are six ceiling fans per classroom, which are

often left on for the duration of the class. There are usually windows in each classroom, which the students almost always leave open for ventilation. When these windows are open, it can become somewhat noisy, and students can become distracted by events happening outside of the window. Some classrooms have air-conditioning, but this is not widely used. I am not sure why this is the case. In general, the teaching spaces at the USM are kept in a reasonably good condition. The students generally seem to take care of their classrooms and they are regularly cleaned by the University staff.

### *1.2.6. Students at the USM*

A final aspect of the context I will describe is the student body at the USM. Most of the students I encountered at the USM were in their late teens or early twenties, with only one or two exceptions. Although as I mentioned earlier the students were generally very respectful to their teachers, student participation and enthusiasm for the subject can be fairly low. Punctuality is also notoriously bad (although this may be a symptom of the Mexican public in general!).

Perhaps one of the reasons for a lack of enthusiasm towards English is a certain level of frustration at having had to repeat the same grammar points (such as the verb “to be”) over and over again since they were young children. However, in my experience, even when the teachers have provided more communicative, student-centred activities, some students continued to demonstrate a lack of effort and interest towards English. Furthermore, although some students may be frustrated with traditional teacher-centred approaches, they seem to be less comfortable when learning in a more student-centred way. For example, when they are no longer dependent on the teacher to explicitly provide them with content and guidance, many of them find it difficult to adapt. This may be linked to their previous experiences of teaching and learning, which are often extremely teacher-centred.

Finally, as mentioned previously, levels of English vary considerably between different students at the USM. Although almost all of the students have been taught English from at least secondary school level, some have attended private schools and/or private language institutes.

I hope that this “thick description” has provided the reader with a reasonably detailed picture of the EFL teaching situation at the USM. In the next section, I explain how I personally fit into the context of EFL learning in Mexico, and more specifically, how I became connected to EFL learning at the University of San Martín.

### **1.3. My route into the study**

Before continuing on to the Literature Review chapter, I feel that it is important to introduce myself and explain what it was that guided me towards conducting a piece of research about EFL teaching at a Mexican university. As I explain in the Methodology chapter, providing this description is one of the key ways in which the reader may begin to decide the extent to which the findings of the study have been affected by my own preconceptions and bias.

I am a British national from Newcastle in the northeast of England. I was interested in learning languages at school and decided to study for a BA in Spanish at the University of Leeds. However, before starting my degree, I decided to go on a “gap year” to Mexico, where I volunteered as a journalist for a Mexican newspaper. I instantly fell in love with Mexico, and over the next few years, I spent as much time as I could there. After the first year of my university degree in Leeds, I decided to suspend my studies for a year, returning to Mexico to work as an EFL teacher. Since then, I have divided my time between finishing my studies (BA, MA and now PhD) and developing my career as an EFL teacher. In total, I have spent approximately five years living and working in Mexico. In that time, I have worked in a variety of EFL contexts.

My first experiences of formally teaching English as a Foreign Language came during a four-week intensive pre-service training course run by an international organisation in Mexico. I have very fond memories of this course and especially of its Head Trainer, who I have remained good friends with ever since. The course was very positive about student-centred learning approaches, and this was certainly “music to my ears”. I say this because my experiences of language learning (and learning in general) in the UK had been largely teacher-centred, and I had grown increasingly frustrated with these approaches, much preferring more hands-on, interactive approaches. I was therefore strongly in favour of student-centred approaches by the end of the course, and this enthusiasm continued as I

began to work on my PhD. To this day, I am still very positive about student-centred learning, although, as we shall see, I have developed a somewhat more pragmatic approach to what is possible since collecting and analysing the data.

It would be fair to say that I “fell into” becoming involved with the University of San Martín. I first set foot in the University when I began teaching private classes to a group of teachers at the School of Marketing. From there, I gradually began to get to know some of the people at the School as well as those at other nearby Schools. When it came to my BA dissertation, I was allowed to recruit students from the School of Marketing to be my participants. I continued teaching private English classes, and was also hired to translate some of the University’s academic documents. I was asked to deliver some teacher training courses on certain aspects of EFL teaching, and presented at a number of conference events. By the time I had completed my MA and began working on my PhD, I felt very much at home at the USM.

During this time, the Head of the School of Marketing kindly allowed me to work in a small shared office that had been provided for the School’s English teachers. I therefore began to get to know these teachers and understand some of the difficulties that they were experiencing. Although I was never directly hired as an EFL teacher at the University, I was able to relate to them as I had worked in a number of teaching positions in Mexico, including one at a very similar public university at another city in Mexico. Throughout this period, I observed many classes and we had many interesting discussions about the challenges these teachers were facing. It was at this point that I began to ask myself questions such as:

- Why did many of these teachers still teach in a largely teacher-centred way, despite having attended so many training sessions which encouraged more student-centred approaches?
- What was it that had made some teachers believe in student-centred approaches whilst others were less convinced?
- Why was it so difficult, even for the more enthusiastic teachers, to teach in a student-centred way?
- Was it even possible to teach in a student-centred way in this context?

These questions were the “itches that I wanted to scratch”; the initial ponderings which would convince me to study a PhD and would direct my early forays into the literature. In the next chapter, I document my journey through this literature; my search for a gap in knowledge which would eventually lead me to my research questions.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the previous chapter, I introduced the main issues which gave me the initial motivation to carry out this piece of research. In this chapter, I situate the study within the literature and outline the specific gaps which would provide the rationale for the study.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. In Section 2.1, I begin by examining the concept of “student-centred learning”. I explore the ways in which the term has been defined, consider some of the reasons why it has been introduced, and acknowledge some of its main criticisms. Finally, by focusing on the meta-analysis of Schweisfurth (2011), I explore some of the reasons why the implementation of student-centred learning has not been particularly successful in developing countries. A number of issues emerge from this meta-analysis; however, one of the most regularly cited of these is a mismatch between the aims of student-centred learning and the educational cultures of the countries where it has been introduced.

Section 2.2 then shifts its focus towards more general theories of educational change. I begin by defining what an “educational change” is, and proceed to establish that the movement towards student-centred learning is therefore an example of an educational change. I then focus on some of the reasons why educational changes in general have not been particularly successful. Here, it emerges that a lack of recognition of the complex nature of educational changes may be one of the main reasons why they tend to fail, especially given that they are implemented by *people*, who often hold deeply-rooted beliefs about teaching, which tend not to change quickly, if at all. At this point, I establish that the introduction of student-centred learning must be considered a “complex” educational change (Fullan, 2007), given that it tends to imply not only a change in teachers’ *practices*, but also a change in their *beliefs*.

Bearing this in mind, Section 2.3 focuses in more detail on the concept of beliefs, and the role they play during educational change processes. I begin by defining the term “beliefs” and establishing some key characteristics of the concept. I then explore some of the factors which have been seen to have an influence on teachers’ beliefs at different points in their lives. In particular, I focus on how teachers’ beliefs may change as a result of their experiences in teacher education, and identify some of the main characteristics of training

courses which are seen to have more or less of an effect on teachers' beliefs. Next, I proceed to explore the complex relationships between teachers' beliefs and their practices, considering some of the reasons why beliefs may not always correspond with practices. I conclude Section 2.3 by analysing in more detail three life history case studies which demonstrate a number of examples of belief and behaviour change over time.

Finally, in Section 2.4, I summarise my review of the literature and highlight some of the main gaps which emerged from my reading. These gaps provide the rationale for this piece of research about the beliefs and practices of EFL teachers at the University of San Martín.

Before continuing, I would like to explain my decisions regarding the use of citations in this chapter (and throughout the thesis as a whole). Over the last four years of doctoral study, I have read a wide range of texts from the literature on educational change, beliefs and student-centred learning. Within these texts, I have often encountered a great deal of overlap between themes, and similar issues are often mentioned in a wide range of different texts. Therefore, although I have tried to include a wide range of citations from a variety of sources to support my arguments, it would be unrealistic to include them all. With this in mind, I have endeavoured to keep the number of citations to a maximum of four per point. Hopefully, this will maintain the readability of the text whilst still making it clear that the points I make are supported by the literature.

## **2.1. An introduction to student-centred learning**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the ways in which Mexico has decided to address its lack of success in EFL learning has been to encourage its teachers to adopt more “student-centred” approaches (SEP, 1996; 2006; 2010a). This has mirrored the worldwide tendency for education systems to encourage its teachers to introduce more student-centred approaches, which has taken place not only in the field of EFL learning, but also in many other subjects (Elkind, 2004; UNESCO, 2008; Schweisfurth, 2013).

This section aims to introduce the concept of student-centred learning, as well as briefly examining some of the problems countries have encountered when trying to implement

student-centred approaches. I begin by providing a general definition of the term “student-centred learning”, although this proved somewhat difficult given the numerous ways in which it has been interpreted in the literature. I then consider how some of the more general characteristics of student-centred learning might be applied to the specific area of EFL learning. Next, I explore why student-centred learning might be considered “better” than previous teacher-centred approaches, before considering some of its main criticisms. Finally, by focusing on the meta-analysis of Schweisfurth (2011), I summarise some of the main reasons why the implementation of student-centred learning has tended to be unsuccessful in developing countries like Mexico.

### *2.1.1. Defining student-centred learning*

The concept of “student-centred learning” has proved somewhat difficult to define. Over fifteen years ago, Farrington (1991: 16) stated that there was “considerable disagreement about what student centred learning actually is”, and this assertion seems as relevant now as it was then. One of the main problems is that many different definitions of student-centred learning exist, reflecting the fact that it has been, and continues to be, interpreted in a number of different ways by different people (Lea et al., 2003; Griffith and Lim, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2013).

The fact that there is no single, unequivocal definition of student-centred learning is not particularly helpful, both from a teacher training and a research perspective. Lea et al. (2003: 321), for example, argue that “a lack of attention to and consistency in defining student-centred learning has resulted in a plethora of synonyms (e.g. learner-centred education, flexible learning) and an inability to compare studies or teaching practices directly.” This statement has certainly rung true throughout the process of carrying out this research; indeed, one of the key methodological issues of this study was attempting to reach a shared understanding of the concept. In the end, arriving at a unified definition of the term proved both unrealistic and undesirable; I explain this in more detail in the Methodology chapter.

For now, I will provide a definition which I feel is generally representative of the way student-centred learning has been interpreted in the literature. This is the definition of Lea et al. (2003), although similar interpretations can also be found in other texts (see, for

example, Felder and Brent, 1996; Jacobs and Farrell, 2001; Schweisfurth, 2013). Drawing on the works of Fay (1988), Brandes and Ginnis (1996) and Cannon and Newble (2000), Lea et al. describe student-centred learning as having the following key characteristics:

1. Reliance upon active rather than passive learning;
2. An emphasis on deep learning and understanding;
3. Increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student;
4. An increased sense of autonomy in the learner;
5. An interdependence between teacher and learner;
6. Mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship; and
7. A reflexive approach to the learning and teaching process on the part of both teacher and learner.

(Lea et al., 2003: 322; numbering and emphasis mine)

My personal interpretations of the points above are as follows:

1. Under more student-centred approaches, students participate as much as possible. The teacher does not always lecture to them, but rather provides them with opportunities to do things, to explore, to experiment, to interact with the topics that they are studying.
2. There is a focus on students learning things which will remain in their long-term memories, as opposed to simply memorising facts to be reproduced in examinations. Learners must find some degree of real-world relevance in what they are doing, in order for them to retain information that may be of use for them in their lives.
3. There is an awareness that the teacher is not (solely) responsible for “making” the students learn. The students are aware that it is, to a great extent, their own responsibility to work and to learn. Because of this, the role of the teacher begins to change from merely an “instructor” of knowledge to a “facilitator” of students’ learning.

4. Similar to the previous point, students are willing to learn, to explore and to look for their own solutions to any issues they might have, without (solely) relying on the teacher to solve all of their problems. Autonomous learning activities therefore form an integral part of teachers' planning and are built into programs of studies.
5. Similar to the previous two points, students do not (solely) depend on the teacher for their learning. In the same way, the teacher recognises that students will also be working somewhat autonomously, and therefore does not expect the student to (solely) depend on them.
6. The teacher-student role changes from a traditional role in which the teacher is the only person whose opinions are worthy of respect, towards a more egalitarian perspective in which both students and teachers' opinions are valued.
7. Both teacher and students are aware that they must constantly reflect upon what they are doing and how they might improve their teaching and/or learning.

The fact that Lea et al.'s definition includes seven points makes it increasingly clear that student-centred learning is not a simple or straightforward concept. Moreover, it further illustrates how difficult it is to compare teachers or teaching directly, given that teachers might demonstrate any number or combination of these characteristics and still be considered, or consider themselves to be, "student-centred" teachers. Again, I explore these issues in more detail in the Methodology chapter.

A last point to consider within this sub-section is the term we might use to denominate student-centred learning. That is to say, should student-centred learning be considered a set of "techniques"? A group of different "methods"? A teaching "approach"? Or, more generally, as a kind of "spirit" or "principle" teachers use to guide their practices? Within the literature, by far the most common way of describing student-centred learning is to call it an "approach" (see, for example, Lea et al., 2003; Schweisfurth, 2013). This would make sense, given that student-centred learning is a way of looking at teaching and learning which may involve a wide range of individual methods and/or techniques. However, given the numerous ways in which student-centred learning has been interpreted, I have tended to use the plural "approaches" in this thesis, as opposed to the

singular “approach”, which may be seen to suggest that there is one single interpretation of the term. By doing this, I hope to acknowledge that there are a wide range of different approaches that could be defined as “student-centred”.

Finally, it is important to mention that, in my view, all of the seven characteristics in Lea et al.’s definition should be considered equally as valid. I see no reason to “choose” which one might be the most important or useful, as they may all have their uses at certain times and for certain reasons.

### *2.1.2. Student-centred learning in the context of EFL teaching*

Lea et al.’s definition provides us with some of the main general characteristics of student-centred learning. These characteristics are not subject-specific, and might be largely applicable to classrooms in general, including the EFL classroom. However, within the EFL field, there are also a number of specific methods and approaches which may be considered “student-centred”. Drawing primarily on the works of Jacobs and Farrell (2001), de Segovia and Hardison (2009) and Griffith and Lim (2010), I have attempted to summarise some of the most frequently mentioned of these in the table below:

Table 2.1.2(i). Characteristics of a more teacher-centred EFL classroom as opposed to a more student-centred EFL classroom

Classroom 1 (the “teacher-centred” EFL classroom)	Classroom 2 (the “student-centred” EFL classroom)
<p>More of a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grammar-based teaching</li> <li>• Structures of language</li> <li>• Accuracy of language forms</li> <li>• Theoretical content</li> <li>• Explanations in the mother tongue</li> <li>• Memorisation and rote learning</li> <li>• Deductive reasoning (teacher explains linguistic rules to learners)</li> <li>• English for General Purposes (EGP)</li> </ul>	<p>More of a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)</li> <li>• Communicative functions of language</li> <li>• Fluency and communicative competence</li> <li>• Authentic content</li> <li>• Use of English in the classroom</li> <li>• Task-Based Learning (TBL)</li> <li>• Inductive reasoning (learners discover linguistic rules by themselves)</li> <li>• English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and its variations, e.g. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)</li> </ul>

Table 2.1.2(i) above gives us an indication of some of the methods and approaches which might be used in more “student-centred” EFL classrooms. However, it must be recognised that it is unlikely that classrooms will be completely “student-centred” all of the time, given that teachers use a wide variety of different strategies at different times and for different reasons. This again provides us with somewhat of a dilemma when it comes to defining whether or not an EFL teacher or class might be defined as “student-centred”. Indeed, what might be more useful is to imagine a *continuum*, with the “extremes” of teacher-centred learning on one side and student-centred learning on the other, but with most classroom contexts falling somewhere in between (Schweisfurth, 2013).

### 2.1.3. Reasons for introducing student-centred learning

At this point, it is worth contemplating why student-centred learning might be considered a more desirable option than previous teacher-centred approaches. Here, Schweisfurth (2013) suggests three main “justificatory narratives” for student-centred learning: 1) the

“economic” perspective; 2) the “cognitive” perspective; and 3) the “emancipatory” perspective.

The first reason, the “economic” perspective, is by far the most commonly cited justification for student-centred learning in educational policy documents (Sahlberg and Oldroyd, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2013). The economic perspective is founded on the idea that new kinds of educational approaches are needed in order to “prepare” citizens for the demands of a changing world (Simons et al., 2000; Geijsel and Meijers, 2005). The argument here is that people will need certain skills in order for them to be as economically competitive as possible, such as critical thinking, flexibility, creativity and independent research skills. It is thought these skills are more likely to be developed if teachers adopt more student-centred approaches (Sahlberg and Oldroyd, 2010).

The second reason, the “cognitive” perspective, is based on the assumption that student-centred approaches are more likely to lead to “increased motivation to learn, greater retention of knowledge, deeper understanding, and more positive attitudes toward the subject being taught” (Felder and Brent, 1996: 43). Student-centred learning is often linked to the constructivist theory of learning based on the works of Vygotsky and Piaget. Constructivism as a learning theory suggests that students learn by building on previous knowledge and experiences (Prawat, 1992; Richardson, 2003). From a psychological perspective, constructivism is often seen to have advantages over the more teacher-centred theory of behaviourism (Deci and Ryan, 1987; Deboer, 2002; Ginnis, 2002). For example, Ginnis (2002), drawing on the work of Caine and Caine (1997), Goleman (1998), Greenfield (1998) and Butterworth (1999), suggests that students have a higher chance of retaining information and being motivated to learn when:

- They have to work things out for themselves;
- They are able to form patterns based on previous knowledge;
- They are exposed to experiences which are unusual and/or stimulating;
- They are involved in a varied range of activities, in which they are able to listen, see, say and do;
- They receive challenges appropriate to their current level;
- They have some degree of control over their learning and are allowed the flexibility to filter out information that is not directly relevant to them; and
- They feel as comfortable possible in their learning environments.

(adapted from Ginnis, 2002)

Finally, the third and least commonly cited reason for introducing student-centred learning is the “emancipatory” perspective. Perhaps the most famous advocate of this “emancipatory” perspective was Paulo Freire. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire strongly criticised teacher-centred approaches, which he referred to as the “banking method” of education. He saw these traditional approaches as oppressive mechanisms which only served to maintain the *status quo* of oppressive elites controlling the masses. As an alternative to the “banking method”, Freire proposed a new “critical pedagogy”, in which there was a change in role for both teacher and student. Under this critical pedagogy, teachers and students were considered more as equals. Students were encouraged to think more creatively, and were granted more of a voice to express themselves, even if this meant questioning previously unchallenged assumptions. The hope was that this would have an emancipatory effect which would lead to a fairer, more democratic society (see also Giroux, 1997; Biesta, 2006, among others).

It must be recognised that there may be a certain degree of overlap between the three “justificatory narratives” (Schweisfurth, 2013). For example, introducing student-centred approaches for purely “cognitive” reasons may contribute towards the development of skills which help a country maintain its economic competitiveness. Similarly, activities which encourage students to express their individual opinions may contribute towards the “active” and “deep” learning commonly associated with the “cognitive” perspective.

Having said that, as mentioned earlier, it is worth noting that by far the most frequently mentioned justification for student-centred learning is the “economic” perspective

(Sahlberg and Oldroyd, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2013). Furthermore, the “emancipatory” argument is rarely addressed in educational policy documents, reflecting the fact that most, if all, education systems worldwide tend to place a significant emphasis on clearly standardised goals, and usually offers few opportunities for students to deviate from them (Deboer, 2002). Therefore, it would seem that any social change or emancipatory effects of student-centred learning may be indirect or secondary consequences of the changes. Whether or not my rather pessimistic interpretation is correct, the debate about the reasons to introduce student-centred learning will surely continue.

#### *2.1.4. Criticisms of student-centred learning*

Although the movement towards student-centred learning is considered by many to be a positive change (Ginnis, 2002; Simons et al., 2000; Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Cornelius-White, 2007), it has not been unanimously accepted. Firstly, although there is some evidence to suggest that student-centred approaches may be more effective than teacher-centred approaches in some contexts (Felder and Brent, 1996; Cornelius-White, 2007), there have been relatively few unequivocal success stories when student-centred learning has been implemented (Elkind, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011). Moreover, some authors have sought to defend traditional teacher-centred approaches, arguing that they may be perfectly effective when taught well (O’Neill, 1991; Barrett, 2007). Furthermore, Schweisfurth (2013: 137) stresses that “unsuccessful attempts at [student-centred learning] [...] are no better than, and can certainly be worse than, well-worn [teacher-centred approaches]”.

However, perhaps the most common criticism of student-centred learning is that it is unrealistic to expect such approaches to be implemented in contexts in which there are significant contextual constraints or obstacles. For example, O’Sullivan (2004: 595), reflecting on the implementation of student-centred approaches in Namibia, highlights that “learner-centred approaches presuppose availability of a specially designed environment with space, resources and small classes”, which were not available in her Namibian context, and tend not to be available in a wide range of developing countries worldwide (see also Barrett, 2007; Vavrus, 2009; Schweisfurth, 2011). I explore the idea of contextual constraints in more detail in Section 2.3.3 of this chapter.

Furthermore, some authors have argued that student-centred approaches will *never* be suitable in certain cultures, as they are based on Western ideals which are not always consistent with the educational values in other countries (Guthrie, 2003; O’Sullivan, 2004; Barrett, 2007; Vavrus, 2009). For example, Vavrus (2009: 305) argues that ““excellent teaching” is not universally equated with social constructivism [student-centred learning] and cannot be measured using a single global standard because the cultural, traditional and the material conditions vary considerably around the world.”. In response to this, she proposes the term “contingent constructivism”, in which certain student-centred approaches may be used, but only if they are deemed to be appropriate in particular contexts. Similarly, O’Sullivan (2004) suggests that a more appropriate term than “student-centred learning” would be “learning-centred education”, in which any combination of teaching approaches may be used, as long as they are seen to help students’ learn (see also Barr and Tagg, 1995). I explore the idea of a more flexible attitude towards student-centred learning in Section 10.4 of the Discussion chapter.

#### 2.1.5. Issues in the implementation of student-centred learning

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that the implementation of student-centred EFL learning has not been particularly successful in Mexico, especially in the public education system (OECD, 2009; Sayer, 2012; Ramírez Romero and Pamplón Irigoyen, 2012; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014). Unfortunately, tendencies appear to be similar in other countries, both in the context of EFL teaching (Zappa-Hollman, 2007; Matear, 2008; de Segovia and Hardison, 2009; Obaidul Hamid, 2010) and also in other subjects (Elkind, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011; Song, 2015).

Numerous articles from a wide range of different countries have attempted to shed light on why the implementation of student-centred learning has been so unsuccessful. I will cite a number of these as we continue through this chapter. However, for now, I will focus on one article in particular: the meta-analysis of Schweisfurth (2011). In this paper, Schweisfurth reviewed 72 articles from the *International Journal of Educational Development*, which related to the implementation of student-centred learning in developing countries. Schweisfurth identified a number of common themes which emerged over the 72 cases. In Table 2.1.5(i) below, I have summarised these themes in terms of the specific examples Schweisfurth cites in her article:

*Table 2.1.5(i). Summary of Schweisfurth's review of issues in the implementation of student-centred learning in developing countries*

<b>Implementation issue</b>	<b>Examples cited by Schweisfurth in her meta-analysis</b>
Unrealistic expectations – too fast and/or difficult for teachers to understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China (Brock, 2009; Dello-Iacovo, 2009)</li> <li>• India (Dyer, 1994)</li> <li>• Namibia (Rowell, 1995; O'Sullivan, 2004)</li> <li>• South Africa (Todd and Mason, 2005)</li> <li>• Sub-Saharan Africa (Jansen, 1989)</li> </ul>
Lack of and/or inadequate teacher training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Botswana (Koosimile, 2005)</li> <li>• China (Brock, 2009; Dello-Iacovo, 2009)</li> <li>• Central Asia (Chapman et al., 2005)</li> <li>• Mexico (Tatto, 1997)</li> <li>• Pakistan (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008; Westbrook et al., 2009)</li> <li>• South Africa (Paige et al., 2008)</li> <li>• Tanzania (Vavrus, 2009)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009)</li> </ul>
Practical and material constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nigeria (Urwick and Junaidu, 1991)</li> <li>• South Africa (Jessop and Penny, 1998)</li> <li>• The Gambia (Jessop and Penny, 1998)</li> </ul>
Inconsistency with national curricula, examinations and/or inspection regimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indonesia (Thair and Treagust, 2003)</li> <li>• Jordan (Mustafa and Cullingford, 2008)</li> <li>• Pakistan (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008; Westbrook et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Sub-Saharan Africa (Jansen, 1989)</li> <li>• The Gambia (Harber, 2006)</li> <li>• Trinidad and Tobago (George and Lubben, 2002)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009)</li> </ul>
Cultural issues – student-centred approaches inconsistent with local teachers' beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Botswana (Prophet 1995; Tabulawa 1997; Tafa 2004)</li> <li>• China (Gu, 2005)</li> <li>• Eritrea (David, 2004)</li> <li>• Ghana (Akyeampong and Stephens, 2002; Dull, 2004)</li> <li>• India (Dyer et al., 2004; Sripakash, 2010)</li> <li>• Kenya (Lillis, 1983)</li> <li>• Latin America (Fink and Arnove, 1991)</li> <li>• Malawi (Croft, 2002)</li> <li>• Melanesia (Ninnes, 1995)</li> <li>• Namibia (O'Sullivan, 2004)</li> <li>• Nigeria (Omokhodion, 1989)</li> <li>• Pakistan (Kanu, 2005)</li> <li>• Sierra Leone (Wright, 1994)</li> <li>• South Africa (Jessop and Penny, 1998; Pryor and Lubisi, 2002; Stoffels, 2005)</li> <li>• The Gambia (Jessop and Penny, 1998)</li> <li>• Sub-Saharan Africa (Jansen, 1989)</li> <li>• Tanzania (Barrett, 2008)</li> </ul>

The examples cited in the table above show a wide range of problems experienced by different countries when attempting to implement more student-centred approaches. However, it is interesting to note that the theme which Schweisfurth chose to emphasise

the most was that of “cultural issues”; that is to say, when there were mismatches between the aims of student-centred learning and local teachers’ beliefs. Although this does not necessarily imply that cultural factors were more important than any of the other factors, it nevertheless suggests that the reasons for the lack of success in implementing student-centred learning may be more complex than we might have initially thought. I explore the idea that student-centred learning may be considered a “complex” educational change in the following section.

## **2.2. Student-centred learning as an educational change**

Educational changes (which have also been referred to as an educational “innovations”) may be defined as any attempt to bring about favourable change in educational settings (Waters, 2009: 421). The movement towards student-centred learning must therefore be considered an “educational change”, as it has been introduced, at least on paper, with the aim of bringing some kind of benefit to those involved. Of course, student-centred learning is not the *only* educational innovation which has been introduced worldwide, and by considering more general theories of educational change, we might be able to better understand some of the reasons why this particular one has been so unsuccessful.

Therefore, in this section, I focus on some of the more general theories of educational change. I begin by exploring some of the main reasons why educational changes in general have tended to be unsuccessful. Here, it emerges that educational policymakers have often failed to take into account how complex the processes of educational change can be, especially given that they are implemented by *people*, who are often extremely complex in their responses to change. I proceed to explore in more detail how important the subjective experiences of educational changes may be for the people who implement them. At this point, it is suggested that educational changes may be extremely challenging for teachers as they may represent a threat to their “key meanings” or beliefs about teaching. I then introduce the concept of a “complex” change, which Fullan (2007) defines as an educational change which not only implies changes to teachers’ practices, but also their beliefs. Finally, I return to the topic of student-centred learning, concluding that this particular change would have to be considered a “complex” change.

### 2.2.1. General reasons for the failures of educational changes

The educational change literature is full of examples of educational changes which have failed to live up to their hoped-for outcomes (Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002; Fullan, 2007; Schweisfurth, 2011). There are several explanations for this, and each change will have its own reasons for success or lack of success. However, there are certain overriding themes from the educational change literature which seem to be relevant to most, if not all, educational changes. One of the most common of these is that policymakers often do not take into account the inherent complexity of educational change processes (O’Sullivan, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Zembylas, 2010). Fullan, for example, argues that

Understanding why most attempts at educational reform fail goes far beyond the identification of specific technical problems such as lack of good materials, ineffective professional development, or minimal administrative support. In more fundamental terms, educational change fails partly because of the assumptions of planners, and partly because solving substantial problems is an inherently complex business.

(Fullan, 2007: 96)

One of the main “assumptions” that educational change planners are said to make is to view educational changes as straightforward processes, in which one only needs to carry out a set of relatively simple steps in order to guarantee immediate changes in teachers’ practices. This might explain why planners often spend a lot of time focusing on the expected *content* or *outcomes* of the changes themselves, but tend to dedicate less energy thinking about *how* these changes might be transferred to real classrooms (Fullan, 2007; Altinyelken, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2013).

Another common assumption is that changes may be implemented consistently and uniformly across a wide range of different contexts. Educational changes are often seen as rational, objective, dispassionate processes (Zembylas, 2010; Cross and Hong, 2011; Saunders, 2013) which can be introduced and implemented in a top-down fashion (Chin and Benne, 1976; Markee, 1997; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Such inflexible, “one-size-fits-all” attitudes towards change have been regularly criticised in the literature, given that they do not take into account the inevitable differences found in individual contexts (Wedell, 2009; 2013; Díaz Maggioli, 2012; Schweisfurth, 2015). Wedell, for example, stresses that

Such rational planning approaches stereotypically view education systems as consisting of stable and unchanging institutions, populated by people (leaders, teachers and learners) whose behaviour is rational and predictable, and whose attitudes and behaviours when confronted by change remain unaffected by contextual realities or by the norms and behaviours of the world beyond the institutional environment.

(Wedell, 2013: 149)

The problem with such “rational planning approaches” is that social systems are often anything but the stable, rational and predictable environments which planners often assume them to be. On the contrary, they take place within the extremely diverse and complex social world in which educational changes are introduced. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, they involve a wide range of different *people*, who are inherently complex in themselves and in their responses to change. A lack of thought as to how these people might actually experience and make sense of educational changes is said to be one of the fundamental flaws of educational change planning (Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009; Zembylas, 2010; Cross and Hong, 2011). I explore this idea in more detail in the following sub-section.

### 2.2.2. *The subjective meaning of educational change*

As mentioned above, educational changes are often viewed from a merely rational, objective, dispassionate perspective, which seems to ignore the fact that they are implemented by people, whose responses to change can be the complete opposite (Markee, 1997; Fullan, 2007; Zembylas, 2010). Indeed, educational changes often represent a professional, and perhaps more importantly, personal challenge for those who experience them. Fullan, for example, highlights that

Real change, [...] whether desired or not, represents a serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty [...] The anxieties of uncertainty and the joys of mastery are central to the subjective meaning of educational change, and to the success and failure thereof – facts that have not been recognized or appreciated in most attempts at reform.

(Fullan, 2007: 32)

Perhaps one of the main reasons why educational changes prove so challenging for teachers on this “subjective” level is that they may be seen to threaten their “key meanings” (Blackler and Shimmin, 1984; cited in Wedell 2009). Wedell interprets these “key meanings” as “my day-to-day perceptions of myself and of my relationships with others that provide me with important personal and professional stability and security” (Wedell, 2009: 19). There are several similar terms to “key meanings” in the literature; for example, personal and/or professional “identities” (Beijaard et al., 2004; Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009), “professional self-understanding” (Kelchtermans, 2009), or simply “beliefs”, which is the concept I focus on in this study (Pajares, 1992; Haser and Star, 2009; Borg, 2011).

Teachers may resist educational changes, if they perceive these fundamental “key meanings” or beliefs to be threatened (Koosimile, 2005; Sripakash, 2010; Curdt-Christiansen and Silver, 2012). This may be especially likely when there is a sizable gap between these beliefs and those implied by the contents of the change (Pajares, 1992; Fullan, 2007; Ketelaar et al., 2012). These kinds of mismatches between people’s current beliefs and the aims of educational changes may occur on an individual level, but also on a more collective one. This is because people belong to social systems connected by shared beliefs, which we might call “cultures” or “subcultures”. Indeed, it has been suggested that the further away a belief system (culture) is from the beliefs implied by a particular change, the less likely it is to be successful (Pajares, 1992; Wedell, 2009).

It would appear, then, that at least some sort of belief change may need to occur in order to facilitate the implementation of educational changes in which there are mismatches between the aims of the change and teachers’ current beliefs (Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Cross and Hong, 2011). Fullan has called these types of changes “complex changes”, and has suggested that when such mismatches occur, teachers will need to go through a process of “reculturing”. According to Fullan, “reculturing” refers to the complex process in which not only practices but also beliefs change over time. He suggests that one of the main issues in educational change implementation is that the idea of “reculturing” tends not to be taken into account by educational policymakers. Furthermore, he argues that there is a distinct lack of research which focuses on teachers’ actual experiences of “reculturing” as they live through educational change processes.

### 2.2.3. Student-centred learning as a “complex” educational change

It is now relevant to return to the more specific educational change which forms the basis of this study: the movement from teacher-centred to more student-centred learning. In light of the views expressed by Fullan and others in the previous sub-section, it would seem that a change towards more student-centred approaches would have to be considered a “complex” educational change, given that, in many cases, it represents not only a change in *practices* for the teachers involved, but also a change in their *beliefs*. We only need to look back at the meta-analysis of Schweisfurth (2011) to see several examples in which student-centred approaches were not fully compatible with the beliefs of the people who were expected to implement them. In fact, these mismatches were arguably some of the most important reasons why student-centred approaches were not implemented successfully.

To further emphasise this point, consider the example of an EFL teacher who has been encouraged to teach in a more “student-centred” way, after having taught in a predominately teacher-centred way throughout his entire teaching career. Such a change would imply a change in role from a *provider of a set body of knowledge* (e.g., the grammatical structures), towards more of a *facilitator of learning* in which students are able to practice using the language in real situations. It would require a significant shift in priorities, from a sole focus on *accuracy* (e.g., students being able to correctly produce grammatical forms) towards *fluency* and the *appropriateness* of what the learners are able to communicate. This change would therefore have to be considered a “complex” change, given that this teacher’s beliefs and practices may well be a long way from those implied by the change.

If we are to accept, then, that the movement towards student-centred learning represents a “complex” educational change which implies not only a change in teachers’ practices but also their beliefs, then it would seem especially relevant to explore in more detail how teachers actually experience this process of belief and behaviour change over time. Bearing this in mind, the next stage of my exploration into the literature examines what has been written about teachers’ experiences of belief and behaviour change in the context of educational changes.

### **2.3. Beliefs in the context of educational changes**

In the previous section, I established that the movement towards student-centred learning must be considered a “complex” educational change, given that it tends to imply not only a change in teachers’ practices, but also a change in their *beliefs*. Moreover, it was suggested that by increasing our understanding of how teachers experience belief change during educational changes, we might be in a better position to improve the implementation process.

With this in mind, this section explores the concept of beliefs and the role they play in educational changes. I begin by looking at some of the ways in which the term has been defined in the literature, and some of the key characteristics which tend to be associated with it. I then examine some of the main factors which are seen to have an influence on teachers’ beliefs at different points in their lives. In particular, I explore how teachers’ beliefs may or may not change as a result of their experiences of teacher education, outlining some of the key characteristics of courses which were seen to have more or less of an impact on teachers’ beliefs. Next, I examine the complex relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their practices, and consider why there might be matches and/or mismatches between the two at different points in time. Finally, I analyse three life history case studies which provide several examples of both belief and behaviour change.

#### *2.3.1. Defining beliefs*

In a similar way to the term “student-centred learning”, the concept of “beliefs” has proven somewhat difficult to define. The first main reason for this is that beliefs have been addressed from several different academic disciplines (philosophy, psychology, education, among others), meaning that a number of different definitions appear in the literature (Pajares, 1992; Borg, 2011; Baştürkmen, 2012). The second main reason is that a range of different terms have been used to refer to similar ideas. Pajares illustrates this point well when he states:

[...] defining beliefs is at best a game of player's choice. They travel in disguise and often under alias – attitudes, values, judgements, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy, to name but a few that can be found in the literature.

(Pajares, 1992: 309)

Taking into account the previous, it is inevitable that I will have to use some of my “player's choice” when deciding upon a definition of the concept “beliefs”. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to use the definition of Richardson, who defines beliefs as “psychologically held understandings, premises and propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (Richardson, 1996: 103). Having said that, I also like the simple but effective definition of Rokeach, who defines beliefs as “any simple proposition [...] capable of being preceded by the phrase, “I believe that...”.” (Rokeach, 1968: 113).

These definitions provide a general idea of what “beliefs” are, but short phrases like these may not do justice to the complexity of the concept. Bearing this in mind, it may be more useful to highlight some of the more common characteristics of beliefs which appear in the literature.

The first key characteristic of beliefs is that they are not considered to be fixed and stable, but are capable of evolving over time (Pajares, 1992; Wideen et al., 1998; Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000; Borg, 2006). As I examine in more detail in the following sub-section, people's beliefs are said to be influenced by the wide variety of experiences that they have throughout their lives (Pajares, 1992; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Mansour, 2013).

Having said this, beliefs are often deep-rooted and difficult to change (Pajares, 1992; Wideen et al., 1998; Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000; Phipps and Borg, 2009). One of the reasons for this is that they are said to provide structure, order and direction in people's lives “which provide the predictability, security and self-worth necessary for coping successfully with daily existence” (Waters, 2009: 443-444; Pajares, 1992).

A second point to make about beliefs is that they may be both conscious and unconscious in nature (Pajares, 1992; Borg, 2001; Baştürkmen, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). In fact, it may be difficult for people to explicitly express their beliefs, meaning that beliefs may have to be inferred through actions (Pajares, 1992). Relevant to this idea is the theory of Argyris and Schön (1974), who differentiated between “espoused theories” and “theories-in-use”. Argyris and Schön define “espoused theories” as “explicit” beliefs which people are able to readily articulate, as opposed to “theories-in-use”, which they define as “implicit” beliefs, unconscious in nature and only inferable from a person’s actions. I will revisit this theory when considering the relationship between beliefs and practices (Section 2.3.3).

A third characteristic of beliefs is that they are said to be organised into “belief systems”, in which different beliefs are allocated varying levels of importance (Rokeach, 1968; Pajares, 1992; Baştürkmen, 2012). Rokeach (1968: 2) defines a belief system as “having represented within it, in some organized psychological but not necessarily logical form, each and every one of a person’s countless beliefs about physical and social reality.” Interestingly, within these belief systems, some beliefs may be considered more important than others, and certain “core” beliefs may sometimes override more “peripheral” beliefs (Phipps and Borg, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Zheng, 2013). I explore the idea of “core” and “peripheral” beliefs in more detail in Section 2.3.3.

A final point to mention is the regularly cited argument that beliefs are generally seen to be key drivers of action (Pajares, 1992; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Baştürkmen, 2012). However, the relationship between beliefs and behaviours is certainly not a straightforward one, and most authors also recognise that there may be several exceptions to this tendency. I explore several of these potential exceptions in Section 2.3.3.

### *2.3.2. Factors influencing changes to teachers’ beliefs*

As highlighted in Section 2.2, it has been argued that a certain degree of belief change may be necessary in order for teachers to change their practices (Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Cross and Hong, 2011). It therefore

seems relevant to focus on some of the main factors which are seen to have an impact on teachers' beliefs.

As mentioned in the previous sub-section, teachers' beliefs are said to be heavily influenced by the experiences they have at different points in their lives (Pajares, 1992; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Mansour, 2013). Firstly, teachers' early beliefs are generally thought to be influenced by their experiences as learners. In 1975, Lortie coined the idea of the "apprenticeship of observation", which refers to the process in which early beliefs about education are formed based upon children's experiences at school (Lortie, 1975). Although this concept was first mentioned over 40 years ago, it appears to be as relevant today as it was then. Indeed, early educational experiences are considered to be so influential that beliefs about teaching are thought to be firmly established by the time prospective teachers start university (Pajares, 1992; Borg, 2005; Phipps and Borg, 2009). It has also been suggested that teachers who are brought up in a predominately teacher-centred educational culture are extremely likely to have teacher-centred beliefs (Richardson, 1996; Wideen et al., 1998).

In addition to their experiences as learners, teachers' beliefs may also be affected by their experiences of teacher education (Wideen et al., 1998; Borg, 2011). There are several examples in the literature of training courses which were thought to lead to significant changes in teachers' beliefs (Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000; Kurihara and Samimy, 2007; Busch, 2010; Mansour, 2013). However, there were also a number of examples of those courses which were not perceived to have a significant impact on beliefs (Pennington and Urmston, 1998; Borg, 2005; Phipps, 2007; Liu and Xu, 2011). Educational change planners might be able to learn from the characteristics of the more successful "belief-changing" courses, and try to avoid the characteristics of the less successful ones.

The first factor which seems to have an impact on the degree of belief change experienced by teachers is the length of the courses themselves. A theme which regularly emerges in the literature is that courses of only a day or a few days tend to be too short for any significant belief change to occur (Wideen et al., 1998; Fullan, 2007; Schweisfurth, 2013). For example, in reference to the Mexican National English Program in Basic Education, Pamplón Irigoyen and Ramírez Romero (2013), Quezada (2013) and Ramírez Romero et al. (2014) all considered that the short, superficial nature of the one-off training courses was one of the main reasons why the program had been so unsuccessful. Similar

themes have also emerged in case studies from other countries, for example in China (Liu and Xu, 2011), Greece (Mattheoudakis, 2007), Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009) and Uganda (Altinyelken, 2010). For instance, in her analysis of the new student-centred “thematic curriculum” in Uganda, Altinyelken (2010) reported that many of the teachers felt that the 10-day intensive training program was so hurried that it led to confusion and even a certain degree of apathy towards the changes.

When training courses are longer, they naturally allow for a much wider variety of activities (Wideen et al., 1998). Two examples of these which were seen to be particularly helpful in facilitating teacher belief change were observed teaching practices and peer observation schemes (Haser and Star, 2009; Busch, 2010; Díaz Maggioli, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). These kinds of activities allow teachers to try out new approaches in their real contexts in order to evaluate their effectiveness. For example, Haser and Star (2009) in Turkey and Busch (2010) in the United States have both stressed the importance of teachers having realistic opportunities to practice the new approaches which they are exposed to on training courses.

Belief change may also be more likely if there is some sort of follow-up or ongoing support for the teachers after the initial training sessions (Wideen et al., 1998; Fullan, 2007; Cross and Hong, 2011; Schweisfurth, 2013). One example of this more long-term support is through mentoring schemes, in which teachers are assigned more experienced supervisors who they maintain contact with over a prolonged period of time (Tatto, 1997; Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008; Haser and Star, 2009). Unfortunately, the literature indicates that these types of opportunities for teachers tend to be rare (Westbrook et al., 2009; Altinyelken, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2013).

Another factor which appears to have an impact on the degree of belief change experienced by teachers is the manner in which courses themselves are delivered. A commonly cited criticism of training courses which introduce new teaching approaches such as student-centred learning is that they are often delivered in a predominately teacher-centred way (Barr and Tagg, 1995; Wideen et al., 1998; Borg, 2005; Schweisfurth, 2013). As Wideen et al. (1998: 160) argue, the message here seems to be “Do as I say, not as I do”, which would appear to be a clear contradiction to the approaches that are introduced on these courses.

Several case studies from the literature exhibit similar tendencies, for example in China (Dello-Iacovo, 2009), India (Dyer et al., 2004), Greece (Mattheoudakis, 2007) and Pakistan (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008). For example, Mohammad and Harlech-Jones highlight that most teacher education experiences in Pakistan are teacher-centred, commenting that “[e]ven when they are advocating more creative and innovative ideas and methods, the teacher educators’ approaches are likely to be formal and transmission based” (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008: 535). Similarly, Dello-Iacovo points out that Chinese teacher education tends to be “marred by the faults of the traditional education it was meant to replace, with large groups of teachers listening to theory-based lectures” (Dello-Iacovo, 2009: 245).

The next factor affecting the degree of belief change is the extent to which training courses are grounded in the contextual realities of the participants. Indeed, teacher training programs are often very prescriptive in nature, failing to acknowledge the inevitable differences found in different contexts (Zappa-Hollman, 2007; Haser and Star, 2009; Vavrus, 2009; Westbrook et al., 2009). For example, Haser and Star (2009) reported that newly-qualified Turkish teachers felt that the student-centred course they attended at university was severely lacking, given that it did not address the real difficulties they would encounter when starting to teach in real classrooms. Another example came from Westbrook et al. (2009), who commented how disconnected Pakistani teacher education tends to be from real classroom contexts.

With the previous in mind, it has been suggested that teacher education programs should include opportunities for teachers to reflect about their current contexts, beliefs and practices in order to facilitate belief change (Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Borg, 2011; Mansour, 2013). In particular, it has been emphasised that the more successful courses are those that enable teachers to articulate their existing beliefs and, with the trainer and their colleagues, consciously consider how these beliefs might need to be adapted in order for them to put (at least a modified version of) the changes into practice (Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000; Malderez and Wedell, 2007; Díaz Maggioli, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). One example of this comes from Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000), who analysed the belief changes of teachers taking a PGCE course at a UK university. They found that some of the most successful characteristics of the course were those which they defined as “belief development opportunities” (p.399); that is to

say, activities which gave participants the opportunity to reflect upon and eventually confront their pre-existing beliefs.

This sub-section has focused on some of the main factors which are seen to have an influence on teachers' beliefs. The next sub-section focuses on the relationships between teachers' beliefs and their practices, which as I alluded to in Section 2.3.1, are not always simple or straightforward.

### *2.3.3. Factors influencing relationships between beliefs and practices*

As I have emphasised several times already, one of the key assumptions made by Fullan and others is that teachers will generally be more likely to put new teaching approaches into practice if they actually believe in them (Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Cross and Hong, 2011). These views are generally supported by those from the literature on teachers' beliefs and teacher belief change, which regularly emphasises how important beliefs are in guiding teachers' practices (Pajares, 1992; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Baştürkmen, 2012).

However, many authors also recognise that teachers' beliefs are *not always* reflected in their practices (Pajares, 1992; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Mansour, 2013; Baştürkmen, 2012). Furthermore, belief change may not necessarily be a precursor to behaviour change, as teachers may need time to try the changes *first*, before they start to "believe" in them (Markee, 1997; Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009). In fact, the relationships between beliefs and practices may be extremely complex, as both may interact with each other at different times and for different reasons (Richardson, 1996; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Baştürkmen, 2012).

Nevertheless, after reading a wide variety of texts from the area of teacher belief and behaviour change, I would judge there to be four main combinations (or "Paths") which teachers might find themselves on at different points in time. In rather simple terms, these are as follows:

Table 2.3.3(i). Four theoretical “Paths” of belief and behaviour change

	Belief change?	Behaviour change?
Path 1:	✘	✘
Path 2:	✘	✓
Path 3:	✓	✘
Path 4:	✓	✓

If we were to apply the four combinations above to the implementation of student-centred learning, we might envisage the following four “Paths”:

Table 2.3.3(ii). The four “Paths” of belief and behaviour change in terms of the change from teacher-centred to student-centred learning

Path 1:	Both beliefs and practices mostly <i>teacher-centred</i>
Path 2:	Practices more <i>student-centred</i> than beliefs
Path 3:	Practices more <i>teacher-centred</i> than beliefs
Path 4:	Both beliefs and practices mostly <i>student-centred</i>

Of course, phenomena such as the relationships between beliefs and behaviours are nowhere near as simple and straightforward as the four artificial categories in the two tables above make them appear. However, the theoretical “Paths” I have created may still be able to illuminate some of the more general tendencies of teacher belief and behaviour change. I discuss each Path separately below.

The first combination, Path 1, refers to when both beliefs and practices are generally teacher-centred. Path 1 may be seen as the “starting point” for teachers when they begin to experience educational changes, especially in the case of those who have been brought up in predominately teacher-centred educational cultures (Richardson, 1996; Wideen et al., 1998). Alternatively, Path 1 may indicate that attempts to introduce student-centred learning have failed.

The next combination, Path 2, is the first example of a *mismatch* between teachers’ beliefs and practices. Here, there may be some degree of behaviour change, but this is not accompanied by a corresponding change in beliefs. As several authors have highlighted, this may be perfectly normal for teachers as they take the time to try out new approaches

(Markee, 1997; Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009). For example, Wedell suggests that teachers may go through a process similar to the following:

- (a) developing a deep understanding of what the change aims mean for classroom practice and why they are worth introducing
- (b) using their current level of understanding (with or without more expert help) to plan how to introduce new practices
- (c) trying out new practices with learners in a classroom
- (d) seeing what happens when doing so – obtaining explicit or implicit feedback from learners, colleagues or a more expert “coach” [...]
- (e) going through many more cycles of (a) to (d), slowly developing a more complete personal understanding and personal confidence in practice through carrying it out again and again

(Wedell, 2009: 34)

By following a sequence similar to the five steps above, it has been suggested that teachers’ beliefs and behaviours may begin to align themselves more consistently with each other over time (Borg, 2006; Isikoglu et al., 2009; Baştürkmen, 2012). However, there may also be examples of Path 2 in which teachers’ beliefs *never* become consistent with their practices. This tendency may be more likely in more authoritarian educational cultures, in which teachers are under a degree of obligation to change their practices. Two examples of this come from Tsui (2007) and Liu and Xu (2011), who focus on two EFL teachers’ experiences of implementing more student-centred approaches in China. In both of these case studies, the teachers in question had little option but to change their practices, as they had essentially been obliged to do so by the authorities. However, as time passed, neither of them became convinced that the student-centred approaches were any better than previous teacher-centred approaches. I analyse these two case studies in more detail in the following sub-section.

The next combination of belief and behaviour change, Path 3, again indicates a mismatch between teachers’ beliefs and their practices. In this case, teachers do report a change in their beliefs, but these beliefs are not (at least fully) transferred to their classroom practices.

Path 3 may occur for a number of reasons. The first of these is that teachers may unconsciously teach in a way that is inconsistent with their (stated) beliefs. When teachers claim that they are teaching in a certain way but their practices do not seem to support their perceptions, Fullan (2007) calls this “false clarity”. Moreover, this phenomenon may be linked to the previously mentioned theory of Argyris and Schön, who highlighted the distinction between people’s “espoused theories” and their “theories-in-use”. As mentioned in Section 2.3.1, Argyris and Schön describe “espoused theories” as those beliefs which people are able to consciously and explicitly articulate (for example, if a teacher were to say “I believe in Communicative Language Teaching”). On the other hand, “theories-in-use” are those beliefs which are unconscious, implicit, and may only be implied by a person’s actions (for example, we may infer that a teacher believes in Communicative Language Teaching if they employ communicative activities). Authors such as Pajares (1992) highlight that there is often a mismatch between teachers’ “espoused theories” and their “theories-in-use”, which may explain why there may be inconsistencies between their beliefs and practices.

A second potential reason for Path 3 is that, although teachers may believe in the changes, they may not have had enough time to get used to actually doing them. As mentioned earlier, teachers’ behaviours may begin to align themselves more closely with their beliefs when they have acquired more practical experience in the classroom. In fact, it is generally thought that the more experienced teachers become, the more likely their beliefs are to correspond with their practices (Borg, 2006; Isikoglu et al., 2009; Baştürkmen, 2012).

A third potential reason for Path 3 is linked to the previously mentioned concept of “core” and “peripheral” beliefs (Pajares, 1992; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Zheng, 2013). For example, the teacher in Zheng (2013) claimed to hold two beliefs: firstly, the belief in Communicative Language Teaching, and secondly, the belief in the importance of examinations. When her students were preparing for a high-stakes test, her beliefs in the value of examinations became more central or “core”, and actually managed to *override* her beliefs about Communicative Language Teaching. This was reflected in her practices, as she chose to teach “exam classes” as opposed to those which included communicative activities. Another example comes from Phipps and Borg (2009), who identified several instances of “core” beliefs overriding “peripheral” beliefs. For example, one teacher chose to teach grammar against her beliefs because she held the more “core” belief that

this particular group of students would find the grammatical contents more useful. Here, her “core” belief in the importance of meeting students’ needs overrode her more “periphery” belief in the value of Communicative Language Teaching.

A final possible reason for Path 3 is that of contextual constraints. There are numerous examples in the literature of teachers who believe in the approaches that have been introduced and would ideally like to make changes to their practices, but are not able to (fully) do so because of the obstacles they encounter within their school environments (Phipps and Borg, 2009; Schweisfurth, 2011; Baştürkmen, 2012; Wedell, 2013). A wide range of contextual constraints are cited in different case studies in the literature. In Table 2.3.3(iii) below, I summarise some of the most frequently mentioned of these:

*Table 2.3.3(iii). Commonly cited contextual constraints*

(continued on next page)

<b>Contextual constraint</b>	<b>As highlighted in case studies from</b>
<i>Textbooks or syllabi which are not fully consistent with the aims of the change</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Castro Juárez, 2013; Lengeling et al., 2013; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014)</li> <li>• Egypt (Mansour, 2013)</li> <li>• Greece (Mattheoudakis, 2007)</li> <li>• Japan (Kurihara and Samimy, 2007)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009; Phipps and Borg, 2009)</li> <li>• South Africa (Stoffels, 2005)</li> </ul>
<i>Not enough time to “cover” the syllabus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Sayer, 2012; Alcántar Díaz and Montes Reyes, 2013; Collins and Pérez, 2013)</li> <li>• Argentina (Zappa-Hollman, 2007)</li> <li>• Colombia (Herazo Rivera et al., 2012)</li> <li>• Jordan (Mustafa and Cullingford, 2008)</li> <li>• Pakistan (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008; Westbrook et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009; Phipps and Borg, 2009)</li> </ul>
<i>Examinations which are not fully consistent with the aims of the change</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Griffith and Lim, 2010)</li> <li>• China (Ouyang, 2000; Dello-Iacovo, 2009)</li> <li>• Egypt (Mansour, 2013)</li> <li>• Hong Kong (Pennington and Urmston, 1998)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009; Phipps and Borg, 2009)</li> </ul>

<i>Overpopulated classrooms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Davies, 2009; Alcántar Díaz and Montes Reyes, 2013; Mendoza Valladares and Puón Castro, 2013)</li> <li>• Argentina (Zappa-Hollman, 2007)</li> <li>• Cambodia (Song, 2015)</li> <li>• Colombia (Cadavid et al., 2004)</li> <li>• Tanzania (Barrett, 2007)</li> <li>• Uganda (Altinyelken, 2010)</li> <li>• Ukraine (Smotrova, 2009)</li> </ul>
<i>Overly heterogeneous groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Davies, 2009)</li> <li>• Cambodia (Song, 2015)</li> <li>• Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009)</li> <li>• Uganda (Altinyelken, 2010)</li> </ul>
<i>Inappropriate classroom facilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Pamplón Irigoyen and Ramírez Romero, 2013)</li> <li>• Malawi (Croft, 2002)</li> <li>• Pakistan (Westbrook et al., 2009)</li> <li>• South Africa (Brodie et al., 2002)</li> </ul>
<i>A lack of learning resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Lengeling et al., 2013; Mendoza Valladares and Puón Castro, 2013; Pamplón Irigoyen and Ramírez Romero, 2013)</li> <li>• Bangladesh (Obaidul Hamid, 2010)</li> <li>• China (Dello-Iacovo, 2009)</li> <li>• India (Dyer et al., 2004)</li> <li>• Jordan (Mustafa and Cullingford, 2008)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009)</li> <li>• Uganda (Altinyelken, 2010)</li> </ul>
<i>A lack of support from students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Quezada, 2013; Ramírez Romero, 2013)</li> <li>• Argentina (Zappa-Hollman, 2007)</li> <li>• China (Ouyang, 2000)</li> <li>• Japan (Kurihara and Samimy, 2007)</li> <li>• Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009)</li> <li>• Ukraine (Smotrova, 2009)</li> </ul>
<i>A lack of support from authority figures and/or other teachers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (López de Anda, 2013; Mendoza Valladares and Puón Castro, 2013; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014)</li> <li>• China (Ouyang, 2000; Tsui, 2007)</li> <li>• Egypt (Mansour, 2013)</li> <li>• Japan (Kurihara and Samimy, 2007)</li> <li>• Pakistan (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008; Westbrook et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009)</li> </ul>

The list of potential obstacles listed in the table above suggests how difficult it may be for teachers to put their beliefs into practice, even if they are strongly in favour of the changes. This is somewhat of a worrying tendency, as it demonstrates that even if teachers' beliefs do change, these beliefs may not necessarily be transferred to real classroom practices. It seems, then, that educational planners must find a way of reducing these contextual constraints, if they are to increase the likelihood of teachers being able to implement educational changes in their classrooms (Wideen et al., 1998; Schweisfurth, 2013; Wedell, 2013).

The final combination, Path 4, indicates a consistency between teachers' beliefs and their practices, but this time with both of these being predominately student-centred. Presumably, Path 4 is seen by many as the desirable "end goal" of educational changes, as it reflects a situation in which both teachers' beliefs and practices will have changed. However, there are very few, if any, examples worldwide in which this has been the case (Elkind, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Schweisfurth, 2011). Furthermore, the idea that "full coherence" between beliefs and practices should be considered the undisputed "end goal" of educational changes is not without its problems (see Section 10.4.3 of the Discussion chapter).

#### *2.3.4. Three life history case studies*

Section 2.3.2 above focused on the reasons why teachers' beliefs might change, or not, over time. Section 2.3.3 then examined the complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practices, and identified four main "Paths" of belief and behaviour change which teachers might experience at different points in time. In this sub-section, I present and analyse three separate case studies which document the experiences of three EFL teachers living through the introduction of student-centred EFL learning in China. What I aim to do in this sub-section is to demonstrate a number of examples of the combinations of belief and behaviour change which I explored in the previous two sub-sections.

The reason I have chosen these three case studies in particular is that they provide rich and detailed descriptions of the way the participants' beliefs and behaviours evolved over time. The authors (Liu and Xu, 2011, Tsui, 2007 and Ouyang, 2000) achieve this by utilising a life history approach, which as I explore in the Methodology chapter, allows researchers to explore the complexities of people's lives in a great degree of detail. There was no specific reason why all three case studies happen to be from China, other than the fact that I was unable to find any other relevant articles which explored teachers' experiences of belief and behaviour change in such detail.

The first case study I will analyse is that of Liu and Xu (2011). Liu and Xu present the educational life history of Hui, an EFL teacher at a Chinese university. Hui had a rather traditional educational upbringing, right through to the end of her undergraduate degree

and even throughout her Master's. Understandably then, when she started teaching English, she strongly believed in teacher-centred approaches to teaching English. These beliefs were reflected in her practices; indeed, there was a strong correspondence between what she believed and what she did, which would have placed her on Path 1. At this point, she was happy as a teacher and gained a great deal of satisfaction from her work.

However, relatively soon after becoming a teacher, a reform was introduced at her university, which essentially advocated a change from teacher-centred approaches to more student-centred approaches. Hui was identified as one of the "traditional" teachers who would need to be "converted" to these new student-centred approaches. She was therefore enrolled onto an in-service teacher training program which hoped to make both her beliefs and practices more student-centred.

However, the program was completely unsuccessful in changing both Hui's beliefs and her practices. The training program was not able to convince Hui to believe in student-centred EFL learning; in fact, she feels that her beliefs in teacher-centred approaches were actually reinforced throughout the course, as she strongly disagreed with what she was being asked to do. Hui also identified that the course was too short and superficial for her to fully understand how to teach EFL in a more student-centred way, suggesting that it was like "asking a chef to cook what he has just learnt and to sell the dish" (p.593).

The most uncomfortable aspect for Hui was that her supervisors were constantly putting her under pressure to change her practices. Because of this, and to avoid being branded a "stubborn traditionalist", she did try to force herself to put into practice some of the approaches advocated by the course. This would be an example of Path 2, given that some of her practices did start to change, but without her believing in what she was doing. However, as soon as she started implementing more student-centred approaches in her classroom, she perceived that her students were not learning. She therefore began to revert back to teaching in a teacher-centred way whenever possible. This would have placed her back onto Path 1, in which there is neither belief nor behaviour change.

For a number of years, Hui struggled in a constant "tug-of-war" between what was expected of her and her beliefs about what she thought was the best way to teach. However, as time passed, and she continued to receive inspections from supervisors to

“rectify her mistakes”, she found it much more comfortable to resort to Path 2; that is, to simply “play along” with the changes, despite not believing in them.

After a number of years grappling with this mismatch between her beliefs and practices, Hui identified a “critical incident” in which she felt she was wrongly accused of being unhappy about changes to a class timetable. As a result of this misunderstanding, those in charge of the student-centred initiative removed her from the program, branded her a “traditionalist” and removed her from the core teaching team for the following year. This was understandably a very difficult time for Hui, as she felt abandoned, lonely and isolated from her EFL teaching community.

This could have been a rather depressing end to Hui’s story. However, when she was no longer under any obligation to teach in a student-centred way, she began to consider ways in which she could somewhat adapt her teaching practices. She joined an EFL research group on the other side of the city, and over time, she actually began to become more convinced by certain student-centred approaches. Gradually, she began to integrate some student-centred approaches into her classes, and even started writing and published some academic articles relating to certain student-centred topics. In this way, she began to move closer to Path 4, given that there was a certain degree of correspondence between her beliefs and practices. The external reform had not been an effective way of “transforming” a “traditional” teacher, but some of Hui’s beliefs and practices did eventually become more student-centred.

The second case study that I will consider is that of Tsui (2007). Tsui presents the educational life history of an EFL teacher called Minfang. Like Hui, Minfang had a very traditional upbringing. His beliefs about the way languages should be taught were essentially teacher-centred when he finished high school. Coming from a relatively small town in the country, he was accepted onto a language teaching degree at a big city university. This university was quite famous for promoting student-centred approaches to the teaching of English, with a special focus on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Like Hui, these approaches contradicted Minfang’s early beliefs about teaching. He thought that CLT approaches were “soft and unrealistic”, given that they did not place sufficient emphasis on linguistic accuracy. He did not feel that he learnt a lot during the communicative classes; indeed, he very much preferred the classes which focused on grammar. Such was his dislike for CLT that he and some of his classmates started to call

it “Cruel Language Teaching”, as it would often take precious time away from them studying for exams. There was a certain amount of pressure on Minfang to adopt these approaches during his degree, but he was never convinced by them. In this way, he was following either Path 1 (neither belief change nor behaviour change), or Path 2 (no belief change but a certain degree of (in this case obligated) behaviour change).

Upon completion of his degree, Minfang was offered an EFL teaching position at the same university. The expectation was that Minfang would be a “model practitioner” of the student-centred EFL approaches advocated by the university; as they called it, he would be a “real product of CLT”. When he started working at the university, he therefore felt pressured to start teaching in this more student-centred way. Like Hui, this would have placed him on Path 2, given that his practices did begin to change, but without there being a corresponding change in his beliefs.

However, his more “student-centred” activities were not well-received by his students. On one occasion, his students even complained about his classes to the Head of Department, who told him that “he must improve”. After this unpleasant experience, he reverted back to the teacher-centred practices that he had initially been comfortable with (which would have returned him to Path 1). Teaching in this more traditional way, he received much more positive feedback from his students, and their exam results even started to improve. He felt happy teaching in this way, and his beliefs about the merits of teacher-centred approaches to EFL learning were reinforced.

Minfang continued to teach in this teacher-centred way until he experienced the “critical incident” of a surprise inspection from one of his supervisors. He felt so nervous during this observation that he was unable to get his students to participate in communicative activities. After the class, he was strongly criticised by the inspector, and was even cited as a bad example of teaching during a staff meeting. After this humiliating experience, Minfang decided that he would have to teach CLT without exception, despite the fact that these approaches continued to contradict his beliefs. At this point, he was therefore firmly following Path 2, in which practices change without there being a corresponding change in beliefs.

Minfang continued to teach in this more student-centred way for a number of years. Interestingly, as he “went through the motions”, he began to acquire somewhat of a

reputation as a “model teacher of CLT”, which had been the aspiration of those who had initially hired him. And, despite never truly believing in what he was doing, he was promoted several times over subsequent years. After completing a Master’s degree and even a PhD in EFL teaching, he remained largely sceptical of student-centred approaches to EFL learning. External pressures had, in this case, been able to change the practices of a “traditional” EFL teacher, but these were never accompanied by a change in beliefs.

The third and final life history case study that I will discuss is that of Ouyang (2000). Ouyang presents the educational life history of an EFL teacher called Cheng. Cheng came from a small town and, like Hui and Minfang, had received a rather traditional education. When she started teaching, she began to do so in the way that she had been taught, which was very teacher-centred, thus placing her on Path 1. She was a very popular teacher and considered one of the most talented in her school. Because of this, she was selected to attend a government-sponsored EFL teacher training program in a nearby big city. The program advocated more student-centred approaches to the teaching of English, again with a particular emphasis on Communicative Language Teaching.

At first, Cheng found it extremely difficult to adapt to the new methods encouraged by the course, given that they were far removed from her early beliefs about teaching. For this reason, she initially resisted putting these new approaches into practice. However, she eventually realised that she would have little option other than to try the new approaches, given that the course required its trainees to conform to student-centred EFL learning in order for them to pass. Therefore, despite her not really believing in what she was doing, her teaching practices gradually became more student-centred (like Hui and Minfang, this would have placed her on Path 2). However, the difference between Cheng and the previous two case studies is that she eventually did become strongly in favour of student-centred learning.

After completing the course, Cheng returned to her hometown full of enthusiasm to try and put the new approaches she had learnt into practice. However, she found it extremely difficult to do so. This was because the leaders at her school, who had proudly sent her away to study on the course, were very critical of the student-centred approaches she began to use, claiming that they were inappropriate for the local context. Many students and even parents complained about her classes, and Cheng’s teaching colleagues complained that there was too much noise coming from her classrooms. This is a clear

example of Path 3, in which teachers' beliefs do change, but changes in practices cannot (fully) occur due to practical constraints within local contexts. It demonstrates that even when teachers would like to teach in a more student-centred way, they may not be able to do so because of the obstacles placed in front of them.

Working in this environment was extremely frustrating for Cheng. Because of this, she soon left the school and was hired at a teacher training college. However, even there, she was criticised by some of the older members of staff who did not believe in student-centred approaches. In what she perceived to be a "critical incident", she participated in a teaching contest but was criticised by the judges, who called her "arrogant" for delivering her class in English. This was a humiliating experience for Cheng, but despite this, her beliefs about student-centred EFL learning did not falter; on the contrary, they were actually reinforced as she began to seriously look down on her older colleagues. Over time, and especially as some older members of the teaching staff began to retire, she reported that student-centred learning approaches began to be more accepted by both staff and students. This led to an increased sense of satisfaction and a further reinforcement of her beliefs in student-centred EFL learning. This would have moved her further towards Path 4, in which there is a general degree of consistency between beliefs and practices.

The three case studies presented in this sub-section exemplify how complex the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices can be. Over the three cases, there were a number of examples of both successful and unsuccessful belief change, as well as examples of all the four theoretical "Paths" of belief and behaviour change. From a methodological perspective, the life history approach seems to have facilitated such a detailed exploration of these complex issues. Given that very few life history case studies have been conducted on the topic of belief and behaviour change, this seems very much to be a gap in the literature. I consider these gaps in more detail in the following section.

## 2.4. Summary and gaps in the literature

In this final section, I summarise my journey through the literature, and identify the gaps which would provide the rationale for my research questions and methodology.

### 2.4.1. Summary of topics covered in the literature review

I began this Literature Review chapter by introducing the concept of “student-centred learning”. This proved to be a somewhat difficult task, given the numerous different ways in which the term has been interpreted in the literature. After providing one general definition, I also considered how some of the more general characteristics of student-centred learning might be applied to the more specific area of EFL learning. I proceeded to examine some of the main reasons why student-centred approaches have been introduced, before briefly examining some of the main criticisms of these approaches. Finally, by focusing on the meta-analysis of Schweisfurth (2011), I explored some of the main reasons why the implementation of student-centred learning has not been particularly successful in developing countries. Here, it emerged that mismatches between the aims of student-centred learning and local teachers’ beliefs was one of the key reasons why these approaches had been unsuccessful.

I then focused on more general theories of educational change. I began by defining the concept of an “educational change”, and establishing that the movement from teacher-centred to student-centred learning would have to be considered an educational change. I then examined some of the main reasons why educational changes in general have been unsuccessful. It became apparent that one of the main reasons why changes tend to fail is that there is often a lack of awareness regarding their complexity, especially given that they involve a wide range of different *people*, who are inherently complex in themselves and in their responses to change. It was therefore suggested that educational changes like the movement from teacher-centred to student-centred learning must represent a “complex change” (Fullan, 2007), given that they imply changes not only to teachers’ practices but also to their *beliefs* about teaching. It was highlighted that planning for this process of belief change is rarely taken into account by educational change planners, and that there appears to be a general lack of studies which focus on how teachers’ beliefs and practices change over time during educational changes.

It therefore seemed especially relevant to focus in more detail on the area of beliefs, and the role beliefs play during educational change processes. I began the section by considering how the term “beliefs” has been conceptualised in the literature. I then explored some of the reasons why teachers’ beliefs might change (or not) over time. It became apparent that teachers’ beliefs may be affected by a number of experiences which they may have at different points in their lives. Specifically regarding teacher education, a number of characteristics of training courses emerged as important factors in affecting the degree of teacher belief change. It was thought that these key characteristics may be of interest to change planners when they introduce “complex changes” such as the introduction of student-centred (EFL) learning.

After this, I proceeded to explore the relationships between teachers’ beliefs and their practices. These relationships proved to be extremely complex, with belief changes not necessarily preceding changes in practices or vice-versa. At this point, I suggested that there may be four main combinations (or “Paths”) possible for teachers at different points in time in educational change processes. Out of these four Paths, possibly the most interesting was Path 3, which was when teachers’ beliefs change, but these beliefs are not transferred (at least fully) into classroom realities. A number of reasons for Path 3 emerged from the literature, but by far the most prominent was when contextual constraints prevented teachers from (fully) putting their beliefs into practice. I judged this situation to be somewhat worrying, as it indicates that even if planners are able to find a way of more or less aligning teachers’ beliefs with the aims of educational changes, they may still not be able to guarantee a real change in classroom practices.

In the final sub-section, I analysed three detailed case studies from China which explored how three EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices had evolved over time as they were encouraged to teach in a more student-centred way. Within these three case studies, there were a number of examples of belief change (or a lack of belief change), and several examples of each of the four combinations or “Paths” of belief and behaviour change which I had established in Section 2.3.3. The “life history” approach employed within these three studies seemed to allow for a much more detailed exploration into people’s beliefs and practices. I explore this methodological approach in more detail in the following sub-section, as well as in the Methodology chapter.

#### 2.4.2. Gaps in the literature and opportunities for study

The main purpose of this literature review was to identify gaps in the literature which would provide me with the rationale to carry out this study. In this final sub-section, I outline the most important gaps which emerged from my reading.

The first main gap in the literature responds to the call of Fullan and others, who have called for more studies which explore how teachers actually experience the process of belief and behaviour change during the implementation of “complex” educational changes (Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Cross and Hong, 2011). This kind of research might enhance our understanding of:

1. *How and why teachers’ beliefs evolve over time.* A number of authors have highlighted the general lack of texts which explore what factors may have an effect on teachers’ beliefs over time (Peacock, 2001; Kurihara and Samimy, 2007; Borg, 2011). The findings of studies like these might prove useful for change planners implementing “complex” educational changes, as they would provide further suggestions as to how to increase the likelihood of teacher belief change.

2. *How and why teachers’ beliefs interact with their practices over time.* Several authors have also suggested that there is a lack of studies which focus on how teachers’ beliefs interact with their practices over time (Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000; MacDonald et al., 2001; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002; Mansour, 2013). In particular, it may be useful to understand why teachers experience *mismatches* between their beliefs and their practices. This might prove useful for change planners who are interested in reducing reduce the inconsistencies between teachers’ beliefs and their practices.

The second main gap which emerged from the literature was that many studies have only analysed teacher belief and/or practice change over *a relatively short period of time* (MacDonald et al., 2001; Peacock, 2001). In addition, the majority of studies have focused primarily on belief and/or practice changes as a result of *pre-service* training courses, whilst relatively few have focused on teachers’ experiences of *in-service* training courses (Borg, 2006; 2011). Furthermore, research into beliefs and practices has tended to employ somewhat *limited methodologies* such as questionnaires, which may not lend

themselves to a particularly deep exploration into the complexity of the relationships between beliefs and practices (Wideen et al., 1998; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Busch, 2010). Phipps and Borg, for example, argue that

it is not enough [...] to identify differences, or tensions, between teachers' beliefs and practices; rather attempts need to be made to explore, acknowledge and understand the underlying reasons behind such tensions. [...] Methodologically, this suggests that studies which employ qualitative strategies to explore language teachers' actual practices and beliefs will be more productive (than, for example, questionnaires about what teachers do and believe) in advancing our understanding of the complex relationships between these phenomena.

(Phipps and Borg, 2009: 388)

One way of exploring teachers' experiences in the detail suggested by Phipps and Borg would be to employ the extremely qualitative approach of "life history". Indeed, the three Chinese case studies I presented in Section 2.3.4 seemed particularly successful in illuminating the complex nature of belief and behaviour change over a longer period of time. As Phipps and Borg highlight, qualitative approaches such as these may allow us not only to identify examples of belief and behaviour change, but also to explore in more detail the *underlying reasons* for these changes. Given that very few studies relating to beliefs and practices have utilised a life history approach or similar, this would seem to be a significant gap in the literature.

In the next chapter, I outline the specific research questions of my study, and describe how I went about trying to answer them at the University of San Martín.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I present the research questions of my study and explain the steps I took to try and answer them. This chapter is organised into six main sections. Section 3.1 begins by outlining the rationale for the study and the research questions. Section 3.2 then introduces the “life history” approach, which was the main methodological approach I chose to adopt within this study. In Section 3.3, I describe, in detail, each of the 15 stages of data collection and analysis. In Section 3.4, I explain some of the main ways in which I attempted to maximise the “trustworthiness” of the findings. In Section 3.5, I address some of the main issues regarding my role as a researcher and my relationships with the participants. In Section 3.6, I briefly recognise some of the main ethical considerations of the project. Finally, in Section 3.7, I explain the way in which I decided to present the findings in the following Data Analysis chapters.

### **3.1. Rationale for the study and research questions**

At the end of the previous chapter, I outlined the main gaps in the literature which emerged from my reading. In particular, there appeared to be a need for further exploration into:

- *How and why teachers’ beliefs evolve over time*, especially in the context of “complex” educational changes; and
- *How and why teachers’ beliefs and practices relate to each other over time*, again within the context of “complex” educational changes.

In addition to the gaps mentioned above, there seemed to be a general lack of studies which focused on:

- Teacher belief and behaviour change over *a longer period of time*; and
- Teacher belief and behaviour change during *in-service* training courses (as opposed to just pre-service courses).

Finally, there appeared to be a lack of studies which utilised *qualitative methodologies*. It was thought that such qualitative approaches might allow for a more detailed exploration into the complex nature of belief and behaviour change.

With the previous gaps in mind, I decided to plan a study which focused on how the beliefs and practices of five Mexican EFL teachers had evolved over the course of their lives. As mentioned in the Contextual Background chapter, the main educational change that these teachers had experienced was the introduction of more “student-centred” approaches to EFL learning. Therefore, using the qualitative approach of “life history”, I aimed to explore in detail how these teachers’ beliefs about student-centred EFL learning had evolved over time and why, as well as how their beliefs had interacted with their practices. It was thought that the findings of the study might prove useful for those involved in the process of implementing more student-centred (EFL) approaches in Mexico, as well as other people from similar contexts in other countries.

The research questions of the study are listed below. *(N.B. Within these research questions and throughout the remainder of this thesis, I will use the term “educational life history” to refer to the participants’ lives as learners and teachers. Furthermore, I will use the term “student-centred EFL learning” to refer to the way student-centred approaches are adapted to the specific area of EFL learning).*

- RQ1: How have the participants’ beliefs about student-centred EFL learning evolved over the course of their educational life histories?
  - RQ1a: What belief changes, if any, are perceived to have occurred?
  - RQ1b: Why might these belief changes have occurred?
- RQ2: What relationships emerge between the participants’ beliefs about student-centred EFL learning and their teaching practices?
  - RQ2a: At what point(s) are there matches and/or mismatches between beliefs and practices?
  - RQ2b: Why might these matches and/or mismatches have occurred?

In Section 3.3, I describe the specific steps I decided to take in order to try and answer these research questions. However, before this, I feel it is important to outline some of the general features of the “life history” approach, which was the main methodological approach I chose to adopt in this study. This is the focus of the next section.

### **3.2. An introduction to the life history approach**

As mentioned previously, the “life history” approach seemed an appropriate way of exploring teacher belief and behaviour change, as it would allow me to explore these phenomena in a considerable degree of detail over an extended period of time. In this section, I introduce the main features of the life history approach. I begin by defining life history research and outlining some of the most common methods which it tends to employ. Next, I examine the main philosophical assumptions that are generally associated with life history research. I proceed to explain how the participants of life history research tend to be selected, before considering the role of the researcher and the way that data analysis is conducted under such an approach. I consider some of the most common criticisms of life history research, as well as acknowledging how life historians have typically responded to them. Finally, I consider some of the potential “secondary” benefits of life history research.

#### *3.2.1. What is the life history approach?*

The life history approach is a qualitative research tradition (Richards, 2003) which aims to explore how people “personally and subjectively experience, make sense of, and account for the things that happen to them” (Goodson and Sikes, 2001: 39). It invites its participants to consider questions such as:

- Who are you?
- What are you?
- Why are you?
- Why do you think, believe, do, make sense of the world and things that happen to you, as you do?
- Why have particular things happened to you?
- Why has your life taken the course that it has?

(Goodson and Sikes, 2001: 1; bullets mine)

Within my particular study, these general questions would be refined into more specific ones, such as:

- What do you believe is the best way to teach?
- Why do you believe this?
- What things have happened to you to make you have these beliefs?
- How do you teach?
- Why do you teach in this way?
- Are you able to teach in a way that is consistent with your beliefs?
- Why/why not?

It might be argued that the life history approach has certain similarities with other qualitative traditions (Richards, 2003; Flick, 2009). For example, life history may be seen to share the key characteristics of “phenomenology”, given that it analyses phenomena in terms of *how they are perceived* by the individuals who experience them (Mason, 2001). Moreover, life history may be considered an example of a “case study”, as it focuses on the individual cases of people’s lives (Bassey, 1999; Yin, 2009). Finally, the life history approach seems to have a lot in common with the qualitative tradition of “narrative enquiry”, as it explores people’s experiences over time within their social contexts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Chase, 2005). This certain degree of overlap between different qualitative approaches may be somewhat confusing (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Richards, 2003). Therefore, whilst recognising the similarities between these different approaches, I will exclusively use the term “life history” from this point onwards.

### 3.2.2. Typical methods used in life history research

In life history research, several different methods may be used in order to explore the types of questions listed in the bullet points above. Perhaps the most common of these is the prolonged interview (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Richards, 2003). These interviews tend to be semi-structured and somewhat flexible, thus allowing participants to explore a wide range of issues, whilst at the same time following the main themes of the research (Kvale, 1996; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Johnson and Weller, 2002).

Life histories may also be elicited from participants in the written form, through methods such as journals, diaries and other personal writings (Bullough et al., 1991; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). In particular, inviting participants to construct *timelines* to visually represent

their lives is thought to be an especially useful way of exploring their life histories (Goodson, 2001; Goodson and Sikes, 2001).

The aforementioned methods may also be accompanied by secondary methods such as classroom observations (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Richards, 2003). Observations tend to serve two main purposes in life history research. Firstly, they may help researchers familiarise themselves with participants and their contexts in order to facilitate the interview process (Schensul et al., 1999; Cohen et al., 2011). Secondly, they may serve as a form of triangulation, given that what participants say may not necessarily be consistent with what they do (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006; Robson, 2011).

### 3.2.3. *The philosophical underpinnings of life history research*

This sub-section outlines some of the main ontological and epistemological assumptions which are typically associated with life history research. Here, “ontology” refers to people’s assumptions about the nature of *reality*, whilst “epistemology” refers to people’s assumptions about the nature of *knowledge* (Pring, 2000). Broadly speaking, people’s ontological and epistemological beliefs may be divided into two contrasting worldviews or “paradigms” (Kuhn, 1962; Cohen et al., 2011). The first of these is the “positivist” paradigm, which may also be referred to as the “normative” or “objectivist” paradigm (Giddens, 1975; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011). The positivist view assumes that the social world can be researched in a similar way to the natural world. It suggests that there is one, infallible “truth” “out there”, waiting to be discovered by the researcher. It sees human behaviour as rational, predictable, and governed by universal laws, and therefore assumes that the social world can be researched empirically. Positivist research is usually deductive in nature, as it produces theories or hypotheses first, and then seeks to confirm them through the results of the research.

The second main paradigm is the “naturalist” paradigm, which may also be referred to as the “anti-positivist”, “interpretivist”, “constructivist” and “subjectivist” paradigms, among others (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011). The naturalistic view argues that human behaviour is too complex to be governed by universal laws. It questions the existence of a one, single “truth”, proposing instead that multiple “realities” may be constructed in the minds of individuals as a result of their

interactions within social settings. The naturalistic paradigm therefore tends to examine social phenomena through the perspectives of the people who experience them, and places an emphasis on the specific contexts in which these experiences take place. In contrast to the positivist paradigm, which tends to test hypotheses in a deductive fashion, naturalistic approaches tends to be inductive in nature, as they focus on people in their natural settings first, and then seek to generate theories which emerge from the findings.

The life history approach is firmly grounded in the philosophical assumptions of the second, naturalistic paradigm (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). These assumptions inevitably affect certain methodological decisions regarding the selection of participants, the role of the researcher, and data analysis, which I briefly address in the following three sub-sections.

#### 3.2.4. *Sampling in life history research*

The sample sizes used in life history research tend to be quite small (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). One reason for this is feasibility. As life history research tends to involve focusing on people's lives in a great degree of detail, it may not be practical for large numbers of participants to be analysed within the same project (Cohen et al., 2011).

However, life historians do not tend to consider small sample sizes as significant obstacles. The main reason for this is that life history studies do not usually seek to generalise findings, but rather to illuminate specific phenomena in the hope that they might be relatable or *transferable* to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). I explore the idea of "transferability" in more detail in Sections 3.2.7 and 3.4.2.

Sampling within life history research also tends to be *purposive* as opposed to random (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Purposive sampling may occur when researchers "hand-pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality of possession of the particular characteristics being sought" (Cohen et al., 2011: 156). The selection of participants may also be somewhat *opportunistic* in nature (as there may only be a small number of willing volunteers) or for *convenience* (as the researcher may only have access to a particular group of people) (Goodson and Sikes, 2001).

### 3.2.5. The role of the researcher in life history research

While many people might criticise research which is not “objective” in nature (Troyna, 1994; Wolcott, 1994; Richards, 2003), the life history approach acknowledges, and indeed embraces, subjectivity as an important part of its methodological foundations (Munro, 1998; Coffey, 1999; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Furthermore, the life history approach recognises that the researcher’s own perspectives may subjectively manifest themselves as they interpret other people’s life histories. The interpretation of participants’ life histories are therefore not seen as indisputable facts, but rather as a middle ground between the subjective interpretation of the participants and the subjective interpretation of the researcher (Bruner, 1990; Kvale, 1996; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Edge, 2011).

### 3.2.6. Data analysis under the life history approach

An interesting characteristic of the life history approach is that data analysis tends to be an ongoing process, and may begin as soon as the first pieces of data are collected (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Richards, 2003; Gibbs, 2007). Indeed, if there are a number of different stages of data collection (for example, several interviews spaced out over an extended period of time), the researcher may begin to analyse the data, albeit tentatively, in the spaces in between. This may inform some of the researcher’s decisions when carrying out subsequent methods of data collection. It is also thought that such *in-situ* analysis may help the researcher avoid becoming too overwhelmed or “dominated” by the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Cohen et al., 2011).

A final point to be made about data analysis under the life history approach is that the participants themselves may be involved in such analysis through “member checking”. The concept of “member checking” refers to when participants are invited to read the researchers’ interpretations of the data and provide feedback regarding any changes that they would like to make (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Richards, 2003). I discuss the idea of “member checking” in more detail in Section 3.4.

### 3.2.7. Criticisms of life history research – and the responses of life historians

It must be recognised that qualitative approaches such as life history have been criticised, mainly by supporters of the positivist paradigm (Troyna, 1994; Wolcott, 1994; Phillips and Burbules, 2000; Richards, 2003). As authors such as Richards (2003: 6) highlight, these kinds of qualitative approaches are often considered to be the “soft option” and “unscientific”, given that they do not fulfil the indispensable criteria of “(internal) validity”, “generalisability”, “reliability” and “objectivity”. For example, life history research may be criticised as having:

- *A lack of (internal) validity* – i.e., how do we know that life histories are accurate? (For example, participants might not be able to remember all the details of their life histories, or they might not always be completely honest with the researcher).
- *A lack of generalisability (external validity)* – i.e., even if life histories are accurate, how useful can the findings be if they cannot be generalised across contexts?
- *A lack of reliability* – i.e., how can the findings of life histories be considered “reliable” when there is no way of knowing if the results would be the same if the study was repeated?
- *A lack of objectivity* – i.e., what is the use of research which is based solely on people’s subjective interpretations? And how can we be sure that the researcher is not being biased?

(Based on points made in Goodson and Sikes 2001, Richards 2003, Yin 2009, and Cohen et al. 2011, among others)

The criticisms above offer a quite strong case against qualitative approaches such as life history. However, as mentioned in Section 3.2.3 above, proponents of life history do not subscribe to the positivist worldview, favouring instead a more naturalistic paradigm (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). They reject the notion that their approaches may be considered some sort of “soft option”, arguing that they require the same standards of “rigour, precision, systematicity and careful attention to detail” as any other type of research (Richards, 2003: 6). Indeed, in response to the positivist criteria of (internal) validity, generalisability, reliability and objectivity, qualitative researchers have tended

to use their own set of criteria in order to maximise the “trustworthiness” of research studies; namely, “credibility”, “transferability”, “dependability” and “confirmability” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I introduce these four criteria below, and identify the specific steps I took to address them in Section 3.4.

Firstly, qualitative researchers have generally been sceptical of the positivist requirement of “(internal) validity”, as they are critical of the notion of a single, definitive “truth” which exists externally to the researcher. They prefer the more naturalistic viewpoint, which suggests that many different “truths” may exist, depending on the subjective interpretation which is constructed in the minds of each individual (Blumer, 1969; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). In response to the term “(internal) validity”, many qualitative researchers have chosen to use the term “credibility”, which places more of an emphasis on the *degree of confidence that something might be true*, as opposed to seeking definitive knowledge of an absolute truth (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A related term is that of “verisimilitude”, which Goodson and Sikes define as “how far [the findings] seem to be true, how far people who have personal experience of the focus of the research regard [them] to be likely, or the extent to which “experts” in the field consider [them] to be plausible” (Goodson and Sikes, 2001: 50).

Secondly, qualitative researchers have criticised the positivist concept of “generalisability”, as they have questioned the degree to which the social world can be generalised (Peshkin, 1993; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). A commonly cited argument is that life is too complex to be reduced to fixed categories, given that “most of what we study is truly complex, relating to people, events, and situations characterized by more variables than anyone can manage to identify” (Peshkin, 1993: 27). With this in mind, qualitative researchers tend to prefer to carry out a number of detailed studies within specific contexts. Provided that such contexts are described in detail, the reader may then be in a position to judge their degree of “transferability” to other contexts. Over time, it is hoped that such context-specific studies might be able to link together to provide a more realistic picture of “reality” than the often unrealistic generalisations that are made using more positivist approaches (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Robson, 2011; Larsson, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Thirdly, qualitative researchers have argued that the concept of “reliability”, that is, the extent to which doing the research again will yield the same results, is simply not

appropriate for qualitative approaches such as life history (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stenbacka, 2001). In fact, achieving “reliability” may be impossible in life history research, given that participants and researchers are unique, dynamic beings, who may affect and be affected by the research process (Bruner, 1990; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Edge, 2011). In response to the term “reliability”, Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested that a more suitable concept might be that of “dependability”, which refers to how consistent the researcher’s conclusions are with the evidence provided from the data, and the extent to which similar studies could be repeated, albeit at different times, with different participants and in different contexts.

Finally, qualitative researchers have strongly questioned whether any kind of research can truly be considered “objective” (Clough, 1992; Munro, 1998; Coffey, 1999). Clough, for example, argues that “all factual representations of reality, even statistical representations, are narratively constructed” (Clough, 1992: 2). In fact, far from seeing it as a limitation, subjectivity is often seen as an essential component of life history research (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). In response to the positivist concept of “objectivity”, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that a more appropriate term would be that of “confirmability”. Here, researchers try to make their own potential motivations and biases as explicit as possible, so that the readers may judge for themselves the extent to which the findings have been shaped by bias.

This sub-section has examined some of the main criticisms and counter-criticisms of the life history approach, and has introduced Lincoln and Guba’s four criteria of “trustworthiness”. I explore these ideas in more detail in Section 3.4, in which I outline the specific ways in which I attempted to maximise the “trustworthiness” of this study.

### 3.2.8. *“Secondary” benefits of life history research*

As I have highlighted, one of the main benefits of the life history approach is that it allows for a detailed exploration into complex phenomena such as the evolution of people’s beliefs and practices over time. However, there may also be certain other “secondary” benefits to the approach. I examine these briefly below.

Firstly, regardless of how useful life history studies end up being for the academic community, they may be viewed as positive experiences for the participants themselves (Bullough et al., 1991; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). This is because the very nature of the approach tends to engage its participants in a process of self-reflection in which they are invited to think carefully about themselves and their lives. In the Literature Review chapter, this process of reflection was considered to be a key factor in more successful training courses (Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Borg, 2011; Mansour, 2013). Therefore, it could be argued that the life history approach might be a useful strategy in teacher professional development (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). However, it must be stressed that the main reason I decided to carry out this piece of research was to produce an original contribution to knowledge. Although the research may have been a positive experience for the participants (and I certainly hope this was the case), I cannot claim to have planned for this to happen when designing the study.

Secondly, life history research is sometimes thought to contribute towards more far-reaching social benefits. In a similar vein to the emancipatory impact of Paulo Freire's "critical pedagogy" (see Section 2.1.3), approaches such as life history may be seen as a way of "giving a voice" to those who do not normally have the opportunity to have one (McLaughlin and Tierney, 1993; González, 2001). However, it must be made clear that at no point did I plan for the research to be "emancipatory" in nature. In fact, I would agree with the opinion of Goodson and Sikes, who argue that to view life history research as emancipatory or empowering would be "at best, naïve and, at worst, grandiose and ethically dubious" (Goodson and Sikes, 2001: 99; see also Troyna, 1994).

A final point which must be made is that life history research may actually turn out to be a *negative* experience for those involved (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). I address this possibility in Section 3.6, which considers some of the main ethical issues of the research. Having examined the general characteristics of the life history approach, the next section describes all 15 stages of data collection and analysis.

### 3.3. Stages of data collection and analysis

The previous section established life history as the main methodological approach of the study and described some of its key characteristics. In this section, I explain the specific procedures that I took during the research process.

This study took place at the “University of San Martín” (USM) in Mexico, and involved 5 EFL teachers and 33 of their students. In order to analyse the educational life histories of the teacher participants, they were invited to take part in a number of activities: firstly, an extended life history interview; secondly, a timeline activity; thirdly, a post-timeline interview; and finally, a third interview in which they were asked to rate the student-centredness of their beliefs and practices at different points in time. To inform the process of data collection and for triangulation purposes, these teachers were also observed in their current classroom settings. Finally, 9 focus groups were carried out with a range of the teachers’ students, again for triangulation purposes.

The specific order of the data collection process is outlined in the table below:

*Table 3.3(i). Stages of the data collection process*

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>People involved</b>	<b>Main aims</b>
<b>1</b>	Jan 2014	Gaining access to the USM	Researcher, Gatekeeper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To obtain permission to carry out the research.</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	Aug 2014	Recruitment of teacher participants	Researcher, Gatekeeper, Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To recruit the teacher participants.</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	Aug 2014	Pilot studies	Researcher, Pilot teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To practice using methods of data collection.</li> <li>To make corresponding adjustments to the methodology if necessary.</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	Aug - Sep 2014	Classroom observations	Researcher, Teachers, Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To begin to build trust with the teacher participants.</li> <li>To provide stimuli for interviews.</li> <li>To form an idea of participants’ classroom practices for later triangulation.</li> </ul>

<b>5</b>	Aug - Sep 2014	First life history interviews	Researcher, Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To establish each teacher's individual interpretations of student-centred EFL learning.</li> <li>• To explore how each teacher's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning had evolved over time in relation to their teaching practices.</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	Aug - Sep 2014	Preliminary data analysis; First drafts of teachers' educational life histories; First formal member checking	Researcher, Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To familiarise myself with the data from the first life history interviews.</li> <li>• To produce a first draft of each teachers' educational life histories.</li> <li>• To give participants the opportunity to verify my initial write-up of their educational life histories.</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	Oct 2014	Explanation of timeline activity	Researcher, Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explain the timeline activity to teachers, in order for them to produce a visual representation of the way in which their beliefs about student-centred EFL learning had evolved in relation to their teaching practices.</li> </ul>
<b>8</b>	Oct 2014	Recruitment of participants for student focus groups	Researcher, Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To recruit participants for the student focus groups.</li> </ul>
<b>9</b>	Oct - Nov 2014	Student focus groups	Researcher, Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To gather the students' perspectives about their current teachers' practices.</li> <li>• To identify any potential mismatches between what teachers say about their teaching practices and their students' perceptions.</li> </ul>
<b>10</b>	Oct - Nov 2014	Preliminary data analysis of student focus groups	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To familiarise myself with the data from student focus groups, in order to inform subsequent interviews with teachers.</li> </ul>

<b>11</b>	Oct – Dec 2014	Post-timeline interviews	Researcher, Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To familiarise myself with the teachers' timelines.</li> <li>• To discuss themes emerging from the preliminary analysis of the first life history interviews and student focus groups.</li> <li>• To explore in more detail how teachers' beliefs about student-centred EFL learning had evolved over time in relation to their teaching practices.</li> </ul>
<b>12</b>	Jan - Mar 2015	First period of formal data analysis	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To carry out a first comprehensive analysis of all data collected.</li> <li>• To begin to consider the main themes emerging from the data.</li> <li>• To begin to think about how the data might be presented.</li> </ul>
<b>13</b>	April 2015	Third interviews and production of summary graphs	Researcher, Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To confirm the teachers' individual interpretations of student-centred EFL learning.</li> <li>• To ask teachers to rate, from '1' to '10', how student-centred they felt their beliefs and practices were at key points in their educational life histories.</li> <li>• To produce graphs in order to visually represent the main ways in which the teachers' beliefs and practices had evolved over time.</li> </ul>
<b>14</b>	May - Sep 2015	Second period of formal data analysis	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To carry out a second comprehensive analysis of all data collected.</li> <li>• To consolidate the main findings of the data.</li> <li>• To start writing the Data Analysis chapters.</li> </ul>
<b>15</b>	Nov 2016	Final member checking	Researcher, Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To give participants a final opportunity to verify my interpretations of their educational life histories.</li> </ul>

I address each of these Stages of data collection in the following sub-sections.

### *3.3.1. Stage 1: Gaining access to the USM*

The first stage of the research process was gaining permission to carry out the study. The choice to conduct the research at the USM was mainly due to feasibility and convenience,

given that I had been involved with the University for a number of years and had developed many professional contacts there (see Section 1.3 of the Contextual Background chapter).

By December 2013, I had finished most of the key readings which would form part of my Literature Review, and had begun to think about some tentative research questions for the study. Although these research questions had not been finalised at this point, I was fairly confident that the study would involve working with English teachers (and perhaps their students) at the USM. Therefore, in January 2014, I decided to travel to Mexico to present a provisional project to the USM's University English Department (UED), and to ask permission to carry out the study.

I requested a meeting with the Director of the UED, Paulina Sandoval, whose name, like all participants in the study, has been replaced by a pseudonym. Despite spending a number of years at the USM, I had never actually met Paulina. However, she was very welcoming and enthusiastic about the project. I explained what I was planning to do and we discussed some practical implications. At the end of the meeting, we agreed that the provisional project would be feasible. She explained that there would be no problem gaining access to the USM as long as the individual participants granted me their informed consent (see Section 3.6.2). She also agreed to help me make initial contact with potential participants when the time came to begin the research.

With this practical concern out of the way, I returned to the University of Leeds to continue working on my research design.

### *3.3.2. Stage 2: Recruitment of teacher participants*

Having been granted preliminary permission to carry out my research at the USM, I returned to the University of Leeds to focus in more detail on the specific methods that I would use. Between January and June 2014, I worked on a detailed research proposal which I defended in my "transfer viva". After attending this transfer viva and responding to feedback from the panel, I had a much clearer plan of the methodological procedures that I was going to follow. In August 2014, I was therefore ready to move to Mexico to begin the process of data collection.

My first task upon arrival in Mexico was to recruit the teacher participants. By this time, I had a clearer idea of the types of participants I was going to need in order to answer my research questions. Specifically, I planned to recruit 4 to 7 teachers who:

- Felt that, in the past, they had taught in a predominately teacher-centred way;
- Now believed in more student-centred approaches; and
- Had made and/or were in the process of making a conscious effort to teach in a more student-centred way.

My rationale was that, if these characteristics were met, I would be able to explore:

- How the beliefs of teachers who now believed in student-centred EFL learning had evolved over time (RQ1a);
- What had happened to these teachers to make them change their beliefs (RQ1b);
- The extent to which these teachers' beliefs were actually reflected in their practices at different points in time (RQ2a); and
- Why there might have been matches and/or mismatches between their beliefs and practices (RQ2b).

In order to help choose the participants, I asked Paulina to recommend some teachers who she felt would fit the criteria I had proposed. Of course, this involved a certain degree of subjectivity on her part. In fact, there was an element of subjectivity when selecting the participants in general, given that there was no way I could possibly “know” how teacher-centred or student-centred these teachers' beliefs and practices were or had been in the past.

In order to somewhat mitigate this subjectivity, two of the activities I carried out with the teacher participants involved them expressing how they personally interpreted student-centred EFL learning (I explain these in more detail in Stages 5 and 13). In addition, I was able to observe participants teaching in the early stages of data collection. This gave me the opportunity to identify any significant mismatches between their interpretations of student-centred EFL learning and mine.

Originally, I had planned for Paulina to provide me with the email addresses of around 10 participants who she felt might fit the characteristics above. However, as tends to be the case in Mexico, the reality was rather more practical and informal. In August 2014, I arranged to meet Paulina for a second meeting; our meeting happened to coincide with an EFL teachers' meeting; Paulina introduced me to the teachers, and seven of them immediately expressed an interest in participating in the study. I have listed the names of these seven participants, as well as some key biographical information, in the table below:

*Table 3.3.2(i). Key biographical information of the teacher participants*

Name	Gender	Approx. age range	Approx. years teaching at USM	University Departments ("Schools") (at time of data collection)	Completed data collection?	Included in final data analysis?
Rebecca	F	40-50	15-20	Languages	✓	✓
Isabella	F	30-40	5-10	Modern Art	✓	✓
Antonio	M	20-30	5-10	Computing, Tourism	✓	✓
Ricardo	M	40-50	10-15	Nursing, Social Work	✓	✓
Elizabeth	F	30-40	10-15	Administration, Education	✓	✓
Jennifer	F	50-60	15-20	Education, Marketing, Tourism	✓	✗
Josefina	F	30-40	5-10	Administration, Computing, Psychology, Tourism	✗	✗

Out of the seven teachers included in the table above, only six completed the entire process of data collection. This was because the seventh participant, Josefina, decided to withdraw from the study because she felt she was too overloaded with work.

In addition, I decided not to include the case of Jennifer in the final data analysis. This was because, after analysing the data, I felt that she did not actually fulfil the criteria I had originally stipulated. Upon reflection, I decided that she had never really taught in a "teacher-centred" way, and as a native speaker of English who had grown up in the United States, her story was quite different to the other participants, who shared a lot of common characteristics.

Having recruited my teacher participants, it was time to begin the process of data collection. However, before starting this process, I decided to carry out two pilot studies, which I explain below.

### 3.3.3. Stage 3: Pilot studies

Before starting the process of formal data collection, I decided to carry out a brief pilot study with a friend of mine who taught at a local private language institution in San Martín. The main objective of this pilot study was for me to practice “doing” the observations and first interviews, given that this was the first piece of research of this nature I had been involved in. Taking part in these activities helped me gain confidence with the process of observing and interviewing. However, a significant drawback was that the teaching context was somewhat different to that of my participants at the USM. This meant that I was not able to directly relate my friend’s experiences to the experiences of the teachers in my study. Nevertheless, I received some useful feedback from the teacher involved, and overall it was a useful experience.

Given that the pilot study had not been directly applicable to my teacher participants, I planned for the first participant of the study (Rebecca) to be somewhat of a trial run. Therefore, in August 2014, I carried out Stages 4 to 7 (classroom observations, first interview, initial data analysis, and explanation of timeline activity) with Rebecca before beginning the majority of the other activities with the other participants. This proved to be a much more valuable experience than the previous pilot study. I made Rebecca aware that this was the first time I had conducted this type of research, and that it might not be a seamless process. Thankfully, she was extremely patient with me, and gave me some useful tips regarding how she had felt during the observations and interviews. Certain changes, some subtle and others more important, occurred as a result of my experiences with Rebecca. I highlight some of these within the following stages.

### 3.3.4. Stage 4: Classroom observations

The first main stage of data collection was the classroom observations, which took place between August and September 2014. I decided to carry out these observations *before* the

main life history interviews for a number of reasons. The first reason was to build trust with the participants (de Laine, 2000; Richards, 2003). I was going to be spending a fair amount of time with these teachers; therefore, on a personal level, it was very important for me to get to know them and establish a positive relationship. Moreover, a sense of trust would be important in order for participants to feel comfortable enough to share their honest accounts of their educational life histories with me. Therefore, throughout the entire research process, I endeavoured to be as friendly, supportive and transparent as possible with the teacher participants.

Aside from building trust, another main aim of the classroom observations was to familiarise myself with the way these individuals taught. I felt it would be extremely important to experience first-hand how these teachers delivered their classes, what activities they used, how teacher- or student-centred I perceived them to be, and how their students responded to them. This would be useful for two reasons. Firstly, it would help facilitate the interview process, as I would be able to refer back to incidents I had observed in the teachers' classes (Schensul et al., 1999; Cohen et al., 2011). Secondly, observing classes would be useful for the study for triangulation purposes (Robson, 2011; Cohen et al., 2011). As I explore in Section 3.4, triangulation is one of the key ways in which researchers are able to maximise the "trustworthiness" of life history studies (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006).

It must be recognised that one of the most important issues when observing classes is that of "reactivity". This refers to the general tendency that participants are unlikely to behave completely normally in the presence of an observer, a phenomenon which has also been called the "Hawthorne effect" or the "observer's paradox" (de Laine, 2000; Richards, 2003; Flick, 2009; Robson, 2011). To some extent this might be an inevitable characteristic of this type of research. However, I tried to reduce the possibility of reactivity in a number of ways. Firstly, as mentioned previously, I made a real effort to build trust with the participants. I endeavoured to be as open and transparent with them at all times, explaining to them that the observations were not the key component of the data collection, and I regularly reiterated to them how important it was for them to behave as normally as possible in order for the data to be meaningful. I tried to be as non-judgemental as possible, repeating to them several times that my intention when observing them was not to evaluate their teaching practices. Another strategy I employed was to spend as long as possible observing each participant, an approach known as

“persistent observation” or “prolonged engagement” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006). Furthermore, perhaps most importantly, I decided not to audio or video record any of the classes. This seemed an appropriate decision to make, because doing so may have significantly affected the way the participants taught (Cohen et al., 2011). I do not feel that choosing not to video record the classes left me at a great disadvantage, given that I was not interested in meticulously analysing them; I was more focused on obtaining a rather general idea of how these teachers taught.

My role when carrying out the classroom observations was as an “observer-as-participant”. Cohen et al. (2011: 457) define this role as “not a member of the group, but who may participate a little or peripherally in the group’s activities, and whose role as researcher is clear and overt, [but] as unobtrusive as possible.” In other words, although I was hoping to observe the class in as natural a way as possible, I did not expect to be “invisible”. This meant that I was happy to “participate” in limited ways in certain situations. For example, every teacher introduced me to their students at the beginning of the class and briefly explained who I was and what I would be doing. In addition, some teachers or students asked me questions about myself or for help with their work, and I was happy to respond. Again, I decided to do this in order to build trust with the teacher (and student) participants.

As I was not going to be video recording the classes, it would be important for me to make notes during the classroom observations (Richards, 2003; Cohen et al., 2011). For practical reasons, I decided to bring my laptop into the classes and make notes directly into Microsoft Word. When I was note-taking, I decided not to follow a fixed structure, but instead recorded the main activities the teachers were doing, as well as any other aspects which I felt might be particularly interesting or relevant to the study, such as how teacher- or student-centred I perceived the activities to be (Wolcott, 1994; Moyles, 2002). After each class, I took my laptop straight back to my office, reflected upon the class I had just observed, and updated the notes if I felt there was anything to change or add. As suggested by Richards (2003), I would refer back to these notes at regular intervals throughout the research. Furthermore, I eventually decided to code the notes into the qualitative data analysis tool NVivo (see Section 3.3.6). This allowed me to analyse in a more comprehensive way the extent to which my perceptions of the teachers’ practices were consistent with what they had said about themselves in the interviews

(triangulation). I have included a sample of one of these notes in Section A.3 of the Appendices.

Several authors have highlighted the possibility of researcher bias when observing. For example, the researcher may not be able to see or record certain happenings, they may misinterpret situations, and they may be influenced by their own pre-conceptions (Moyles, 2002; Robson, 2011; Flick, 2009). In order to somewhat reduce the possibility of this, I made a conscious effort to keep my notes as neutral and objective as possible. However, as mentioned in Section 3.2.5, it must be recognised that the subjective interpretation of the researcher is an inevitable component of this kind of qualitative research (Munro, 1998; Coffey, 1999; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). I revisit these themes again in Section 3.5, in which I focus on my role as the researcher and my relationships with the participants.

An interesting decision that I had to make was when to stop observing. Although I was following the general recommendations of “persistent observation” and “prolonged engagement” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006), I decided to stop observing when I felt I had reached some sort of “saturation point”; that is to say, when I started to see the same kinds of behaviours repeating themselves (Adler and Adler, 1994). This began to occur after around 3 to 5 classes per teacher. At this point, I was reasonably confident that I had a general idea of how these teachers taught, and especially how teacher- or student-centred I perceived their practices to be. I therefore felt ready to start the main component of the research: the life history interviews.

### *3.3.5. Stage 5: First life history interviews*

After completing the classroom observations, I began the most important part of the data collection process: exploring the teachers’ educational life histories. The first stage of this process was the first life history interviews.

Before I began the main content of the interviews, I felt it was necessary to understand how each teacher participant understood the term “student-centred EFL learning”. Having spent a fair amount of time reading around the subject, and generally failing to find a standardised definition of the concept, I conceded that the interpretation of this term

would be slightly different for each individual (see Section 2.1.1 of the Literature Review chapter). Therefore, I decided that, within my project, I would allow the teachers to decide upon their own (potentially different) interpretations of student-centred EFL learning. From a methodological point of view, I felt this was an acceptable (and indeed necessary) compromise. After all, I was not planning to *directly* compare the beliefs and practices of my teacher participants, but rather to explore how, on an individual level, their beliefs and practices had evolved over time and why.

I therefore allowed some time before the interviews to have an informal chat with each teacher about their individual understandings of student-centred EFL learning. I began by showing them my interpretation of student-centred learning in general, which essentially consisted of the seven-point definition of Lea et al. (2003) which I introduced in Section 2.1.1 of the Literature Review chapter. I then showed them my interpretation of the way that student-centred learning might be applied to EFL learning, which was based on the points listed in Table 2.1.2(i) of Section 2.1.2 of the Literature Review chapter. After giving the participants the chance to consider these two definitions, I proceeded to ask them to what extent they agreed with them. In particular, I asked them to highlight which specific aspects of student-centred EFL learning they thought were most important in terms of their own beliefs and practices.

There were no major differences between my interpretations of student-centred EFL learning and those expressed by the teachers. However, it did become apparent that each teacher had placed slightly different degrees of importance on different aspects of the term. At the beginning of each case in the following Data Analysis chapters, I describe how each participant personally interpreted student-centred EFL learning.

One mistake which I feel I made at this stage was that I did not make notes as we discussed the participants' interpretations of student-centred EFL learning. In retrospect, I feel that I should have done so, in order to maintain a record of the participants' definitions which I could refer to later. Fortunately, I was able to repeat a similar activity as part of the third interview (Stage 13), during which I did make notes.

Upon completion of this initial activity, I began the first life history interviews. Following the general guidelines of life history research, these interviews were semi-structured. That is to say, flexibility was allowed for participants to express themselves relatively freely,

but I still followed a certain structure in order to address the research questions (Kvale, 1996; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Johnson and Weller, 2002). Although all of the interviews followed slightly different paths, they all involved teachers talking through their time as both learners and teachers. This mainly took place in chronological order, and we generally began by talking about their experiences as learners. As we talked about different chronological periods in these participants' lives, I made sure to ask them certain questions which were directly related to my research questions. For example:

- How did you believe was the best way to teach at that point? (RQ1a)
- To what extent did you believe in student-centred EFL learning at that point? (RQ1a)
- Why do you think your beliefs changed/did not change? (RQ1b)
- How did you teach at that point? (RQ2a)
- How student-centred do you feel your practices were at that point? (RQ2a)
- What do you think had an impact on you putting your beliefs into practice? (RQ2b)

I felt that by making sure these key questions were covered, I would be best placed to answer my research questions when it came to the data analysis.

The duration of the first life history interviews varied between 45 and 80 minutes. This length seems to have been suitable for this kind of research, as it has been suggested that the quality of responses may decrease as interviews get longer (Richards, 2003). However, I cannot claim to have planned for the interviews to be an exact length, as I simply followed a natural flow of conversation until we had reached the end of each participant's educational life histories. It is therefore unsurprising that the shortest interview was that of Antonio, the youngest participant, and the longest interview was that of Ricardo, the oldest participant.

Unlike the classroom observations, I did decide to audio record the interviews. Although to a certain extent doing so may have affected the participants' responses, I felt that the benefits of recording would vastly outweigh the drawbacks when it came to transcribing and analysing the data (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Richards, 2003). However, in order to increase the possibility of participants expressing themselves honestly, it was important

to make them feel as comfortable as possible (Kvale, 1996; de Laine, 2000; Richards, 2003). In order to achieve this, I planned for the interviews to take place in a comfortable room in which participants could be sure that they would not be heard by anyone else. Throughout the interview, I tried to be friendly and non-judgemental, and to be as open as possible to anything they wanted to say. After the interview, I thanked them for participating, clearly explained what I was going to do with the data, and informed them of the next stages of the research.

As was the case with the observations, there is always a possibility of researcher bias when conducting semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996; Barker and Johnson, 1998; Cohen et al., 2011). Again, this may be seen as an inevitable characteristic of qualitative approaches such as life history, given that knowledge is seen as an “interpretation of an interpretation” which is co-constructed between the interviewer and interviewee (Bruner, 1990; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Edge, 2011). Nevertheless, I did make an effort to reduce the possibility of bias when interviewing. For example, I endeavoured to be as objective and neutral as possible, trying not to express my own points of view and avoiding “leading” questions (Kvale, 1996; Arksey and Knight, 1999). I address these points again in Section 3.5, in which I consider my role as the researcher and my relationships with the participants.

A final point to be made about the interviews is that I gave teachers the choice to speak in either English or Spanish. The reason for this was that I wanted them to feel as comfortable as possible, and to avoid the possibility of language being a barrier to them expressing exactly what they wanted to say. In the end, all of the teacher participants opted to use English. With the exception of Jennifer, all of the participants were non-native speakers of English, which might be seen as somewhat of a limitation (Aldridge and Fraser, 2000). However, all of the teachers had a good level of English and, as a bilingual speaker of English and Spanish myself, I was generally satisfied that what they wanted to say was expressed during the interviews.

3.3.6. Stage 6: Preliminary data analysis, first drafts of teachers' educational life histories, and first formal member checking

When I had finished the first life history interviews with the teachers, I uploaded the recordings onto my laptop and began transcribing them using the qualitative analysis tool NVivo. Although some authors recommend including aspects such as tone of voice, pauses and emphasis when transcribing (Atkinson and Heritage, 1999; Flick, 2009), I decided not to do so. This was because my study was focusing on the main themes highlighted by the teachers, as opposed to an in-depth “discourse analysis” of their interviews. I have provided a number of screenshots of the transcription process in Section A.4 of the Appendices.

Upon completion of the first drafts of transcription, I went through each interview again, correcting any grammatical mistakes and omitting any repetitions. I decided to do this for two reasons. Firstly, as I have just mentioned, I would not be analysing the data from a discourse analysis perspective, but rather in terms of the key semantic themes that emerged from the interviews. Secondly, given that all of the participants (except Jennifer, who was not included in the final data analysis) were non-native speakers of English, there were naturally quite a few errors in their spoken English. I felt that if I left the mistakes in by transcribing the interviews word-for-word, it might be embarrassing for the teacher participants.

After the interviews were transcribed, I began the process of coding in NVivo. Coding is generally considered a vital component of qualitative data analysis (Kelle, 1995; Gibbs, 2007; Flick, 2009). It consists of allocating certain parts of the data into different categories, which allows the data to be more effectively organised for analysis (Cohen et al., 2011). When coding, Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo are extremely useful, given that they assist with the main human problems of data overload and retrieval (Kelle, 1995; Flick, 2009). Of course, these programs do not actually “do” the analysis for the researcher, and this tends to be one of the main reasons they are criticised (Richards, 2002; Gibbs, 2007; García-Horta and Guerra-Ramos, 2009). Nevertheless, I have found using NVivo an extremely useful tool in facilitating *my own process* of interpreting the data.

There were two main types of coding which I used in my project: *chronological* and *thematic*. The first process which I carried out was that of *chronological coding*. This involved dividing participants' educational life histories into key time periods, and then coding different segments of the transcription into these periods. The process of deciding upon each participant's key time periods was quite challenging. Mainly, this was because there was not always clear "start and end points" between different sections of the participants' lives, and there was often a great deal of overlap between different key events (such as long-term training courses). However, in terms of being able to differentiate between the main tendencies in the participants' educational life histories, I had to be bold and create somewhat artificial categories. The chronological time periods for each teacher participant are highlighted at the start of each Data Analysis chapter, and each Data Analysis chapter is divided into these key periods (see Section 3.7).

When my first attempt at chronological coding was completed, I began the process of *thematic coding*. This involved creating categories within each chronological period, and then coding segments of text into these categories. My approach when deciding upon the thematic categories could be described as a combination of *deductive* and *inductive* coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Cohen et al., 2011). From a deductive perspective, I was always aware that I was going to have to answer my specific research questions. Therefore, it was inevitable that I began the data analysis process with certain (deductive) categories in mind. For example:

- Changes in beliefs about student-centred EFL learning (RQ1);
- Changes in teaching practices (RQ2);
- Examples of consistencies between beliefs and practices (RQ2);
- Examples of inconsistencies between beliefs and practices (RQ2).

However, from an inductive perspective, I also maintained an open mind regarding the creation of new categories. This was especially relevant when it came to creating sub-categories within the main categories highlighted in the bullet points above. For example, within the category "Changes in beliefs about student-centred EFL learning", the following sub-categories emerged naturally (inductively) from the data:

- Changes in beliefs about student-centred *teaching methods*;
- Changes in beliefs about *teacher-student roles and relationships*.

The sub-categories above are just two examples of codes which emerged during the course of the data analysis. Indeed, as tends to be the case with qualitative research approaches such as life history, category generation and coding was a long-term process (more than 12 months from start to finish), which evolved over time as I became increasingly familiar with the data (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Richards, 2003; Gibbs, 2007). In Section A.5 of the Appendices, I have provided a variety of screenshots which show examples of the coding process.

When the initial chronological and thematic coding was completed, I began writing up a first draft of each participant's educational life histories. As I did this, I became more immersed in the data, and my understanding of what had happened to the participants' beliefs and practices over time became clearer. When I had finished these first drafts, I sent them to each teacher so that they could verify my initial interpretations and make suggestions if necessary. This method of "participant validation" or "member checking" was one of the key ways of trying to ensure the "trustworthiness" of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006). I focus on "trustworthiness" in more detail in Section 3.4.

None of the participants reported any significant problems with the first drafts that I sent them. This may have been because my analysis was very accurate, or perhaps because they either did not have the time to look at it detail, or did not feel comfortable enough to point out any problems (Cohen et al., 2011). In any case, my research design provided a number of other opportunities for the participants to "member check" my analysis of their educational life histories. The next chance for this to happen would be during the following timeline activity, which would confirm and supplement the information obtained from the first life history interviews.

### 3.3.7. Stage 7: Explanation of timeline activity to teachers

The next main activity for the teachers was the timeline activity. The purpose of asking teachers to produce timelines was to create a visual representation of their educational

life histories (Goodson, 2001; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). I felt that this might add to, or at the very least reinforce, the data I had obtained from the first life history interviews.

My initial plan when designing the timeline activity was for the participants to produce their timelines rather quickly and informally. I brought in large pieces of paper and coloured pens, with the idea that the teachers would be able to produce their timelines within an hour or so. However, after carrying out the pilot study with Rebecca, I realised that it was unrealistic to expect teachers to be able to reflect on their lives in the detail required within such a short timeframe. Therefore, I asked them to complete the activity in their own time. It took two months for all the teachers to finish their timelines, but I did not see this as a problem, as it was clear that they were taking the task seriously.

Around October 2014, I arranged individual meetings with each participant in order to explain to them some general guidelines for producing their timelines. However, I also made it clear that they were free to organise the timeline in any way that they wanted, if they felt it would make the information easier for me to understand. This certain degree of flexibility meant that every timeline was slightly different, which far from being a limitation of the study, I think enriched it considerably. I allowed teachers to produce their timelines either by hand or in digital form; most opted for the latter. Most teachers put a lot of effort into their timelines; indeed, I was rather surprised by the level of detail and enthusiasm that they dedicated to the task. Perhaps this was simply to make a good impression with me, but after talking to them, I believe that this was because the activity had been intrinsically motivating for them.

The general guidelines that I asked teachers to adhere to was as follows:

- Draw a **BLACK** line in the middle of the page to represent the timeline itself. Write down the key events that you feel have had an impact on changes to your beliefs about student-centred EFL learning and your teaching practices. Include dates if you can remember them. **1**
- Write in **GREEN** how you feel your beliefs about teaching English (specifically, beliefs about student-centred EFL learning) evolved at those particular time periods. **2**

- Write in **BLUE** how you feel your actual teaching practices evolved at those time periods. **3**
- Write in **RED** any obstacles which you feel may have prevented you from putting your beliefs into practice. **4**

In addition, I asked teachers to provide the following at key points in the timeline:

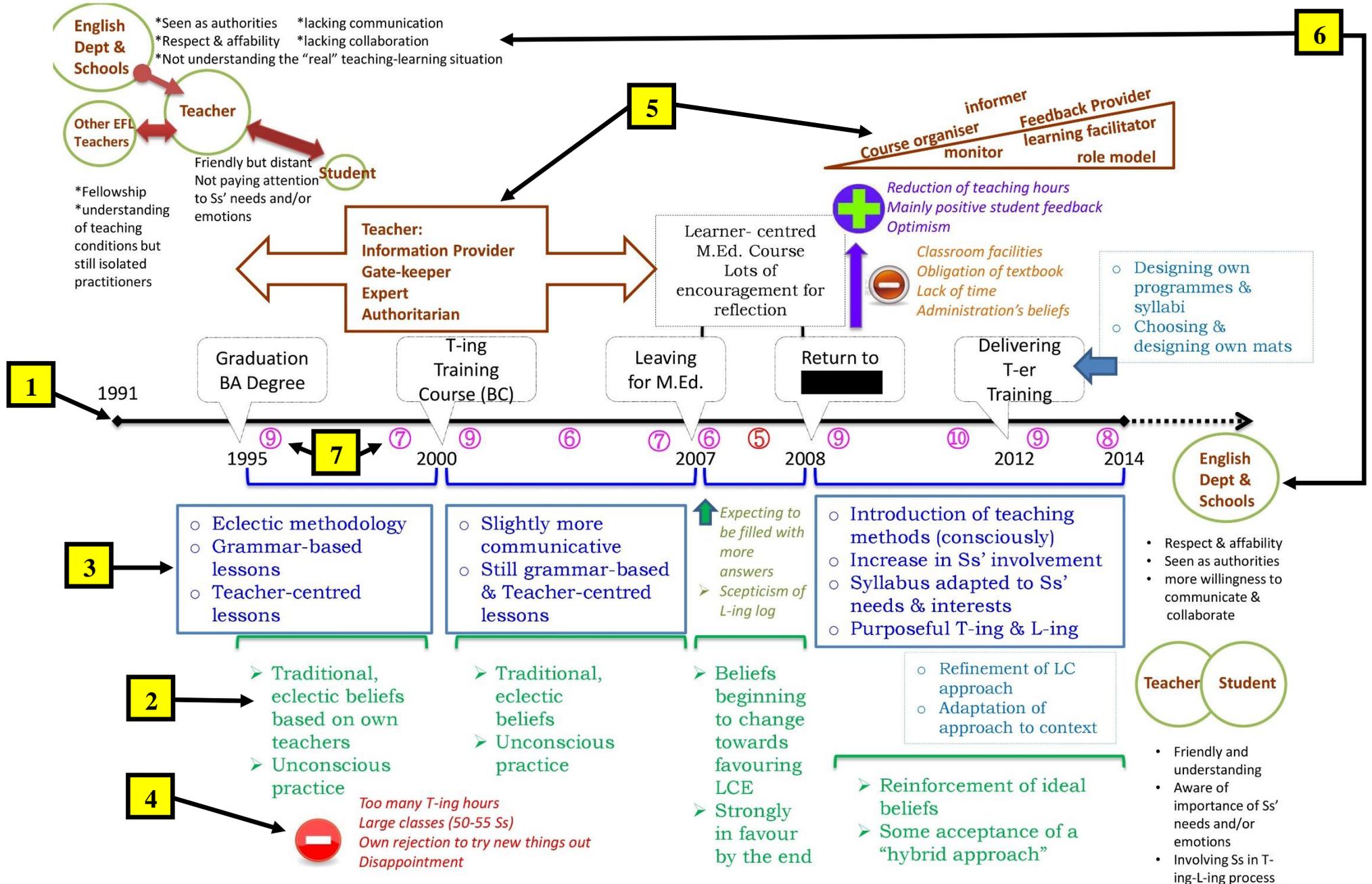
- Words to describe how they saw their *role as a teacher*. **5**
- Diagrams to illustrate the way they perceived their *relationships with their students*. **6**
- A rating (from 1-10) relating to how good a teacher they felt they were *at the time*. **7**
- A rating (from 1-10) relating to how good a teacher they feel they were *in retrospect*. **8**

It was thought that this information might stimulate more interesting discussions within the second interview, and this definitely proved to be the case.

Not all teachers provided information for all of the eight pointers above for every event or chronological period. For example, as is shown in Fig. 3.3.7 below, Rebecca did not provide any information relating to number 8, possibly because I had not explained the instructions clearly enough. However, this did not prove to be crucial; I was not looking for five standardised timelines, but rather a variety of different ways of gathering potentially relevant data to supplement my initial analysis of the participants' educational life histories.

On the following page, I have provided one of the timelines (that of Rebecca), so that the reader has a general idea about the kind of work that the teacher participants produced. Although it is not essential to understand every part of the timeline (which I imagine may seem somewhat confusing to an outsider), I have included yellow squares (**1**) which relate to the tasks outlined above (except number 8). I have included the rest of the timelines in Section A.2 of the Appendices (with the exception of Elizabeth, who chose not to include her timeline in this thesis).

Fig. 3.3.7(i). Rebecca's timeline (with explanations in yellow boxes)



### 3.3.8. *Stage 8: Recruitment of participants for student focus groups*

While the teachers were working on their timelines, I took the opportunity to carry out focus groups with some of their students. The main aim of these focus groups was to gather the students' points of view regarding their English classes. This would allow me to compare the teachers' perceptions of their current classroom practices with what the students said about them. It was hoped that this method of triangulation, together with the classroom observations, would help contribute towards the "trustworthiness" of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006).

I therefore needed to recruit a selection of students from the various groups I had observed. In order to do this, I asked each teacher's permission to speak briefly to their students at the end of one of their classes. At this point, I gave the students a brief overview of my research. I then asked them if they would be interested in participating in the focus groups. The teacher and I left the classroom, and those who were interested wrote down their names and email addresses on a piece of paper. After this, I re-entered the classroom (without the teacher), and agreed on a time for the focus groups. I did not want the teacher to know who was participating in the focus groups, so that both parties would not feel uncomfortable. All five teachers agreed to this.

Many students showed an interest in participating in the study. However, as tends to be the case in Mexico, punctuality was poor, and less than half of those who put their names down actually arrived. Nevertheless, I was still able to carry out 13 focus groups (9 if we exclude the groups of Jennifer, who I decided not to include in the data analysis) with a total of 45 students (33 excluding Jennifer's groups). These nine groups were as follows:

*Table 3.3.8(i). Summary of student focus groups*

<b>Group no.</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Semester</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>
1	Rebecca	Languages	7 <sup>th</sup>	6
2	Isabella	Modern Art	1 <sup>st</sup>	3
3	Isabella	Modern Art	5 <sup>th</sup>	2
4	Antonio	Computing	7 <sup>th</sup>	3
5	Antonio	Tourism	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5
6	Ricardo	Nursing	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2
7	Ricardo	Social Work	1 <sup>st</sup>	4
8	Elizabeth	Administration	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4
9	Elizabeth	Education	1 <sup>st</sup>	4
				<b>Total: 33</b>

### 3.3.9. Stage 9: Student focus groups

Between October and December 2014, I carried out the aforementioned focus groups with the students. As suggested by Newby (2010), it was important to choose a location which would facilitate discussion, whilst also allowing the interviews to be audio or video recorded. Fortunately, I found an ideal location which enabled both of these requirements to be met: the “Focus Group Recording Facility” at the USM’s School of Marketing. This facility contains two rooms divided by a one-way mirror. Participants sit in one room around a round table, and may be observed by the researcher on the other side of the mirror. The main room contains four cameras which record from four different angles. This enables all participants to be seen and heard, and therefore facilitates transcription and analysis.

I decided to try a rather novel procedure for the focus groups. Participants were completely aware at all times that they were being video recorded and that I was on the other side of the mirror, but what made the focus groups slightly different was that I came in and out of the main room at different times. The procedure was as follows:

1. I gave students a set of questions to discuss between themselves (there were four sets of these; I list them below).
2. I left the room, and gave them a few minutes to talk about these questions. I provided them with large pieces of paper and pens so they could make notes if they wanted to. I watched and listened to them from the other side of the mirror.
3. When they were finished discussing the questions, they made a signal to me to return. I re-entered the room, and asked them to summarise what they had discussed.
4. I then gave them the next set of questions to answer, and the process was repeated.

The four sets of questions I asked students to discuss were as follows:

1. To what extent does your current English teacher teach you differently to previous English teachers? How is he/she different?
  
2. What are your beliefs about the best way to learn English?  
Do you think that the way your current teacher teaches you fits with these beliefs?  
What types of activities do you especially like with your current English teacher?  
What types of activities do you not like so much?
  
3. Do you think your relationship with the teacher is different than with previous English teachers? How? What do you feel about this?
  
4. Can you think of any obstacles to you learning English that are out of your current teachers' control?

My reasons for carrying out this somewhat experimental approach was that I felt that students might not be able to immediately articulate what they wanted to say if I was in the room with them. I felt that it would be worthwhile to give students the opportunity to first think about the questions and discuss ideas with each other, before reporting their final answers to me when I returned to the room (similar approaches have been used in Smithson, 2000; Hydén and Bülow, 2003). This way of organising the focus groups worked extremely well, and although some were rather underpopulated (for example, those with only two or three participants), I gained a lot of important information from them. The focus groups took place in Spanish, and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

### *3.3.10. Stage 10: Preliminary analysis of student focus groups*

As soon as the focus groups had finished, I started the long process of transcribing and translating the video recordings into NVivo. This helped me become aware of some of the key themes that would begin to emerge from the data; that is to say, whether there were consistencies and/or inconsistencies between teachers' perceptions of their classroom practices and their students' perceptions. I did not have enough time carry out a comprehensive analysis of the data at this point; however, familiarising myself with the data was useful when it came to the next stage of the research: the post-timeline interviews with teachers.

### *3.3.11. Stage 11: Post-timeline interviews with teachers*

Between October and December 2014, I carried out the post-timeline interviews with the teacher participants. These second interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes, and involved teachers talking through what they had included on their timelines. Like the first life history interviews, the post-timeline interviews were semi-structured. This meant that while we generally followed a chronological structure when discussing the timelines, there were opportunities to go off on tangents if they were considered relevant by either me or the participants. The second interviews also gave me the opportunity to ask certain questions or express doubts that, for whatever reason, I had not been able to address in the first interview.

In general, what teachers said in the second interviews reinforced the information which had been gathered from the first interviews. This was satisfying, because it gave me increased confidence that my interpretations in the first drafts of the participants' life histories were reasonably accurate representations of the teachers' perceived educational life histories.

As soon as I finished the second interviews, I began transcribing them into NVivo. I was also able to upload the timelines into NVivo, and digitalise those that had been produced by hand. However, due to a lack of time, I was not able to analyse the information in detail until I returned to Leeds. This was the next stage of the research.

### *3.3.12. Stage 12: First period of formal data analysis*

In December 2015, having carried out the main proportion of the data collection process, I returned to the University of Leeds to begin the first period of prolonged data analysis. As mentioned earlier, data analysis had been occurring regularly while I was collecting the data in Mexico. However, returning to England would give me the opportunity to detach myself and take stock of the data that I had obtained abroad.

After completing some remaining transcription and translation, I set myself to work on the process of formal data analysis. I had already carried out some preliminary chronological and thematic coding during Stage 6, using the data from the teachers' first

life history interviews. My task now was to integrate the new data from the timelines and post-timeline interviews. This was quite a long process, but as I continued to code, my categories gradually became clearer. This enabled me to be better placed to answer my research questions. As mentioned in Section 3.3.6, I have provided a range of screenshots of the coding process in Section A.5 of the Appendices.

At this stage, I was able to start coding the data that I had obtained from the classroom observations and student focus groups. These were rather more straightforward to code, because I was specifically looking for consistencies and/or inconsistencies between what the teachers had said about themselves and the perceptions of their students.

I also began to think about how I could present the data in as clear a way as possible to the reader. It was at this point that I realised that it might be useful to present summarised versions of participants' educational life histories in the form of graphs. This would provide the reader with quick visual summaries of the main changes in the participants' beliefs and practices over the course of their educational life histories. I therefore decided to take advantage of an upcoming trip to Mexico to help me produce these graphs.

### *3.3.13. Stage 13: Third interviews and production of summary graphs*

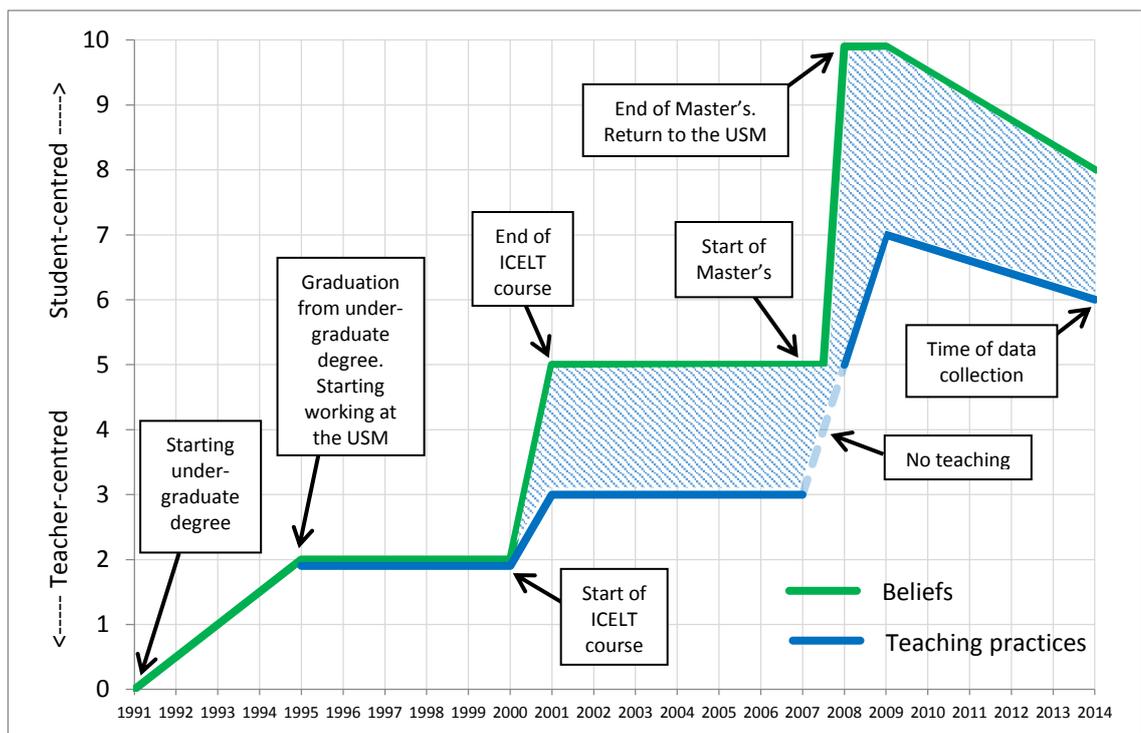
In April 2015, I returned to Mexico to teach a course (on student-centred learning) at the University of San Martín. During this time, I met up with each individual teacher and carried out a third activity. The main aim of this meeting was for the teachers to help me produce graphs to summarise the ways in which their beliefs and practices had evolved over time. I therefore asked them to provide with me with ratings, from '1' to '10', regarding how "student-centred" they felt their beliefs and practices were at key points on their timelines.

However, before I could do this, I needed to confirm exactly what they meant by the term "student-centred EFL learning". As mentioned earlier, I had probably made a mistake before the first interviews in failing to record teachers' answers regarding their individual interpretations of student-centred EFL learning. Therefore, this time, I made notes while the teachers were providing me with their definitions. This meant that I had a permanent

record of their answers, although, in retrospect, I think it would have been even better to audio record their responses in order to transcribe what they said word-for-word.

After the teachers had clarified their interpretations of student-centred EFL learning, we worked together to produce the ratings and graphs. Fortunately, both the teacher participants and I were very satisfied with the graphs we created. Indeed, for some participants, the creation of these graphs was somewhat of a “light bulb moment”, as they were finally able to see an (albeit simplified) version of their educational life histories “come to life”. Below is an example graph (that of Rebecca), which I think does a good job of summarising the main events in her educational life history. I will not analyse it in detail at this point, but will do so in the following Data Analysis chapter.

*Fig. 3.3.13(i). Graph summarising how Rebecca’s beliefs evolved in relation to her teaching practices over the course of her educational life history*



It is important to recognise at this point that these graphs are not supposed to represent “reality” as such, but rather a simplified version of the main events that participants felt had an effect on the evolution of their beliefs and practices over time. Moreover, it must be made clear that it was never my intention to compare graphs and ratings between participants. For example, a rating of ‘10’ for Rebecca may not mean the same as a rating of ‘10’ for Isabella. Finally, it must be stressed that the graphs are not only *my* interpretation of participants’ educational life histories, as they have been produced and

negotiated by the participants themselves. As has been mentioned on several occasions already, this “member checking” significantly contributes towards the “trustworthiness” of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006).

#### *3.3.14. Stage 14: Second period of formal data analysis*

In May 2015, I returned to Leeds to carry out the second period of formal data analysis. Having produced the aforementioned graphs with the teachers, I was able to form an even clearer picture of each participant’s educational life history and how I would be able to present these life histories in an understandable way to the reader. With this in mind, I began writing the first drafts of the Data Analysis chapters.

#### *3.3.15. Stage 15: Final member checking*

The last stage of the research project was a final process of “member checking”. As any PhD student will be aware, the “writing-up” stage of the thesis often takes considerably longer than expected. Indeed, it was not until November 2016 when I finally finished writing a first full draft of the entire thesis. At this point, I sent each participant a copy of this draft and invited them to identify any aspects that they felt needed changing.

Fortunately, none of the participants reported any significant problems with the work that I sent them. This gave me increased confidence that I had produced a reasonably accurate interpretation of the participants’ educational life histories. Having received this positive feedback at this final stage of “member checking”, I was essentially given the “green light” to publish the data and submit the thesis for examination.

The issue of maximising “trustworthiness” (through methods such as the aforementioned “member checking”) has been mentioned several times already so far in this chapter. However, “trustworthiness” is such an important component of qualitative research that I have decided to dedicate another part of this Methodology chapter to summarise the specific ways in which I attempted to maximise the trustworthiness of the study. This is the focus of the next section.

### **3.4. Maximising “trustworthiness”**

As discussed in Section 3.2.7, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four measures which might contribute towards the “trustworthiness” of a qualitative research study: “credibility”, “transferability”, “dependability” and “confirmability”. I examine these criteria below, and discuss how I tried to address them within my study.

#### *3.4.1. Maximising “credibility”*

The first key criterion of “trustworthiness” is that of “credibility”. As discussed in Section 3.2.7, perhaps the best way to define the term “credibility” is to compare it to the concept of “verisimilitude”, which refers to “how far [the research findings] seem to be true, how far people who have personal experience of the focus of the research regard [them] to be likely, or the extent to which “experts” in the field consider [them] to be plausible” (Goodson and Sikes, 2001: 50).

There were four main ways in which I tried to maximise the “credibility” or “verisimilitude” of the findings. The first was through a process of “persistent observation” and “prolonged engagement” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006). These terms refer to spending a long enough time in the field in order to increase the possibility of understanding the phenomena in question. It is argued that the longer the researcher spends in the field, the more chance they will be able to “rise above” their own biases or preconceptions (Cohen et al., 2011). Moreover, it has been suggested that spending an increased amount of time with participants increases the chance of earning their trust, which was an important part of the research design (de Laine, 2000; Richards, 2003).

I believe I was able to achieve “persistent observation” and “prolonged engagement” for a number of reasons. Firstly, I had been involved with the University of San Martín for a number of years before beginning the research, which meant that I had a fairly good understanding of the context before I started collecting the data. Secondly, I tried to observe as many of the teachers’ classes as possible, and only stopped observing when I started to see similar practices repeating themselves (Adler and Adler, 1994). Thirdly, the entire research process took place over an extended period of time (around a year in total),

which gave me plenty of opportunities to absorb myself in the data. Finally, there were a number of different stages of data collection. Given that the teacher participants' views were largely consistent across these different stages, I became reasonably confident that they were providing me with accurate accounts of their educational life histories.

The second way in which I tried to maximise the credibility of the study was by incorporating opportunities for "participant validation" or "member checking" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006). This involved providing opportunities for the participants to read or listen to my interpretations of the data, and to inform me if there were any aspects that they did not agree with or wanted to add. There were opportunities for rather informal member checking; for example, discussing a class over a coffee after a classroom observation, but also more formal opportunities. For example, during Stage 6, I gave participants my first draft of their educational life histories to member check, and during Stage 15, I sent them the first full draft of the thesis. Given that very few changes were made as a result of member checking, I was confident that my interpretations of the data were credible.

A third way of maximising credibility is to incorporate triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006). Triangulation involves looking at the phenomenon in question from different angles or from different sources, often through the use of different methods of data collection (Cohen et al., 2011). I was aware that it would be extremely difficult to triangulate teachers' perceptions of events that had happened in the past; however, I *was* able to gather a "second opinion" of their current teaching practices. There were two ways in which I attempted to do this. The first was through the classroom observations. This gave me the opportunity to judge whether what teachers said about their practices was consistent with my observations. The second was through the student focus groups. There were very few inconsistencies between what the teachers said about themselves, what I saw in the observations, and what the students said about the teachers. This further increased my confidence in the credibility of the findings. Nevertheless, I have addressed any possible discrepancies within the "triangulation" boxes found in each of the Data Analysis chapters.

A fourth and final way in which I attempted to increase the credibility of the findings was through "peer debriefing" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006). Fortunately, I was able to carry out this piece of research under the supervision of two

senior academics at the University of Leeds. This meant that, at regular intervals, I was able to receive expert and neutral advice regarding my interpretations of the data.

### 3.4.2. Maximising “transferability”

The second criterion of “trustworthiness” is that of “transferability”. As discussed in Section 3.2.7, the concept of “transferability” refers not to how findings are *generalised* across contexts, but rather how the findings may be relatable or *transferable* to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Here, the responsibility switches to the reader to decide whether the findings of a particular qualitative research project may or may not be relevant to their own contexts. However, in order to help the reader make this decision, it is important for qualitative studies to describe the research in a great deal of detail (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2009; Robson, 2011).

One way of doing this is to include a “thick description” of the context in which the research took place (Geertz, 1973; Larsson, 2009). I attempted to do this within Sections 1.2 of the Contextual Background chapter, which provides a reasonably detailed description of the context of the USM. However, it is worth mentioning that I decided not to make this “thick description” overly “thick” for two main reasons. The first of these was that I did not want to make the text so long that it would be difficult to read. Secondly, I felt that if I provided too much detail about the participants or the institution, it would increase the possibility of them being identified, which could have been an ethical concern (see Section 3.6.3 on “confidentiality”). Nevertheless, I still feel that the information I have provided in the Contextual Background chapter, as well as the detail found in the five Data Analysis chapters, is sufficient in order for the reader to judge the extent to which the findings might be applicable to their own contexts.

### 3.4.3. Maximising “dependability”

As suggested in Section 3.2.7, the concept of “reliability”; that is, the extent to which repeating the research will yield the same results (Cohen et al., 2011) may be seen as incompatible with life history research, given that both participants and researcher are unique beings who affect, and are affected by, the data collection process (Bruner, 1990;

Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Edge, 2011). However, Lincoln and Guba have suggested that qualitative researchers may be able to utilise the concept of “dependability” instead. The term “dependability” refers to the degree of consistency between the researcher’s interpretations and the evidence found in the data, and the extent to which *similar* studies could be carried out by different people in different contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In terms of the “dependability” of this particular study, I feel that the numerous strategies I have outlined to attempt to maximise the “trustworthiness” of the findings mean that if someone else had carried out the research, the findings would not have been radically different. Furthermore, given that I have openly and transparently described the procedures I took when carrying out the data collection, I am reasonably confident that other people would be able to carry out similar pieces of research, albeit adapted to fit the specific characteristics of their own contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009).

#### 3.4.4. Maximising “confirmability”

The final measure of “trustworthiness” is that of “confirmability”, which refers to the degree of neutrality of the research and the extent to which the findings are influenced by researcher bias (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Again, this may prove to be difficult to achieve under qualitative approaches such as life history research, given the inherent subjectivity of the approach (Munro, 1998; Coffey, 1999; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). However, Lincoln and Guba suggest a number of ways to limit the impact of such bias and therefore increase the degree of “confirmability”.

The first way in which I attempted to achieve confirmability was to provide a description of myself as a researcher. I have done this in Section 1.3 of the Contextual Background chapter, in which I describe myself as well as some of the key motivations which brought me to the study. Hopefully, by providing such information, the reader may begin to decide for themselves the extent to which the findings of this piece of research have been influenced by researcher bias (Cohen et al., 2011).

Secondly, throughout the entire process of data collection and analysis, I made a concerted effort to reduce unnecessary bias. To the best of my ability, I tried to put aside my personal opinions regarding teaching, student-centred (EFL) learning, the University

of San Martín, Mexican education, and other related issues. As I was collecting the data, I consciously made an effort to avoid giving my own opinions, or to ask “leading” questions which might guide participants towards certain responses (Kvale, 1996; Arksey and Knight, 1999). However, I must acknowledge that achieving *complete* neutrality when analysing data which was so intrinsically interesting and meaningful for me would have been extremely difficult (Coffey, 1999). I address these issues again in the following section, which examines my role as the researcher and my relationships with the participants.

A final strategy which may be used in order to verify the “confirmability” of a research project is through an external audit (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I have not been subject to an external audit as of yet; however, I have kept all of my data, notes, and drafts available for audit if required. Furthermore, my two supervisors have constantly scrutinised my research throughout the four years that we have worked together.

### **3.5. Role of the researcher**

In this section, I address some of the main issues regarding my role as the researcher during the process of collecting and analysing the data. As mentioned in Section 3.2.5, the life history approach acknowledges subjectivity as an important part of its methodological foundations, and recognises that the researcher’s own perspectives may have a bearing on data collection and analysis (Munro, 1998; Coffey, 1999; Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Indeed, given that the researcher is unavoidably part of the social world which they are researching, it would seem that a certain degree of reactivity caused by the researcher may be inevitable (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Cohen et al., 2011; Edge, 2011).

However, as I hope I have made clear at regular intervals throughout this chapter, I did take certain steps to try and avoid unnecessary bias which may have had an effect on the findings. Furthermore, I made a conscious effort to try and understand the extent to which I was having an influence on the research (this is known as “reflexivity”; see, for example, Roulston, 2010; Finlay, 2012; Berger, 2015; Mann, 2016). As mentioned previously, it is ultimately very difficult for us to “know” precisely the extent to which I may have had an effect on the way participants acted towards me. However, I feel that by being as open

and transparent as possible about my role as the researcher in this study, the reader is in a better position to judge for themselves the extent to which the study was affected by my own preconceptions or biases (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

One way of achieving this “transparency” was by providing the description of myself, my beliefs, and my motivations to carry out the research (see Section 1.3 of the Contextual Background chapter). However, I will also talk briefly about my relationships with the participants at this point. The two main words I would use to describe my relationships with the participants would be “friendly” and “collegial”. I did not know the participants before the research took place, with the exception of Elizabeth, who had attended one of my workshops on teaching translation. To a certain extent I was able to identify with their work as teachers at the USM, as I had been “in and around” the University for a couple of years, and had taught in Mexico for about five years, including a period teaching at a very similar public university. However, we were not strictly “colleagues” in the sense that we were not paid to do the same job, and obviously I had had a different background to them, having spent most of my life in the UK. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that I did not perceive to hold any sort of “power” over these teachers. I felt that there was a great deal of mutual respect between us, and from my perspective it felt like we were equals. Of course, only the participants themselves are in a position to state how they really felt about me, but I would be surprised if they had a different opinion. We have remained good friends since completing the research.

As I have discussed several times already, there was always the possibility that the teachers would not be totally honest with me in the interviews and may not have acted in a completely “natural” way during the classroom observations (de Laine, 2000; Richards, 2003; Flick, 2009; Robson, 2011). As mentioned in previous sections, I implemented a number of strategies in order to try and avoid this “reactivity”, such as “prolonged engagement”, building trust, and “member checking”. Of course, there was always a chance that they may have wanted to “tell me what I wanted to hear”. Again, only the participants themselves will know the extent to which this is true, but my instinct is that this was not the case. I perceived the participants to be dedicated, open-minded professionals who were genuinely interested in exploring their beliefs and practices, which I think was exemplified by the time and effort they spent on their timelines (see Section 3.3.7).

Another important point to consider is how my own beliefs may have affected the way in which I collected and analysed the data (Finlay, 2012; Berger, 2015; Mann, 2016). Inevitably, I came into the research with my own history and beliefs about teaching, especially when it came to my beliefs about student-centred learning (as I recognise in Section 1.3, I was very much in favour of the approach when I began the research). However, as I have hopefully made clear throughout this chapter, I made a conscious effort for my own beliefs *not* to interfere with what the participants wanted to express to me - it was very important to present *their* educational life histories, not mine. For example, as described in Section 3.3.5, I endeavoured to be as neutral and professional as possible when carrying out the interviews, and tried to avoid expressing my own opinions and/or asking “leading” questions (Kvale, 1996; Arksey and Knight, 1999). However, I am human, and I am sure that, over the course of the research, the participants must have become aware of some of my opinions, whether directly or indirectly. For example, throughout the interviews, when certain aspects caught my attention, it was natural for me to show more interest and to ask further questions in order to explore these aspects in more detail.

Perhaps the most obvious example of me potentially having an influence on the participants was when I introduced them to my interpretations of the definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 3.3.5). Indeed, it was only after I had shown them *my* interpretation that I invited them to express to me the extent to which they agreed with it. In this way, it could be argued that I may have been “leading” them towards *my* interpretation of the term. However, each participant then proceeded to provide me with *their* own individual interpretations. Each of these interpretations were different and were far from being exact replicas of my definition, which suggested that the participants felt comfortable enough to consider my definition and replant it, taking into account their own beliefs and experiences. Therefore, whilst recognising that there may have been a certain degree of influence on the participants at this stage, I do not feel that I “led” them towards any particular answer.

A final interesting example of my “reflexivity” was the way in which I analysed the data. As I mentioned in Section 3.3.6, this involved a mixture of *deductive* and *inductive* coding. The analysis was *deductive* in the sense that I did have some pre-conceived categories in mind (which may have been to a certain extent influenced by my own beliefs about teaching, as expressed in Section 1.3). However, the analysis was also *inductive* in

the sense that I did allow for new ideas (e.g. the concept of “hybrid” teaching) to emerge naturally from the data. The fact that I allowed this inductive analysis to occur demonstrates two important points. Firstly, it shows that I was making a conscious effort to be open to new findings, even if these might end up challenging my pre-existing beliefs. Secondly, it is a clear example that it is not only the participants who may be influenced by the researcher, but also the *researcher* may be influenced by the participants (Mann, 2016). For example, the findings of the study (in particular, an increased recognition of the importance of “hybrid” teaching) have gone on to have a significant impact on my own beliefs about teaching. Although I still believe strongly in the value of student-centred approaches to EFL learning, I have become much more open to a more pragmatic combination of both teacher-centred and student-centred approaches. These comments should start to make more sense after reading the Discussion chapters, and especially Section 10.4.

### **3.6. Ethical considerations**

The field of ethics in research seeks to strike a balance between the potential benefits of research and the possible negative consequences it may have on its participants (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). In this section, I explore some of the key ethical considerations of this study.

#### *3.6.1. The potentially sensitive nature of life history research*

Given that my research involved exploring participants’ personal lives in detail, it may therefore be considered a “sensitive” topic (Lee and Renzetti, 1993). Indeed, in life history research, talking about certain life events may end up being an unpleasant experience for those involved (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Whilst this may be unavoidable, I employed a number of strategies in order to reduce the likelihood of it happening. Firstly, when recruiting participants, I took the time to explain the aims of the study, stressing that there was no obligation for them to talk about anything which they might find upsetting or embarrassing. Secondly, I made it clear to participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without there being any negative consequences (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992).

Finally, as mentioned in previous sections, the final write-up of the data analysis was member checked, thus ensuring that nothing was published against any participant's will.

### 3.6.2. *Informed consent*

Informed consent refers to “the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions” (Diener and Crandall, 1978: 57). It is considered “a cornerstone of ethical behaviour, as it respects the rights of individuals to exert control over their lives and to take decisions for themselves” (Cohen et al., 2011: 77). Therefore, before the participants agreed to take part in the study, I provided them with a copy of the Participant Information Sheet, which outlined in detail what they would be expected to do (I have provided a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for both teachers and students in Section A.1 of the Appendices). I also explained to the potential participants what I was planning to do, and gave them the chance to ask any questions, which allowed them to weigh up the possible risks and benefits of taking part (Howe and Moses, 1999). As I have just mentioned, participants were under no obligation to take part in the study, and were free to withdraw at any time (before 30 December 2015, which was the earliest possible date that I could have realistically published the thesis). In fact, one of the participants, Josefina, withdrew from the study after a few weeks because she felt too overloaded with work. Although I would have liked her to finish the study for the benefit of the research findings, I did not make any attempt to persuade her to do so.

Of course, informing potential participants of every single detail of the study would have been unrealistic. For this reason, a more suitable term might be that of “reasonably” informed consent (Cohen et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the study did not include any purposeful deception. Although it might be argued that not informing participants of what I was looking for might have caused them to act more naturally (Mitchell, 1993), I felt that it was important to be as honest with them as (realistically) possible. This went a long way towards building trust with the participants, which as mentioned several times already, was an important part of my study design (de Laine, 2000; Crow et al., 2006).

### 3.6.3. Confidentiality

Cohen et al. (2011: 92) define confidentiality as “not disclosing information from a participant in any way that might identify that individual or that might enable the individual to be traced”. It is worth comparing this concept with that of “anonymity”, in which participants’ identities are genuinely unknown, even to the researcher (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011). Given that I knew who the participants were, I was therefore in no position to promise them “anonymity”, but there were certain strategies I employed to increase the chances of “confidentiality”. Firstly, pseudonyms were used to substitute the real names of participants, as well as the name of the institution and some of its departments. In addition, any information which could make participants easily identifiable were removed or adapted (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). Furthermore, throughout the entire process of data collection, I made sure I did not share the data with anyone else other than my two supervisors. Finally, when I was abroad, I ensured the security of the data by saving it onto my encrypted laptop, or on the secure University of Leeds M: drive.

### 3.6.4. Ownership of the data

An interesting debate in life history research is the question of when “ownership” of the data passes from participants to the researcher, as well as what powers participants and researchers may have regarding the dissemination of the findings (Cohen et al., 2011). I made it clear to participants in the Participant Information Sheet (see Section A.1 of the Appendices) that they would be able to withdraw from the study until 30 December 2015, which I felt was the earliest possible date by which I might have realistically finished my thesis. As mentioned in Section 3.3.15, I also gave participants the opportunity to “member check” my interpretations of the findings, right up to November 2016, when I gave them the chance to review my first full draft of this thesis.

### 3.6.5. Responsibilities to the research community

Cohen et al. (2011) stress that researchers have an ethical responsibility to carry out competent and rigorous studies in order to protect the interests of future research and

researchers. Although I am still developing my skills as a researcher, I endeavoured to design and implement the research to the very best of my ability. Throughout this Methodology chapter, I have hopefully demonstrated how I attempted to do this.

### **3.7. Presentation of the data**

In this final section, I explain how I decided to present the findings of the study in the following Data Analysis chapters.

The first decision I made was to present the findings *by individual case*. I did this by dividing the Data Analysis into five separate chapters, one for each of the teacher participants. As Cohen et al. (2011: 551) suggest, this way of organising analysis “preserves the coherence and integrity of the individual’s response and enables a whole picture of that person to be presented”. After presenting these individual cases, I would then compare them to each other in the Cross-Case Analysis chapter (Chapter 9).

Within each teacher case, I presented teachers’ educational life histories *chronologically* (Yin, 2009; Robson, 2011). This meant that each teacher case was divided into the key chronological time periods which had emerged from the data collection process (see Section 3.3.6).

Finally, within each chronological time period, I analysed the data *thematically*. I chose to do this in order to relate the findings directly to the research questions. Cohen et al. highlight the value in organising data analysis in this way, arguing that:

[Organising data analysis by themes or research questions] is a very useful way of organizing data, as it draws together all the relevant data for the exact issue of concern to the researcher [...]. It returns the reader to the driving concerns of the research, thereby “closing the loop” on the research questions that typically were raised in the early part of an enquiry.

(Cohen et al., 2011: 552)

Each Data Analysis chapter has been organised into the following sections and sub-sections:

- 1. [*Participant's name*]'s interpretation of student-centred EFL learning
- 2. Key chronological periods in [*participant's name*]'s educational life history
  - 2.1. Period 1: [*dates and title of period*]
    - 2.1.1. Evolution of beliefs
    - 2.1.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs
  - 2.2, 2.3, etc.: [*dates and titles of subsequent periods*]
- 3. Summary
  - 3.1. Summary of evolution of [*participant's name*]'s beliefs
  - 3.2. Summary of [*participant's name*]'s teaching practices in relation to their beliefs

As the bullet points above show, each Data Analysis chapter is divided into a number of sections. In Section 1, I begin by describing the way in which each participant individually interpreted the term “student-centred EFL learning”. As mentioned several times already, the concept of student-centred (EFL) learning has many different aspects and has been defined slightly differently by different people. Therefore, it was important to establish each participant’s individual interpretation of the term before continuing with the rest of the data analysis. This would mean that we would know what each participant was referring to when they mentioned the term student-centred (EFL) learning.

The next main section, Section 2, contains the main component of data analysis. This section was divided into the key time periods in each participant’s educational life history (see Section 3.3.6). Each of these time periods was then divided into two sub-sections: “Evolution of beliefs” and “Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs”. The first of these sub-sections (“Evolution of beliefs”) corresponds to Research Question 1, and analyses the way participants’ beliefs about student-centred EFL learning evolved during the particular time period. It focuses on *what* belief changes are perceived to have occurred (RQ1a) and *why* such changes are perceived to have occurred (RQ1b). The second sub-section (“Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs”) corresponds to Research Question 2, and explores the relationships between participants’ beliefs and their practices. It aims to identify potential matches and/or mismatches between the teachers’ beliefs and their practices (RQ2a), as well as the possible reasons for these matches and/or mismatches (RQ2b).

The final section, Section 3, provides two summaries: firstly, a summary of how the participant’s beliefs evolved over the course of their educational life histories (RQ1), and

secondly, a summary of how the participant's teaching practices evolved in relation to their beliefs (RQ2).

Within the five Data Analysis chapters, I have tried to provide data from a wide range of sources. For example, my interpretations of each participant's educational life history are supported by a combination of:

- Direct quotations from interviews;
- Extracts from timelines;
- Extracts from my notes made during the third interview;
- Summary graphs; and
- Triangulation boxes.

Regarding my use of direct quotations and extracts from timelines, I sought to follow the view of Cohen et al. (2011: 553), who suggest that such quotations may “add life to the narrative and often convey the point very expressively – without it being mediated or softened by the academic language of the researcher”. Indeed, as suggested by Gibbs (2007), I attempted to include a wide range of quotations whenever possible, whilst at the same time not including so many of them as to make the text unwieldy.

As discussed in Section 3.3.13, I also decided to include summary graphs at regular intervals throughout each Data Analysis chapter. It may be a matter of opinion as to how useful these graphs actually prove to be, but personally I think they do an excellent job of illustrating the main tendencies of belief and behaviour change in each participant's educational life history.

Finally, at certain points, I have included “triangulation boxes” which provide “second opinions” of the points made within particular sections. I felt that by integrating these triangulation boxes within the main body of the data analysis, I would be able to address any consistencies and/or inconsistencies directly at the source. The triangulation boxes include data from the notes I made during the classroom observations, as well as direct quotations from the student focus groups. I recognise that these triangulation boxes may not be perfect as they are mostly made up of subjective opinions (either from myself or the students), as opposed to hard, quantifiable “evidence” of the teachers' practices. However, given that the data obtained from triangulation was generally consistent with

the perceptions of the teachers (with one or two exceptions), I was reasonably confident that what the teachers said about themselves was an accurate representation of their lives (see Section 3.4 on “trustworthiness”).

A final decision I made regarding the Data Analysis chapters was the writing style that I chose to use. Qualitative approaches such as life history may be criticised as being more like literature or journalism than the “real” sciences (Cohen et al., 2011). However, supporters of more naturalistic paradigms are sceptical of such a view. For example, Hammersley and Atkinson argue that:

[...] there is no neutral language of description, so there is no neutral mode of report. [...] There can be no question, then, of viewing writing as a purely technical matter [...] [Qualitative analyses are] more informal and impressionistic and thus written in the first person.

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 207-208)

I therefore decided to attempt to strike a balance between a formal, academic style and an informal, readable style. This proved to be somewhat of a challenge, and the reader will ultimately be the judge of how successful I have been in achieving this.

I hope that this Methodology chapter has made it clear the procedures I took when collecting and analysing the data of this study. The next five chapters present and analyse the educational life histories of the five teacher participants.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORY OF REBECCA**

This chapter is the first of five Data Analysis chapters. These five chapters analyse each participants' educational life history in detail, in order to explore how their beliefs evolved over time in relation to their teaching practices. In Section 3.7 of the previous chapter, I explained how each of the five Data Analysis chapters has been organised. I will therefore not repeat this explanation at this stage, and will proceed to present the educational life history of the first participant, Rebecca.

### **4.1. Rebecca's interpretation of student-centred EFL learning**

As with all participants, it was important to establish how Rebecca understood the concept of student-centred EFL learning, as this might have affected the way in which I interpreted the data. As mentioned in the previous chapter, before the first interview I introduced participants to my personal interpretation of student-centred EFL learning which had emerged from my reading around the subject. Rebecca did not express that she disagreed with any aspects of the definition I provided her with. However, when I asked her to tell me which parts she felt were most important, she mentioned the following:

- Involving students as much as possible in the learning process;
- Making learning as meaningful as possible for both students and the teacher;
- Working on the "connections" between the teacher and students; thinking more about how the teacher can help students learn, as opposed to leaving the sole responsibility for learning to the students;
- Creating a closer relationship with students, and taking into account their needs.

(Adapted from my field notes taken during Interview 3 with Rebecca)

Throughout the rest of this chapter, it is therefore important to bear these points in mind whenever the concept of student-centred (EFL) learning is mentioned.

## 4.2. Key periods in Rebecca's educational life history

The key chronological periods which emerged from Rebecca's educational life history were as follows:

- *Period 1*: 1991-2000: Studying at the USM and first five years teaching
- *Period 2*: 2000-2007: The ICELT course and subsequent teaching
- *Period 3*: 2007-2008: Studying a Master's in the UK
- *Period 4*: 2008-2014: Return to the USM

These periods are examined separately in the following four sub-sections.

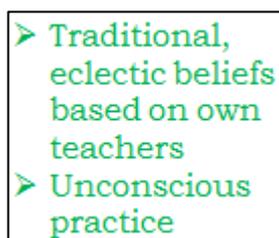
### 4.2.1. Period 1: 1991-2000: Studying at the USM and first five years teaching

The first main period of Rebecca's educational life history was between 1991 and 2000, which consisted of her time studying at the USM and her first five years of teaching. Like the other four participants, Rebecca studied her undergraduate degree at the USM's School of Languages. When she graduated from her degree in 1995, she was immediately offered an EFL teaching position at the same University. Her first teaching post was not in the city of San Martín, but in one of the USM's regional campuses, where she began teaching at the Schools of Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine and Administration.

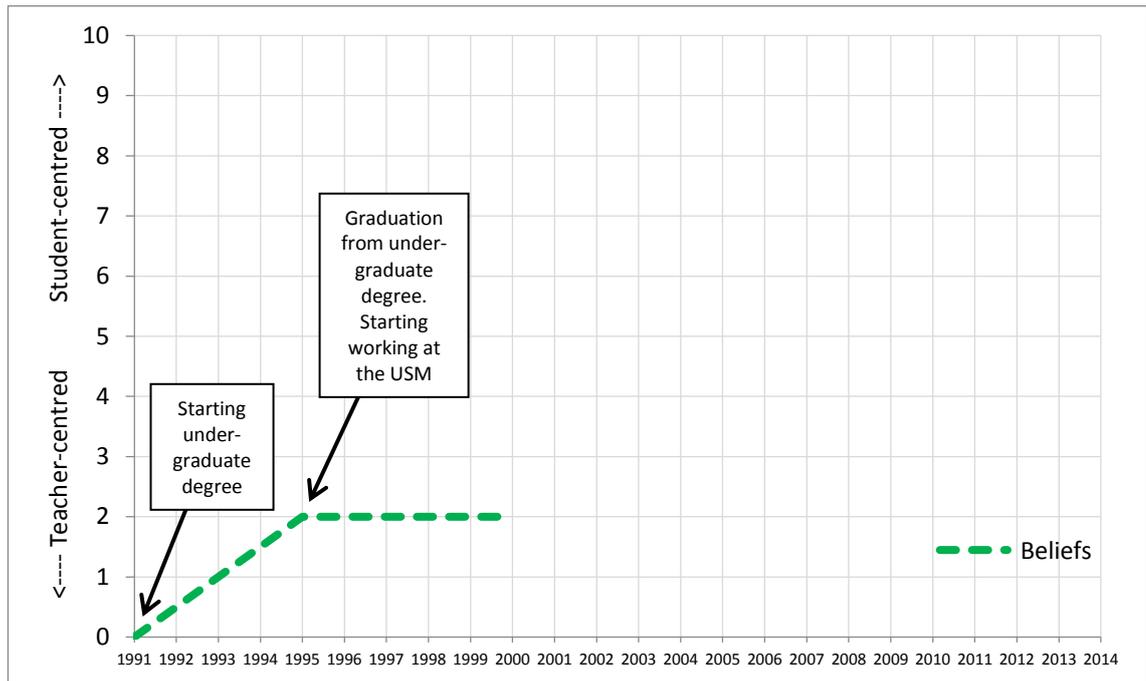
#### 4.2.1.1. Evolution of beliefs

The two Figures below summarise how Rebecca perceived her beliefs between 1991 and 2000:

*Fig. 4.2.1.1(i). Summary of Rebecca's beliefs about teaching between 1991 and 2000 (extract from timeline)*



*Fig. 4.2.1.1(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1991 and 2000*



What seems clear from the two Figures above is that Rebecca considered her beliefs to have been predominately teacher-centred between 1991 and 2000. As the graph above shows, she felt that the extent to which her beliefs were student-centred would have been a '0' at the start of her degree, and only about a '2' by the time she graduated.

In Fig. 4.2.1.1(i) (the extract from her timeline), Rebecca also states that these early beliefs were “unconscious” in nature. This may have been due to the fact that she had not received any explicit teacher training on her degree. At the present time, the undergraduate degree in Languages at the USM is aimed at producing (English) language teachers; however, when Rebecca took it in the early 90s, it was much more general, with more of a focus on the linguistic aspects of English, as well as other areas such as tourism and administration. Therefore, when Rebecca started teaching at the USM, she had not been trained to be a teacher, and had never consciously thought about what might be the best way to teach.

In fact, Rebecca feels that the only guidance for her first few years of teaching would have her experiences as a language learner, which, on reflection, appear to have been almost totally teacher-centred. It was therefore understandable that she would begin to teach in the only way she had been exposed to:

*“My beliefs at the time were very traditional. I was teaching in the way I had been taught. [...] I didn't actually know what I was doing; it was unconscious; I was just doing it because I thought it was the right thing to do at the time.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:01:36 – 00:02:08

*“I didn't follow a methodology; actually I didn't even know there was a methodology.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:00:39 – 00:00:45

During this period, Rebecca also felt that her (albeit unconscious) beliefs about the role of the teacher were generally teacher-centred. Fig. 4.2.1.1(iii) below shows four words and phrases which she chose to describe her role between 1991 and 2000, all of which seem consistent with a typically teacher-centred view of education:

*Fig. 4.2.1.1(iii). Words Rebecca used to describe the way she saw herself as a teacher between 1991 and 2000 (extract from timeline)*

<p><b>Teacher:</b>  <b>Information Provider</b>  <b>Gate-keeper</b>  <b>Expert</b>  <b>Authoritarian</b></p>
--

*“I was an "information provider"; I was a "gatekeeper"; I just gave grades and marks and that was my role; who passed and who didn't pass, that was it. I didn't even think about whether [the students] learnt or not, because I placed the responsibility, or blame for learning, on the students. I was an "expert" and an "authoritarian", because I thought that was the only way of making students learn.”*

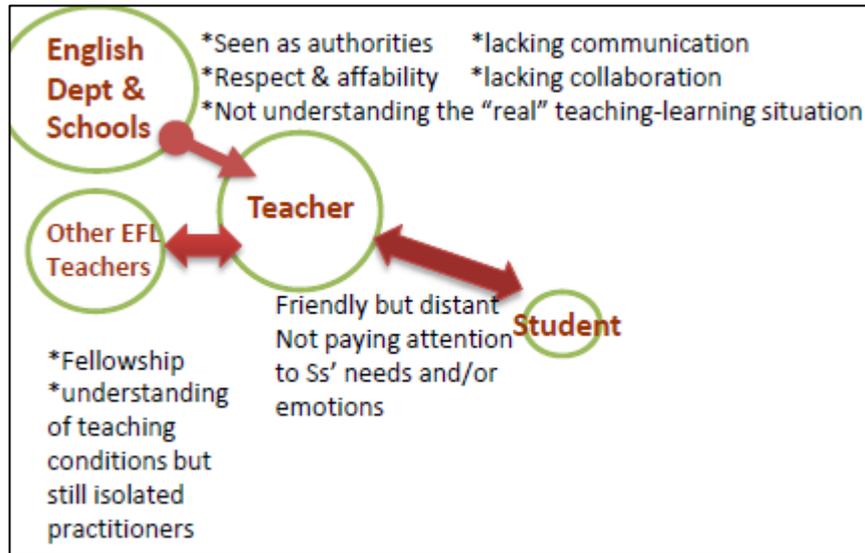
Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:04:35 – 00:05:19

*“What I thought before is that I needed to make it clear that I was the teacher and they were the students.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:50:58 – 00:51:12

The last quotation above indicates a certain degree of distance between Rebecca and her students. She expressed this relationship on one of the concept maps which she provided on her timeline:

Fig. 4.2.1.1(iv). Rebecca's concept map showing her perceived relationships with students, authorities and other EFL teachers between 1991 and 2000 (extract from timeline)



When describing her concept map in the second interview, Rebecca explained that she had purposely decided to place the students below the teacher:

*"I put [the students] slightly lower, because that's how I saw myself and how I saw my students. I was friendly with them, but still distant; "you are the student, and I'm the teacher"."*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:15:50 – 00:16:10

As she had started teaching at a relatively young age, she felt that this may have also been a contributing factor in her wanting to establish more of a distance between herself and the students:

*"I also think it has to do with age, because I started teaching very young, so I really needed to make the difference clear. I think I had students who were slightly older than me at the time, so I said "I need to send out the message that I'm the teacher"."*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:16:13 – 00:16:39

The top-left circle in the concept map above represents the way Rebecca perceived the relationships between herself and authority figures. At the time, Rebecca's bosses were a combination of those at the University English Department and the Heads of the individual Schools (at this time, Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine and Administration).

On the concept map, Rebecca chose to place these people higher than herself as a teacher, indicating their superior position within the USM's power structures. Indeed, whilst it appears to have been a fairly amicable relationship, it seems clear that Rebecca saw these people as the authorities:

*"I don't want to say "obey", but we needed to "comply" with what the English Department said. It was like "this is how it should be done, you should follow this content"."*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:10:17 – 00:10:36

*"Of course there was respect, and the relationship was friendly, but as I see it now, there was no communication; it was just like "they're over there, and we're here"."*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:11:26 – 00:11:47

*"We had meetings, but we didn't do anything together; we didn't collaborate at all; we just did what they told us to do."*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:12:11 – 00:12:24

The final relationship shown on Rebecca's concept map was her relationship with other EFL teachers. Rebecca placed these on the same level as herself, indicating a certain degree of friendship and collegiality. However, given that each teacher was assigned to their own groups within particular Schools, she felt that there were few opportunities to interact and collaborate:

*"I put them more or less on the same level, but they were still distant. [...] There was some collegiality; everyone understood each other's problems, because we were going through the same thing [...]. But we were still working alone. I mean sometimes when we were gathered together in meetings [...] we would catch up with what was happening, but when the meetings finished everyone went back to their workplaces and that was it."*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:13:20 – 00:14:38

#### 4.2.1.2. *Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs*

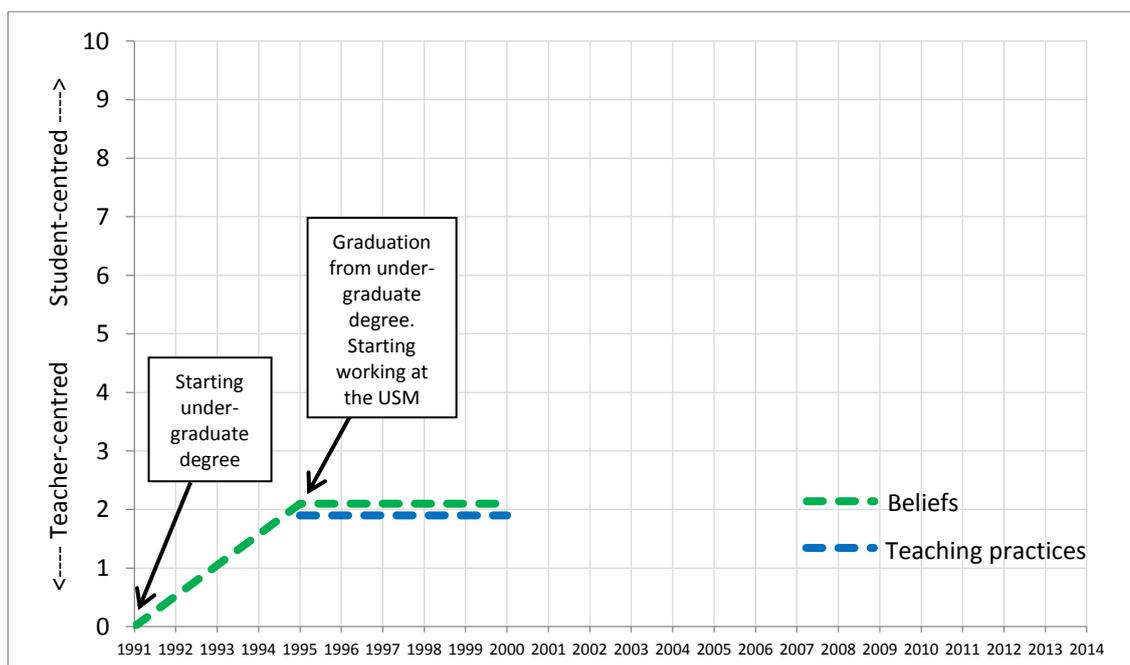
The previous sub-section established that Rebecca considered her (albeit unconscious) beliefs about teaching to have been generally teacher-centred between 1991 and 2000. In terms of her actual teaching practices, she also felt that these were very teacher-centred. This is summarised in Fig. 4.2.1.2(i) below:

Fig. 4.2.1.2(i). Summary of Rebecca's perceived teaching practices between 1995 and 2000 (extract from timeline)

- Eclectic methodology
- Grammar-based lessons
- Teacher-centred lessons

When asked how student-centred she felt her teaching practices were between 1995 and 2000, Rebecca answered that she would have rated them as a '2'. This was the same score as she gave to her beliefs, which suggests that she was teaching in a way that was generally consistent with her (albeit unconscious) beliefs. This is illustrated in the graph below:

Fig. 4.2.1.2(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1991 and 2000



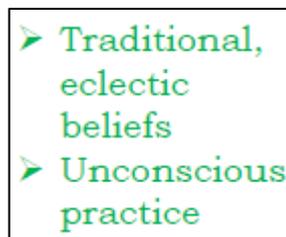
#### 4.2.2. Period 2: 2000-2007: The ICELT course and subsequent teaching

In 2000, Rebecca took the In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT), which was run by the British Council but delivered at the USM. This was the first formal teacher training course that Rebecca had taken. It was a practical course which included observed teaching practices, and had a special focus on Communicative Language Teaching. After completing the course in 2001, Rebecca continued working at the USM. A few years later, she was transferred from the USM's regional campus back to the main campus in the city of San Martín.

##### 4.2.2.1. Evolution of beliefs

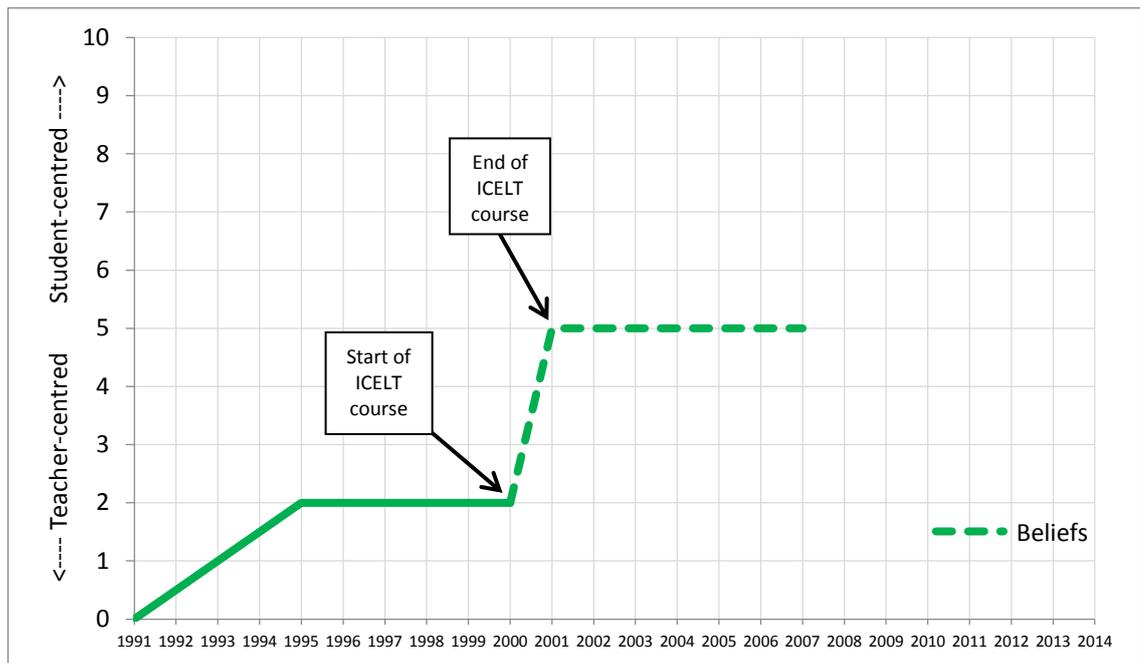
Fig. 4.2.2.1(i) below indicates that Rebecca's perceived beliefs were fairly similar in Period 2 in comparison to Period 1, given that she still considered them to be largely traditional, eclectic, and unconscious in nature:

*Fig. 4.2.2.1(i). Summary of Rebecca's beliefs about teaching between 2000 and 2007 (extract from timeline)*



However, Rebecca did consider that her beliefs became somewhat more student-centred after having attended the ICELT course. This is illustrated in the graph below, in which she reported an increase from about a '2' in 2000 to a '5' in 2001:

Fig. 4.2.2.1(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1991 and 2007



This change from a '2' to a '5' might be viewed as an important change in Rebecca's beliefs. However, Rebecca was quick to point out that she does not feel that her fundamental beliefs about teaching changed as a result of the ICELT course. In fact, during the interviews, she mentioned a number of the course's limitations:

*"It was a very active course [...] we were observed teaching and we were given feedback, but it was just like that. [...] I cannot find very meaningful things from the experience."*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:07:04 – 00:07:32

*"It was a long course, and we did some assignments, but it was very fast and just like strategies or tips, things to do in your classroom to make it more communicative, that was it."*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:05:43 – 00:06:02

*"We were involved and we did a lot of things, but there was no thinking behind the doing; we were just doing it because they told us it worked."*

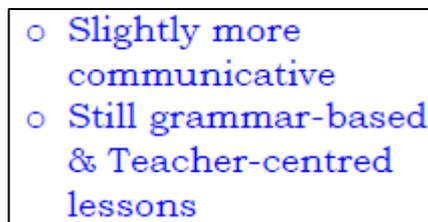
Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:06:34 – 00:06:52

The last quotation (“*we were just doing it because they told us it worked*”) suggests that the ICELT course was fairly prescriptive in nature, and might even be defined as somewhat teacher-centred. It seems that Rebecca was expected to learn and implement the “right” method (in this case, Communicative Language Teaching), without much opportunity for flexibility or critical reflection about how feasible these new approaches might be within her teaching contexts. This appears to be an important shortcoming of the ICELT course (and others), an issue which I explore in more detail in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

#### 4.2.2.2. *Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs*

Fig. 4.2.2.2(i) below shows how Rebecca summarised her teaching practices between 2000 and 2007:

*Fig. 4.2.2.2(i). Summary of Rebecca’s perceived teaching practices between 2000 and 2007 (extract from timeline)*

- 
- Slightly more communicative
  - Still grammar-based & Teacher-centred lessons

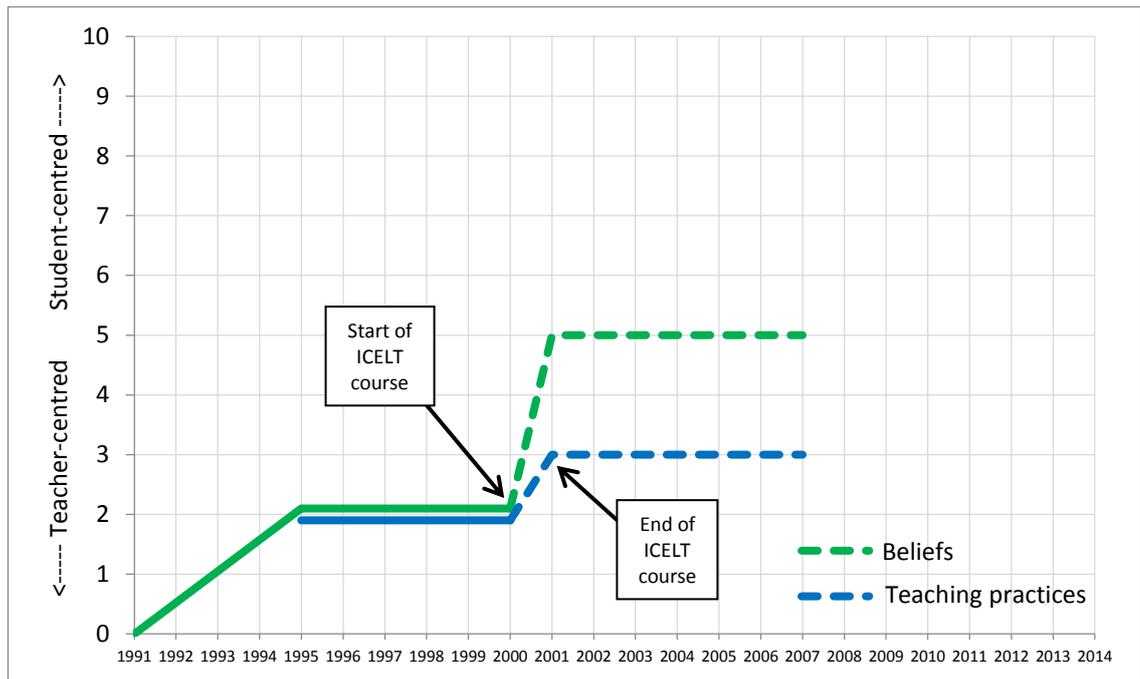
The box above indicates that although there was a slight change in Rebecca’s teaching practices after the ICELT course, she still felt that she was teaching in a largely teacher-centred way:

*“I think there was a slight change in my teaching behaviour; it was a bit more communicative [...] but [my classes were] still grammar-based and teacher-centred.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:02:44 – 00:03:01

This is illustrated the graph below, which shows that although Rebecca felt her beliefs rose from about a ‘2’ to a ‘5’ after the ICELT course, there was only a small change in her actual teaching practices, which she felt increased from a ‘2’ to a ‘3’:

Fig. 4.2.2.2(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1991 and 2007



During the interviews, Rebecca was able to provide an explanation as to why there was such a minimal change in her teaching practices:

*“Now I understand why the [ICELT course] didn't work: because there was no connection with the classroom. Teachers go on courses and they leave the experience there, and then they forget about everything and go back to the classroom.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 01:10:51 – 01:11:12

*“There was no follow-up; no one was there to give me feedback on what I was doing, so why would I change if I was so comfortable doing it that way, and because I thought that worked, and that was the only way I could do it?”*

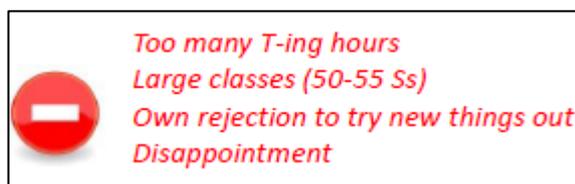
Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:03:31 – 00:03:53

I explore the issues that Rebecca raises (courses failing to make connections with teachers' classroom realities; lack of follow-up after initial training sessions) in more detail in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

In addition to the perceived shortcomings of the ICELT course, Rebecca also identified certain external obstacles which she feels prevented her from implementing the more

communicative approaches which had been encouraged to do on the course. She summarised these obstacles on her timeline, as shown in Fig. 4.2.2.2(iii) below:

*Fig. 4.2.2.2(iii). Summary of obstacles preventing Rebecca from implementing Communicative Language Teaching after the ICELT course (extract from timeline)*



The first obstacle Rebecca identified was that she was teaching too many hours. Given that she was often teaching up to 12 groups at a time, it is understandable that this would have affected her ability to provide the individualised attention, planning and energy needed to teach English in a more communicative way:

*“I was tired. I was teaching too much I think; I taught almost 40 hours a week.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:48:49 – 00:49:06

The next obstacle which she included was the amount of students in some of her classes, with even the “smaller” groups containing between 20 and 30 students:

*“Classes were large: 50 to 55 students. But not all of them, some of them had 20 or 30.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:05:47 – 00:05:58

As Fig. 4.2.2.2(iii) above shows, Rebecca also felt that her somewhat negative attitude towards trying new things as an obstacle, as well as a certain degree of “disappointment” in her students, who she often perceived to be putting in a minimal amount of effort:

*“I thought that [the students] didn't find my work valuable. I was investing so much time and effort, [...] but they didn't appreciate it. So I got kind of disillusioned because of that.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:47:50 – 00:48:22

The ICELT course had therefore not been successful in making significant changes to Rebecca’s beliefs or practices. It would not be until 2007, when she went to the UK to study a Master’s, that the most important event in her educational life history happened.

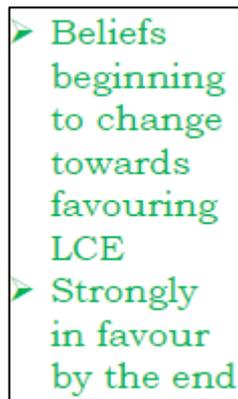
### 4.2.3. Period 3: 2007-2008: Studying a Master's in England

In 2007, Rebecca was offered the chance to study a Master's in Education at a UK university. During this 12-month course, she learnt about new teaching approaches, as well as issues in the field of teacher training and even curriculum change. Rebecca felt that the course was delivered in a very student-centred way (see her definition in Section 4.1), and incorporated several opportunities for her to reflect on her beliefs and practices. After graduating from the course in 2008, she returned to work at the USM.

#### 4.2.3.1. Evolution of beliefs

Fig. 4.2.3.1(i) below demonstrates that, by the end of the Master's program, Rebecca had started to believe strongly in more student-centred approaches to EFL learning:

*Fig. 4.2.3.1(i). Summary of Rebecca's beliefs about teaching between 2007 and 2008  
(extract from timeline)*



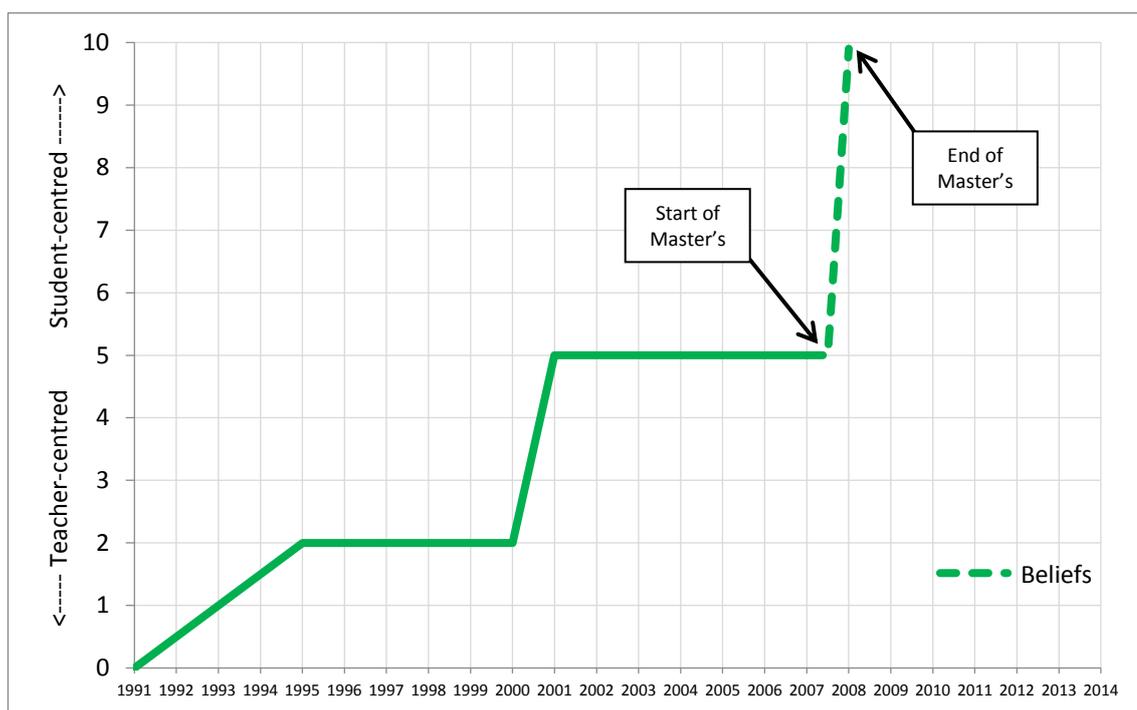
➤ Beliefs beginning to change towards favouring LCE

➤ Strongly in favour by the end

N.B. LCE = "learner-centred education", which may be considered a synonym of student-centred learning.

As shown on the graph below, Rebecca felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning increased from a '5' in 2007 right up to a '10' in 2008:

Fig. 4.2.3.1(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1991 and 2008



Such a drastic change reflects the importance of the Master's program in influencing Rebecca's beliefs. Indeed, she felt that her time studying abroad was the key event which had an impact on both her beliefs and practices:

*"For change to start happening there should be a trigger. In my case it was that. I don't know if it would have happened if I hadn't gone abroad and lived what I did. But I'm very happy that I did."*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 01:15:21 – 01:15:46

Over the course of the 12-month program, Rebecca took part in a variety of activities which she found particularly useful:

*"I got to know more about teaching and learning [...] about how the brain works; how learning takes place. I didn't know anything about that."*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 01:03:32 – 01:03:47

Interestingly, it does not appear that Rebecca was necessarily bombarded with information *about* student-centred EFL learning, nor was she explicitly encouraged to

teach in a student-centred way. However, what she did stress is that she was able to “live” the student-centred experience:

*“There was one tiny thing about student-centred learning, and I actually presented something on that, but it was just that.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:19:17 – 00:19:38

*“[But] it was because of the way [these courses were] organised; the way they were delivered. [...] I did meaningful things that allowed me to keep those things and bring them back with me to my classroom.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 01:11:18 – 01:11:44

*“We actually lived, and experienced, student-centred learning.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:00:49 – 00:00:53

Moreover, Rebecca felt that one of the most important reasons why she experienced such an important change in her beliefs was that she was encouraged to reflect on herself and her practices at regular intervals throughout the course:

*“There was a lot of discussion, and a lot of reading, and talking about the things that we were reading. And I would say that discussion and reflection were the most important tools for actually understanding and making meaning of the things that we were doing.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:15:55 – 00:16:18

*“All the modules required us to write learning logs, [...] and then after that we carried out reflective tasks. We also had a formal assignment for the modules and a portfolio assignment [in which] we wrote about our “learning journey”.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:01:06 – 00:01:32

*“For example, in one of the modules I was asked to describe my lesson. [...] And I said “well, I have 20-something students, all of them sitting in rows, and the teacher is at the front, explaining a grammar point, and then she goes through the exercises in the book, and then checking correct answers”; [...] it was practically the same in all my classes [...]. That was when I realised how I was teaching, because never before had I actually consciously thought about what I was doing. [...] It was this reflective approach to the practice which really got into me through that.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:02:28 – 00:04:12

Engaging with the course through a combination of reading, discussion and reflection seem to have created an extremely meaningful learning experience for Rebecca. These characteristics of the course (meaningful activities, being involved in the learning process, making “connections” with her own context) seem to have been vital in her own construction of the term of “student-centred learning”, which was described in Section 4.1.

Nevertheless, it must be recognised that Rebecca’s change in beliefs did not take place immediately:

*“It was a little bit strange at the beginning [to do the reflective tasks], because it was not something I was used to doing. [...] And actually I refused to do it at the beginning.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:12:12 – 00:12:27

This period of initial resistance is understandable, taking into account Rebecca’s largely teacher-centred beliefs and practices before travelling to the UK. Moreover, another contributing factor may have been that she was not provided with any direct explanation as to why she was being asked to carry out the reflective activities:

*“We were not explained anything; we were not taught anything. It was just “we suggest you write these; you do it this way”, but we didn't talk about why we were doing them.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:12:38 – 00:12:57

In fact, it was only when Rebecca took one specific module that she started to become more engaged in writing the reflective learning logs. Looking back, she felt that this may

have been due to the fact that the module was run by a particularly inspirational (or frightening!) tutor:

*“I would say that the tutors had to do with it. [...] [My tutor for that module was] really good, and I think that was one of the factors.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:32:34 – 00:33:17

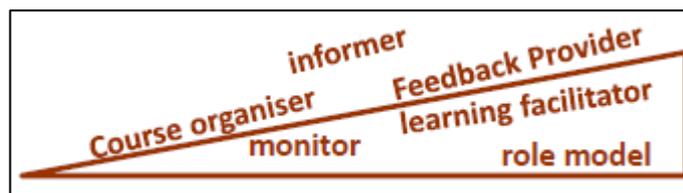
*“I had a module called "English Language Teaching Methods" or something like that, and we were studying things that I had already read about, and I said "ok, they're not telling us something new"; [...] I didn't believe in it, and I said "why should I write about this?"; I was very lazy with that particular module. But then we also had another module which was called "Approaches to Teaching and Learning", and I didn't mind writing the log for that. Maybe it was because I was afraid of the teacher! [...] Well no, but I cannot tell you why I made that decision.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:16:47 – 00:17:49

The example above suggests not only the influence tutors can have on their students, but also that positive changes may occur even if teachers are (initially) forced to do something they do not necessarily believe in. I discuss this idea in more detail in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

Rebecca also commented that she experienced a change in her beliefs about the role of the teacher as a result of her experiences on the Master's. This is highlighted in Fig. 4.2.3.1(iii) below, which illustrates some of the ways in which she conceptualised her new role:

*Fig. 4.2.3.1(iii). Words Rebecca used to describe the way she saw herself as a teacher after the Master's (extract from timeline)*



The words used in Fig. 4.2.3.1(iii) above are a stark contrast to those that she used to describe herself before the Master's (“information provider”, “gate-keeper”, “expert” and

“authoritarian”). Although Rebecca did still mention some of the arguably more teacher-centred characteristics (“course organiser”, “informer” and “feedback provider”), she also included the potentially more student-centred characteristics of “monitor”, “learning facilitator” and “role model”.

What Rebecca was very keen to emphasise during the interviews was that a change in her relationships with students was a change that she *wanted* to make as a teacher. In particular, she mentioned that she had not been paying sufficient attention to her students and their needs, which was an important component of her definition of student-centred learning in Section 4.1:

*“When you have a teacher-centred classroom, there is no connection between the learning and the teaching. The teacher teaches, and the learner learns on his or her own, and the connections have to be made by the student [...] But when you are working in a student-centred classroom, you have to make those connections, I mean you have to work on those connections, and they should be made by both. And that's what happened to me: I was disconnected from the students.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:25:20 – 00:26:01

*“I needed to connect with my students, to make the bonds stronger, because if you want to persuade them to start working in a different way you need to get closer to them. [...] This way of working demands the teacher to listen to their students, so we should be open to what they have to say.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:53:32 – 00:54:07

#### 4.2.3.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs

Rebecca was not teaching during the Master's, meaning that she would have to wait until she returned to Mexico to make changes to her teaching practices.

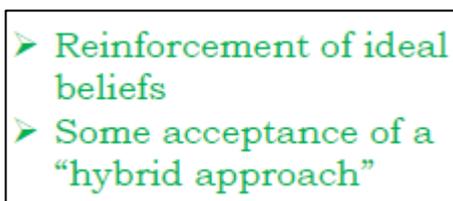
#### 4.2.4. Period 4: 2008-2014: Return to the USM

Upon completing her Master's in 2008, Rebecca returned to Mexico to work at the USM. When she arrived, she was given the opportunity to work as a teacher trainer. This meant that she was given considerably fewer groups to teach. She continued to work at the USM both as an EFL teacher and trainer until the time of data collection.

##### 4.2.4.1. Evolution of beliefs

Fig 4.2.4.1(i) below shows the two main tendencies of belief change which Rebecca identified between 2008 and 2014. The first of these was the reinforcement in her beliefs in the value of student-centred EFL learning. The second was a movement towards a more “hybrid approach”, which implied somewhat of a return to more teacher-centred beliefs:

*Fig. 4.2.4.1(i). Summary of Rebecca's beliefs about teaching between 2008 and 2014 (extract from timeline)*

- 
- Reinforcement of ideal beliefs
  - Some acceptance of a “hybrid approach”

I will first discuss the ways in which Rebecca's beliefs were reinforced. When she arrived back to Mexico after the Master's, Rebecca was extremely in favour of student-centred EFL learning. Therefore, it was understandable that she started to try to implement some of these more student-centred approaches in her classes (for example, by encouraging her students to participate more through more meaningful activities; see her definition in Section 4.1). When she did this, she received largely positive feedback from her students, which she felt helped reinforce her beliefs:

*“I knew this was the way to do things when students evaluated the course. The comments that they made were like “this is a different English class from the ones that we have been to”. ”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:22:29 – 00:22:47

As I have just mentioned, Rebecca was also given the opportunity to deliver teacher training courses. Again, when she received positive feedback from the participants on these courses, it seemed to help to reinforce her beliefs:

*“When I started teaching teachers, I started gaining more confidence, because I started doing what I was supposed to be doing [...] and I think it's worked.”*

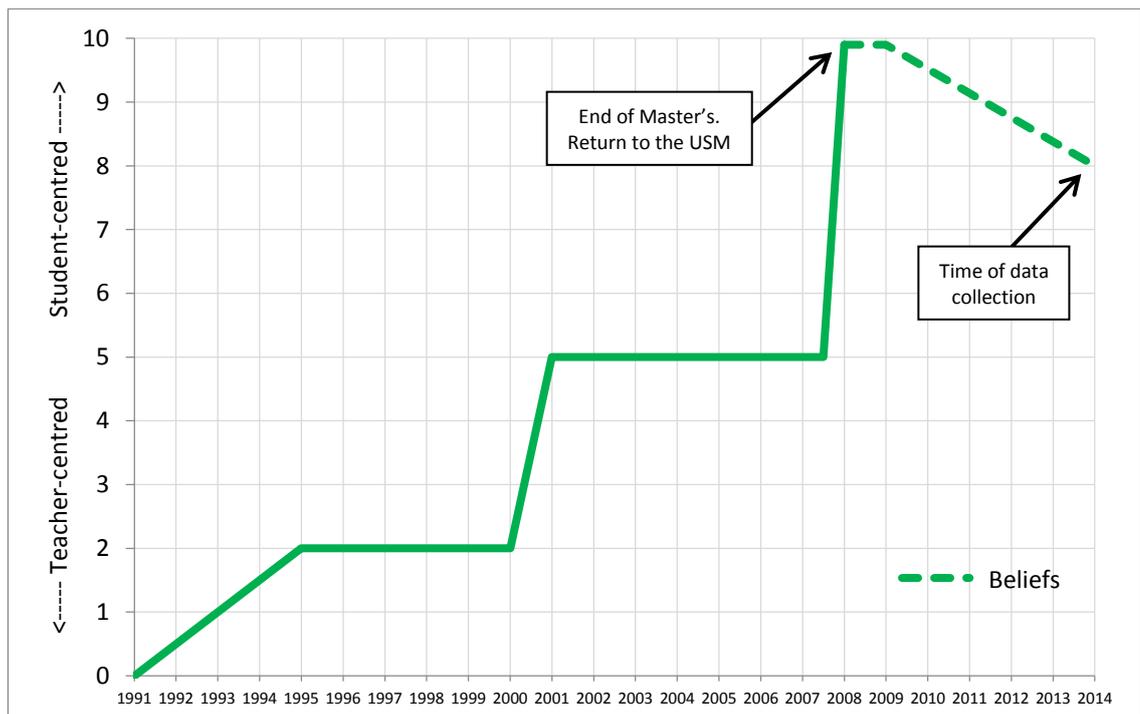
Rebecca, Interview 1, 01:05:27 – 01:05:54

*“In one of the sessions [a teacher participant] came and he said [...] “I did what you told me to do, I started doing it in my class.” [...] “And how did you feel?” “I felt good.” [...] “The students enjoyed it. They participated more.” [...] That's rewarding for me, to see that teachers are willing to start doing things in their classrooms.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 01:07:16 – 01:08:27

Despite this initial reinforcement in her beliefs, Rebecca reported that over the last few years she has become slightly more sceptical of student-centred EFL learning, at least in its more idealistic form. This is shown in the graph below, which shows that her perceived beliefs decreased from a ‘10’ in 2009 to an ‘8’ in 2014:

*Fig. 4.2.4.1(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1991 and 2014*



The reasons for this slight decrease can be attributed to what Rebecca described as a “hybrid approach”. During the interviews, Rebecca explained that this refers to the idea that a combination of student-centred and teacher-centred approaches may be used, if they are considered to be most appropriate within particular contexts. This movement away from complete confidence student-centred EFL learning may be linked to the obstacles that prevent such approaches being (fully) implemented at the USM (see Section 4.2.4.2 below). However, Rebecca suggested that this may not necessarily be the case, emphasising that her beliefs about the “best” way to teach (at the time of data collection) might include at least some teacher-centred approaches. For example, she stated that teaching grammar in a more or less explicit way may have its uses:

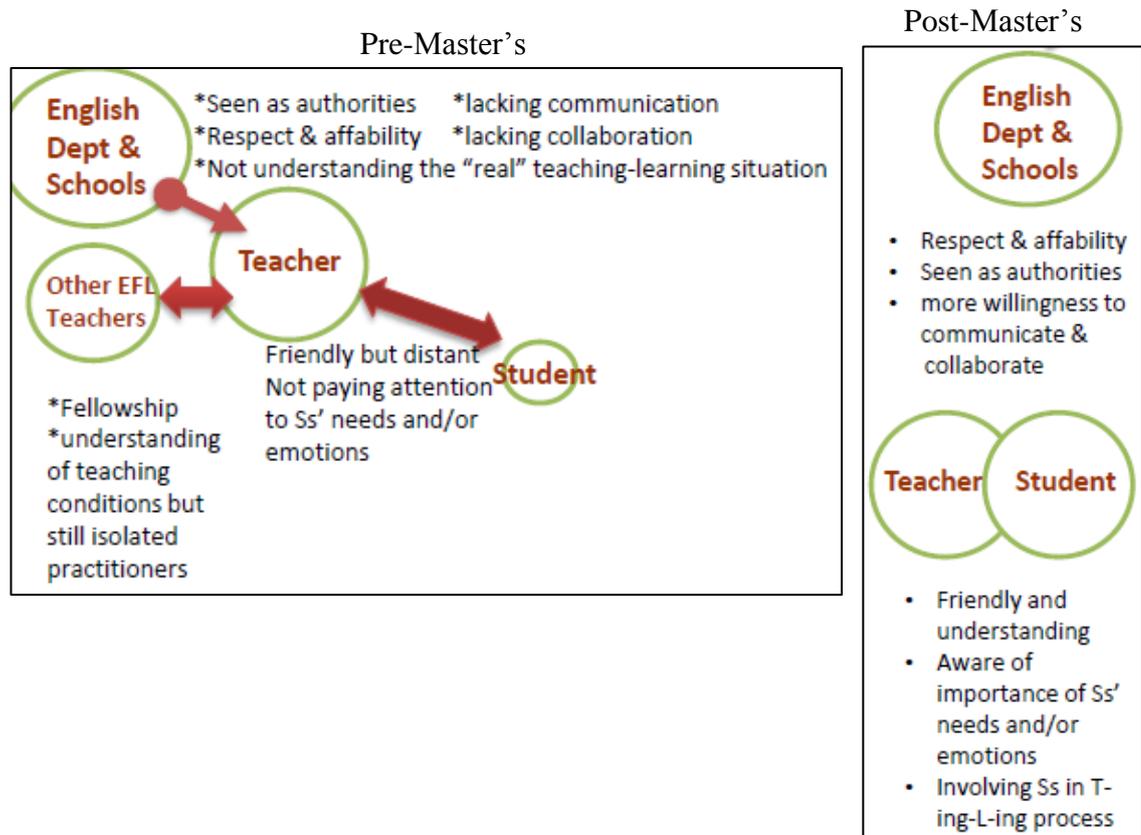
*“Actually I don't think we can just leave grammar out in that sense. I think they do need it, and sometimes it's the fastest and easiest way of doing it.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:32:11 – 00:32:32

The idea that teachers may revert to a more “hybrid” approach is revisited several times throughout the following four chapters, and is explored extensively in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

A final aspect to consider within this sub-section is the evolution of Rebecca’s beliefs about the role of the teacher and her relationships with students. As mentioned in the previous section, Rebecca began to envisage a new kind of relationship with her students after her experience on the Master’s. When she returned to Mexico to teach at the USM, she was able to start putting these new relationships into practice. The concept maps in Fig 4.2.4.1(iii) below show how Rebecca’s views about the relationships between herself, students and authority figures changed after returning from the Master’s:

Fig. 4.2.4.1(iii). Rebecca's concept maps showing her perceived relationships with students, authorities and other EFL teachers (Pre- and Post-Master's) (extracts from timeline)



The concept maps above show certain differences between the way Rebecca saw her relationships with students and authorities after returning from the Master's. Firstly, the teacher-student relationship is no longer so separated, with the two circles placed on the same horizontal level and even overlapping one another. This is a visual indication of Rebecca's increased willingness to get closer to her students, which was a key characteristic of her definition of student-centred EFL learning which was established in Section 4.1.

*"After the Master's program, the relationship with the students changed. I'm still their teacher, but we're working at the same level. It's not that I know more; I know what skills I have and whatever, that I have more experience than them, but this still does not make me feel above them; it's more equal. I'm still friendly, but I'm more understanding now, and I'm aware of the importance of their needs and their emotions."*

In addition to reducing the distance between herself and the students, Rebecca also noted that she has become more open-minded to criticism:

*“There were really significant changes in the way I understood things, and the way my mind was open to criticism.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:39:59 – 00:40:10

*“I started considering students' evaluations of my courses as something useful; I mean it's significant information to help me work. [...] I stopped considering it as criticism; I just considered it to be information, information to help me enhance my practice.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:39:33 – 00:40:23

This change in attitude did not happen immediately. However, little by little, Rebecca reported that she has been able to let go of her previously teacher-centred role:

*“[When I first came back, I was] still wanting to have the control. [...] I think that's one of the most difficult things, you have to let the control go. [...] It's still difficult now, because control is what I think makes the teacher believe that something is happening. [...] I have been letting it go, but it was not immediate.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:56:27 – 00:57:20

△ TRIANGULATION:  
THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP (1/2)

My interpretations from classroom observations:

From the classes I observed, there seemed to be a general degree of consistency between how Rebecca described herself and how she came across with her students. I noted that there was a positive atmosphere in the classes I observed. The classes were relaxed and certainly not authoritarian. The students seemed comfortable and were happy to ask questions when they did not understand. There was just one example in which Rebecca made a spelling mistake on the board, but no one pointed it out. I am not sure whether this was because the students did not realise, or because they were uncomfortable telling her.

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP (2/2)

Students' opinions from focus groups:

There was also consistency between my observations and the perceptions of the students. For example, several students commented that there was less of a distance between themselves and Rebecca:

*"I think that some teachers have an authoritarian role, like "I'm better than you", but Rebecca [...] is on the same level as us; she helps us; she understands us."*

Laura (Student at the School of Languages), Focus Group 1, 01:03:46 – 01:04:04

*"She makes you feel really comfortable; you can talk to her like a friend."*

Rocío (Student at the School of Languages), Focus Group 1, 01:10:51 – 01:10:54

Moreover, the students confirmed what Rebecca had said about listening to them and taking their needs into account:

*"She takes our opinions seriously; what we need and what we think."*

Laura (Student at the School of Languages), Focus Group 1, 01:05:43 – 01:05:51

A final point to make is that the Post-Master's concept map also indicates a slight change in Rebecca's relationships with the University authorities:

*"The relationship is the same: respect and friendship and friendliness, and they're still the authorities, but what changed was my willingness. I changed, so my approach to dealing with this relationship is different; I'm more willing to communicate and collaborate."*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:47:43 – 00:48:13

4.2.4.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs

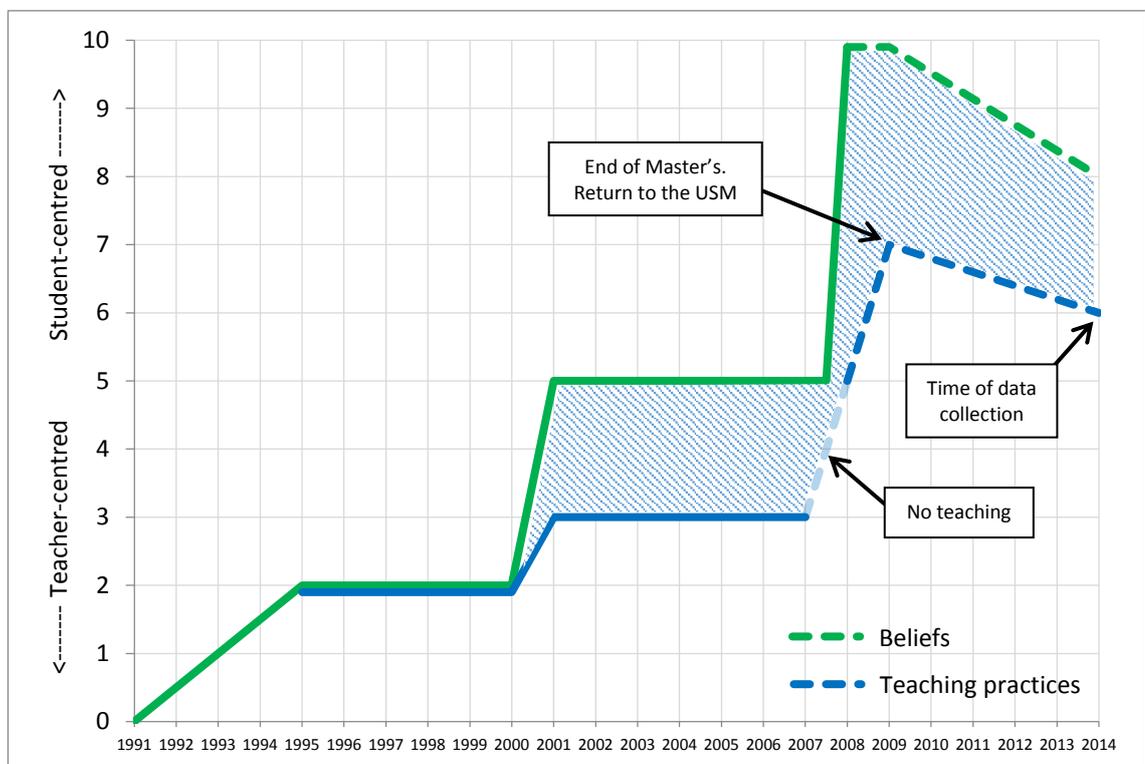
Fig. 4.2.4.2(i) below summarises the main changes in Rebecca's teaching practices after returning from her Master's:

Fig. 4.2.4.2(i). Summary of Rebecca's teaching practices between 2008 and 2014 (extract from timeline)

- Introduction of teaching methods (consciously)
- Increase in Ss' involvement
- Syllabus adapted to Ss' needs & interests
- Purposeful T-ing & L-ing

These changes can also be observed on the graph below:

Fig. 4.2.4.2(ii). Graph summarising Rebecca's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1991 and 2014



As the graph above shows, Rebecca felt the extent to which her teaching practices were student-centred rose from about a '3' in 2007 to a '7' in 2009. This reflects the fact that, upon arrival from her Master's, she made a conscious effort to put into practice some of the more student-centred approaches she had learnt while studying abroad. These practices were consistent with her current definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 4.1). For example, she tried to involve her students more in the learning process, through more "purposeful" or meaningful activities such as group work. Furthermore, as

suggested by her change in role (see Section 4.2.4.1) she began to place more of a focus on the students and adapt her classes to their needs:

*“I came back to San Martín very happy and satisfied, full of energy, and wanting to do things differently.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:33:39 – 00:33:50

*“There were some very tangible things that I started doing consciously, because I knew they worked, because I had lived them.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:34:34 – 00:34:48

*“I was given a beginners course in the School of Tourism, and I started doing different things. I started organising group work, something that I didn't do before, and [the students] started creating their own things, these posters; [they] started getting involved in the creation of their learning.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:21:44 – 00:22:20

*“[The students] were doing things using the language; it wasn't just grammar.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:27:30 – 00:27:41

#### Δ TRIANGULATION:

##### EXAMPLES OF MORE STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES (1/2)

##### My interpretations from classroom observations:

There were many examples of activities which would fit with Rebecca's interpretation of student-centred EFL learning. For example, there were a number of activities which incorporated group or pair work, such as one lesson in which the students gave a presentation on books they had read. In terms of adapting the classes to fit students' needs, Rebecca had created several of her own materials to avoid relying on the textbook. Furthermore, I noted that English was used almost all of the time, and students appeared to be accustomed to using English when talking between themselves.

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
EXAMPLES OF MORE STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES (2/2)

Students' opinions from focus groups:

The students also highlighted a number of characteristics of Rebecca's teaching which might be considered more "student-centred". The aspect that they emphasised the most was that she varies her activities and does not rely on the textbook:

*"With Rebecca it's different, because we do different kinds of activities."*

Helena (Student at the School of Languages), Focus Group 1, 00:28:55 – 00:29:01

*"With Rebecca there's like more flexibility. We do use the book but everything is more fluid."*

Marta (Student at the School of Languages), Focus Group 1, 00:02:49 – 00:02:59

*"With Rebecca we might be studying a topic [from the textbook], but then we also do other things; we don't always use the book."*

Marta (Student at the School of Languages), Focus Group 1, 00:11:50 – 00:11:58

It must be highlighted that there appear to have been some factors which contributed towards helping Rebecca to make these early changes to her teaching practices. The first of these was a reduction in her teaching hours. As mentioned earlier, before leaving to study her Master's, she was teaching up to 12 groups at a time. However, when she returned to the USM, she was initially allocated only one group because of her teacher training responsibilities. This seems to have allowed her the time and energy to experiment with new approaches:

*"Working in this way demands a lot of time from you as a teacher. You need to plan your lessons; you need to mark the students' work; you need to do a lot of things. If I were teaching the same number of hours as I was before, I probably wouldn't be able to do that. I only have one class now, and of course it's a lot easier."*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:49:17 – 00:49:48

Rebecca feels that the increased autonomy granted to her as a teacher trainer also facilitated her teaching in a more student-centred way, at least within the teacher training sessions themselves:

*“When I was doing the teacher training, I was able to design my own programs and my own materials. That's when I think real student-centred learning is implemented. I implement student-centred learning when I have the chance to design the whole thing, select all the materials, and make decisions on how many participants I will have in my lesson and what I will be doing with them. That's the ideal situation, for student-centred learning to happen.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:38:06 – 00:38:46

A few years later, Rebecca was transferred to the USM’s School of Languages. She felt that another factor in helping her implement more student-centred approaches was that this School appeared to be more aware of what was needed in order to teach English in a student-centred way:

*“In the School of Languages [...] we have the same mind-set, because we're working towards the same aim, we're training student teachers, so we're more or less aware of what we should be doing.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:43:38 – 00:44:01

Despite these factors which seem to have helped Rebecca make an initial transition towards more student-centred teaching practices, Fig. 4.2.4.2(ii) above nevertheless shows a gap between Rebecca’s beliefs and her teaching practices between 2008 and 2014. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous sub-section, she felt that her teaching practices actually became slightly more *teacher-centred* from about 2009 onwards, as she began to teach in a more “hybrid” way:

*Fig. 4.2.4.2(iii). Extract from timeline showing Rebecca’s transition towards a more “hybrid” approach (extract from timeline)*

- Refinement of LC approach
- Adaptation of approach to context

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
EXAMPLES OF “HYBRID” TEACHING

My interpretations from classroom observations:

Although a lot of Rebecca’s teaching could be defined as “student-centred”, I also observed a number of activities which I considered to be more “teacher-centred”. This would seem consistent with her recognition that she currently teaches in a more “hybrid” way. For example, she did include some explicit grammar explanations, gap-fill exercises, and traditional listening comprehension tasks. Moreover, in between some of the more “student-centred” activities, Rebecca spent a fair amount of time lecturing to the group.

Students’ opinions from focus groups:

The comments of Rebecca’s students seemed to support the idea that at least some of her activities were more teacher-centred. Indeed, although the students were generally very satisfied with Rebecca’s teaching, some suggested that they would like it if her classes were slightly more “dynamic”:

*“Rebecca does give us conversations, and useful activities [...] but maybe the activities could be a bit more dynamic.”*

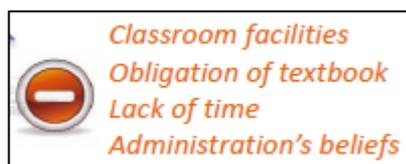
Rocío (Student at the School of Languages), Focus Group 1, 00:04:57 – 00:05:09

*“Rebecca’s got it all, well, almost everything - maybe the activities could be a bit more dynamic.”*

Laura (Student at the School of Languages), Focus Group 1, 00:37:39 – 00:37:47

As mentioned in the previous section, a movement towards a more “hybrid” approach might be explained by the contextual constraints which Rebecca encountered at the USM. Rebecca was quick to stress that she does not consider these constraints to be “excuses” as such, but these factors may have prevented Rebecca from (at least fully) putting her beliefs into practice. Fig. 4.2.4.2(iv) below summarises some of the main obstacles Rebecca identified on her timeline:

*Fig. 4.2.4.2(iv). Summary of obstacles preventing Rebecca from putting her beliefs into practice between 2008 and 2014 (extract from timeline)*



The first obstacle Rebecca mentioned were the classroom facilities at the USM:

*“The facilities are sometimes not the most appropriate for working this way. [...] The arrangement of the tables in the classroom doesn't really allow me to move students around. I really don't want to disturb the arrangement of the classroom, so I decide not to move them that much.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:36:47 - 00:37:26

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
INAPPROPRIATE CLASSROOM FACILITIES

My interpretations from classroom observations:

All of the classes I observed with Rebecca had the traditional table structure of rows of students facing the teacher. I can certainly see where Rebecca is coming from when she suggests it may be more difficult to carry out more interactive activities in such a classroom layout. Moreover, given that many teachers share the same classrooms at the USM, it would be unrealistic for her to move the tables around during every class.

The next obstacle Rebecca included in her timeline was the “obligation of textbook”. In fact, she commented several times during the interviews that she was frustrated at having to use a centrally-imposed textbook:

*“I do not like textbooks. I haven't found a way of working with them. I don't think that I'm doing it well [...] and I don't think the students like it either. And that makes me feel like I'm failing, because I don't think a textbook matches the principles of student-centred learning. I would say that's the biggest constraint of all.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:41:46 – 00:42:31

Furthermore, Rebecca commented that a “lack of time” has meant that it has often been difficult for her to diverge from the textbook:

*“The struggle is time, because we have to cover a certain number of units and if I bring new things and videos and stuff like that, we might not have time, so I don't know what to do.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:45:25 – 00:45:45

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
A LACK OF TIME

Students' opinions from focus groups:

Rebecca's students also pointed out a lack of time as an obstacle to their learning. For example, one of her students said the following:

*"I think that the [lack of] time is an obstacle; there are very few hours for English class and sometimes, like this week, we don't have class because of bank holidays and things like that."*

Miriam (Student at the School of Languages), Focus Group 1, 00:50:12 – 00:50:23

The final obstacle Rebecca identified was the "Administration's beliefs". Rebecca explained what she meant by this in the interviews:

*"In some Schools [...] they still believe English is not important, and you have to fight against that, because the English teacher is the only advocate of English, not the Head of School, sometimes not even your colleagues; I mean they're telling students "don't learn English, because it's not useful". I think that's also a very important obstacle."*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:44:02 – 00:44:57

*"Sometimes they don't want you to make a lot of noise, or they want students to be in the exact room at the exact time that you are supposed to be teaching them. For example, sometimes I ask my students to work on their own; I give them like an hour of class to do some research, or to prepare for a presentation or something like that, and suddenly the Head of School or the coordinator or whoever is in charge is asking you why the students are not in their classroom."*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:38:12 – 00:38:46

Another important obstacle, which Rebecca did not include in Fig. 4.2.4.2(iv) above but did mention several times in the interviews, was the students themselves. It appears that many students at the USM are used to more teacher-centred approaches and find it difficult to adapt to more student-centred approaches:

*"Sometimes it's the students themselves; it's their rejection towards working in new ways."*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:36:15 – 00:36:27

*“They don't want to speak. I mean I ask them a question, and then there's like a 30 second or one minute pause and nobody answers.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:33:37 – 00:33:48

*“The other day one of my students here at the School of Languages [...] said that he didn't like group work. [...] “Why don't you like it?” “I don't know, I don't see the point of working in groups. I don't find it useful. [...] I prefer it when the teacher explains everything. I prefer the more teacher-centred approach”.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:31:12 – 00:31:56

△ TRIANGULATION:  
STUDENTS AS OBSTACLES

My interpretations from classroom observations:

Within the classes I observed, there were occasions in which the students seemed quite shy and reluctant to participate. Moreover, at times, some of them seemed quite distracted. For example, during one group work activity, I noted that many were chatting in Spanish or using their mobile phones. However, I would not say that any of them seemed particularly uncomfortable or actively “resisted” the more student-centred activities.

Students' opinions from focus groups:

From my personal experience working with Mexican university students, I do not doubt that some may prefer more teacher-centred approaches. However, within the relatively small focus group I conducted with Rebecca's students at the School of Languages, all six participants made it very clear that they preferred more student-centred, “dynamic” activities. Of course, this view may not necessarily be representative of the whole group, or of other students at the USM.

A final obstacle that Rebecca identified is that there has been no real follow-up since the Master's to aid her in the process of making her teaching practices more student-centred:

*“I feel I'm doing it right, but I'm not quite sure. No one has come and told me “you're doing things right”, because we don't have these observation schemes or anything.”*

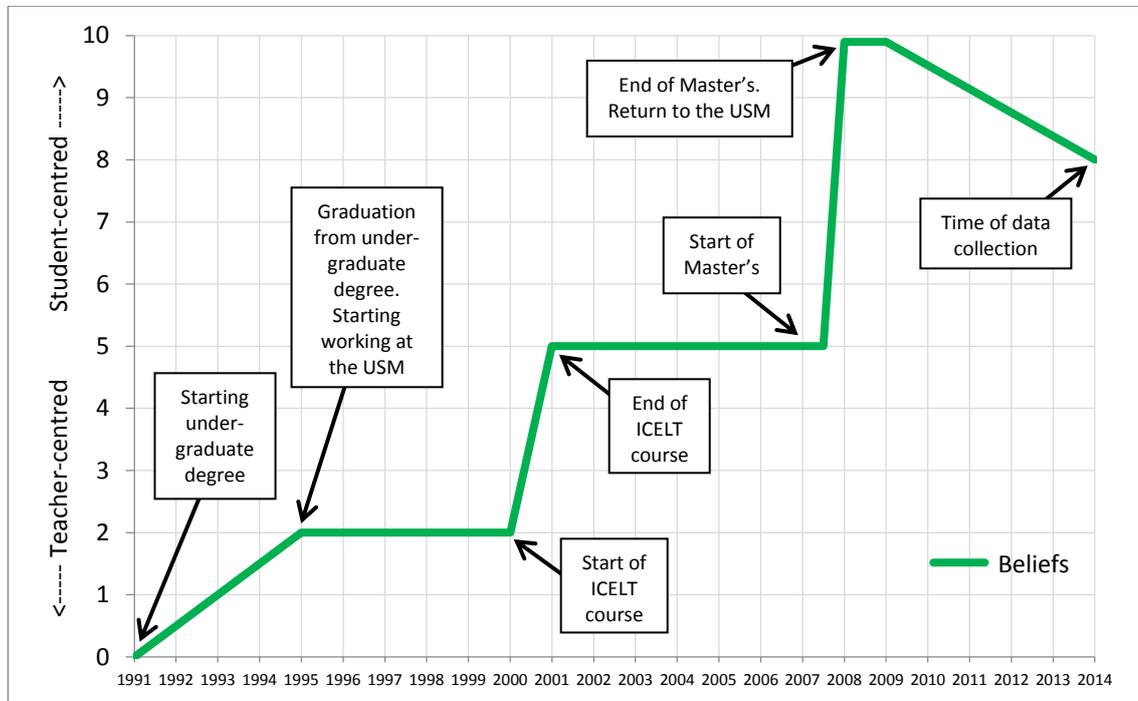
Rebecca, Interview 1, 01:16:00 – 01:16:17

This perceived lack of follow-up and ongoing support is revisited in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

### 4.3. Summary

#### 4.3.1. Summary of the evolution of Rebecca's beliefs

Fig. 4.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Rebecca's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of her educational life history



The graph above summarises the evolution of Rebecca's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning between 1991 and 2014. The first chronological period was between 1991 and 2000, which included her time studying at the USM and her first five years teaching. At the start of her undergraduate degree in 1991, she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been a '0'. This seems to have been due to the very traditional model of education that she had been exposed to up to that point. By the end of her degree, she felt that this score would have only increased to about a '2', given that the course did not include any formal teacher training.

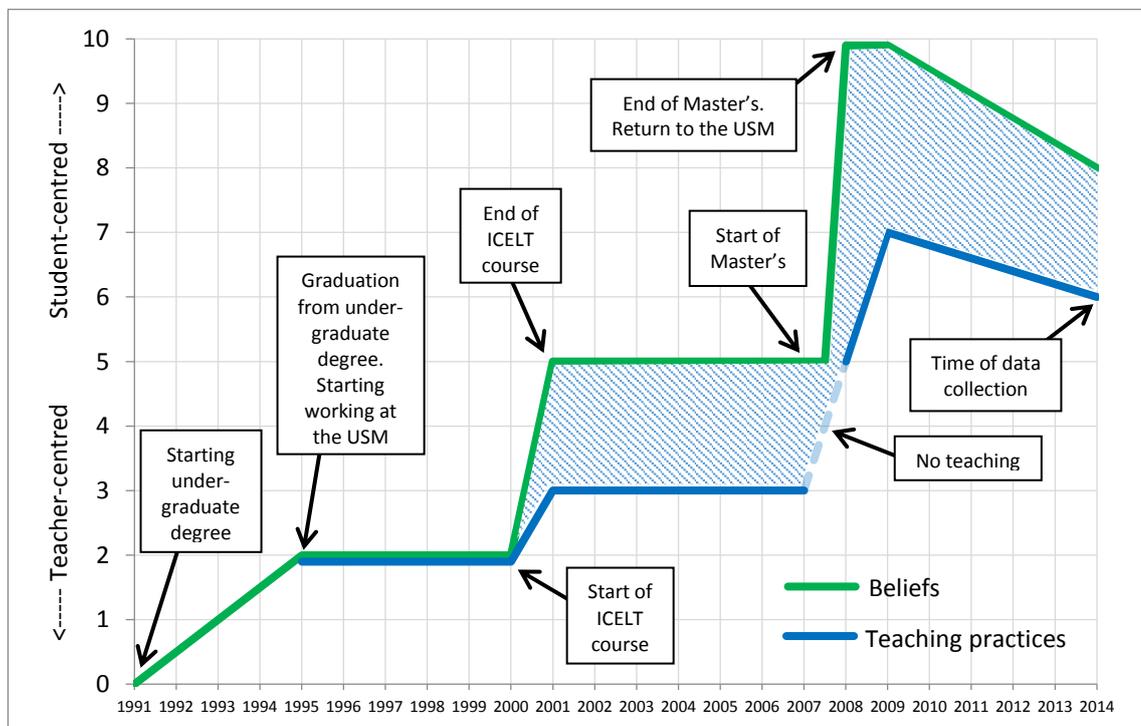
This rating of a '2' continued until 2000, when she took the ICELT course run by the British Council. After attending this course, she felt that her beliefs became somewhat more student-centred, increasing to about a '5' by 2001. However, it was not until 2007, when she went to study a Master's degree in the UK, that the big upswing towards more student-centred beliefs occurred. She felt that being encouraged to reflect on her current teaching practices was one of the main reasons in helping her realise that they were generally teacher-centred and that she would be able to make some changes to them.

However, this belief change did not happen instantly; indeed, she only decided to truly engage with the reflective tasks on one particular module, which happened to be run by an especially inspirational tutor.

Regardless of how this change in beliefs occurred, she was strongly in favour of student-centred EFL learning by the end of the Master's program. In fact, by 2008, she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been a '10'. She then returned to the USM full of enthusiasm to try and implement these new approaches. Positive feedback from students, as well as from teacher participants on teacher training sessions, contributed towards reinforcing her beliefs in student-centred EFL learning. However, in the last few years, she felt that her beliefs have become slightly more teacher-centred, as she started to recognise that there may be room for certain teacher-centred approaches in particular situations, a concept which she calls a "hybrid approach".

#### 4.3.2. *Summary of Rebecca's teaching practices in relation to her beliefs*

Fig. 4.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Rebecca's beliefs in relation to her teaching practices over the course of her educational life history



The graph above summarises the relationships between Rebecca's beliefs and her teaching practices between 1991 and 2014. When she started teaching in 1995, there was a general degree of coherence between her beliefs and her teaching practices, which were both teacher-centred (she felt she would have rated both as about a '2'). However, after taking the ICELT course in 2000, a gap began to establish itself between her beliefs (which she rated as a '5') and her teaching practices (which she rated as a '3'). She felt that this was because the course was not sufficiently rooted in her teaching realities, and because there were certain obstacles to her changing, such as very large groups, too many teaching hours and unmotivated students.

When she came back from her Master's in 2008, Rebecca did try to implement the ideas that had made such a big impact on her on the course. Therefore, she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been about a '7' by 2009. However, there was still a gap between her beliefs and her practices. Again, this gap might be explained by the contextual constraints at the USM which have prevented her from fully putting her new beliefs into practice. Some of these obstacles have been: inappropriate classroom facilities, being forced to use a textbook, a lack of time, being undermined by authority figures, and a certain degree of student resistance.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORY OF ANTONIO**

This chapter is the second of the five Data Analysis chapters. It focuses on the educational life history of the second participant, Antonio.

### **5.1. Antonio's interpretation of student-centred EFL learning**

When I asked Antonio to identify the characteristics of student-centred EFL learning that he thought were most important, he highlighted the following:

- Activities to promote more student participation;
- A movement away from grammar teaching towards more Communicative Language Teaching;
- Opportunities for students to be more autonomous;
- A change in the role of the teacher from a traditional provider of information and materials, towards more of a guide;
- A movement away from English for General Purposes towards English for Specific Purposes.

(Adapted from my field notes taken during Interview 3 with Antonio)

As with the previous case of Rebecca, it is therefore important that we bear this interpretation in mind as we explore Antonio's educational life history.

### **5.2. Key periods in Antonio's educational life history**

The key chronological periods which emerged from Antonio's educational life history were as follows:

- *Period 1: 2003-2007: Studying at the USM*
- *Period 2: 2007-2009: First two years teaching at the USM*
- *Period 3: 2009-2014: CLIL and the Master's*

These periods are examined separately in the following three sections.

### *5.2.1. Period 1: 2003-2007: Studying at the USM*

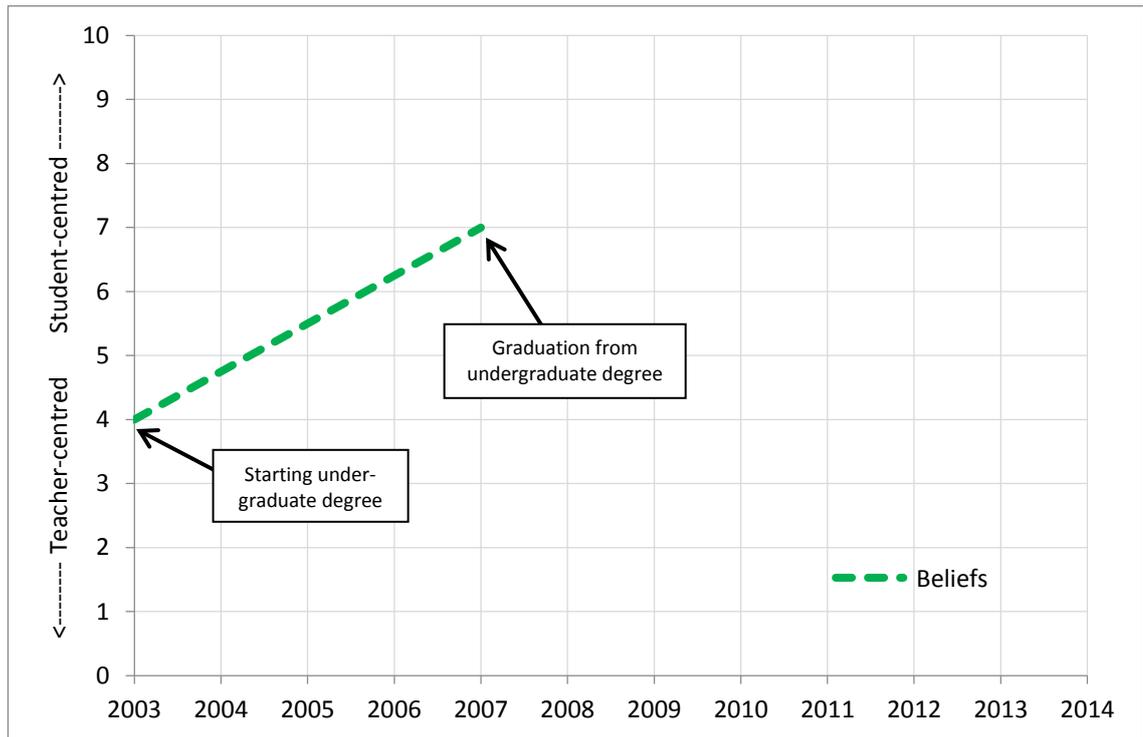
The first main period in Antonio's educational life history was between 2003 and 2007, when he studied his undergraduate degree in Foreign Languages at the USM. Antonio was the youngest participant in the study, and the School of Languages that he experienced appears to have been quite different from that which Rebecca had attended around ten years earlier. Indeed, while Rebecca was not given any explicit teacher training, Antonio did recall being taught about teaching approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching.

The last few semesters of Antonio's degree involved a series of observed teaching practices, which provided him with his first real experiences of teaching. During these teaching practices, he received positive feedback from both teachers and students. After completing his teaching practices and graduating from his degree, Antonio was immediately hired to work as an EFL teacher at the USM.

#### *5.2.1.1. Evolution of beliefs*

When Antonio started his degree in 2003, he felt that his beliefs about teaching were slightly more teacher-centred than student-centred. This is shown in the graph below, as he considered the extent to which his beliefs were student-centred would have been about a '4':

Fig. 5.2.1.1(i). Graph summarising Antonio's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 2003 and 2007



Antonio's slightly more teacher-centred beliefs in 2003 seem to have been linked to the largely traditional education that he had received up to that point:

*“At the beginning I had this idea that I was supposed to teach grammar, because that was the way I had learnt.”*

Antonio, Interview 1a, 00:02:09 – 00:02:18

This included a period learning at a local private language school called the San Martín English Language College (SMELC), whose teaching approach appears to have been particularly teacher-centred:

*“[It was] completely grammatical at SMELC; a little bit of reading and things like that but it was grammar.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:09:30 – 00:09:40

At the time, Antonio felt that grammar was a very important part of his language learning. He seems to have had a lot in common with many teachers and students in perceiving the

importance of learning *las bases* (the “basics”) first, in order to lay the foundations for future communicative competence:

*“I learnt all the patterns by drilling and things like that, and I learnt a lot of vocabulary through grammar.”*

Antonio, Interview 1a, 00:02:18 – 00:02:27

*“I noticed that I learnt; that it was easier for me to learn, because I had all the vocabulary; I had all those building blocks. So it was always easier for me to understand and then to produce [the language].”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:09:47 – 00:10:03

It was during his time studying at SMELC that Antonio realised that he had a talent for teaching:

*“That's when I started. I discovered here that I was really good at explaining. [My classmates would say to me] “I understand you better than the teacher!” So I started, I grabbed my marker and I was like “Ok, we have to do this, this, this and that”.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:02:03 – 00:02:21

As mentioned earlier, Antonio’s experiences of his undergraduate degree at the School of Languages was quite different to that of Rebecca. He felt that being exposed to teaching approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching helped make his beliefs become more student-centred (Communicative Language Teaching was considered an important part of Antonio’s interpretation of student-centred EFL learning; see Section 5.1). Indeed, as the graph above indicates, he felt that the extent to which he believed in student-centred EFL learning rose from about a ‘4’ in 2003 to a ‘7’ in 2007.

However, despite his beliefs gradually becoming more student-centred, Antonio also expressed that his time at the School of Languages was somewhat frustrating. One of the main problems he identified was a lack of consistency in the School’s teaching methods:

*“They told me to read about [approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching], but the School was a mess. [...] I learnt a lot from two or three teachers, who actually practised what they preached, [but] the teacher who was supposed to be teaching “teaching” [...] was very bad. He made us learn all the history of English Language Teaching, and the different approaches, methodologies, all those things, but he didn't use any of them [in his own classes].”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:13:15 – 00:14:15

In the quotation above, Antonio highlights an issue which emerges several times throughout this study. That is to say, although courses may cover student-centred topics, they are often not modelled in a student-centred way themselves. This appears to have been frustrating for Antonio, even though he did not have a great deal of practical teaching experience at the time. In fact, in a similar way to when he was a student at SMELC, his mind would often wander towards ways in which he might be able to do things differently to his teachers:

*“I learnt how to teach differently; how to approach certain topics in an easier way than other teachers. When I was in class, I was thinking [...] “perhaps he should have done this differently”, “perhaps he should have started differently”, because so many people didn't understand.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:02:45 – 00:03:11

As mentioned earlier, Antonio was able to take part in some teaching practices towards the end of his degree. In fact, he was even given his own group to teach on Saturday mornings, where he received positive feedback from students:

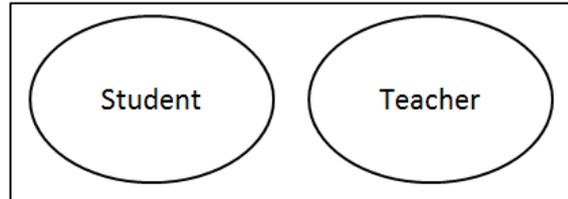
*“My students always told me that I was very good at teaching, because it was easier for them [to understand me].”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:11:24 – 00:11:29

In fact, so positive were recommendations from students and teachers alike, that Antonio was invited to work at the USM immediately after graduating.

A final consideration worth making within this section was the way Antonio perceived his role as a teacher in relation to his students. Fig. 5.2.1.1(i) below shows how he chose to illustrate this teacher-student relationship on his timeline:

*Fig. 5.2.1.1(ii). Antonio's concept map showing his perceived relationships with students between 2003 and 2007 (extract from timeline)*



The concept map above indicates that, although the teacher is not necessarily placed above the student, both entities are separate, with little or no interaction between them. This was the way Antonio described his relationships with students during the interviews:

*“Before, I was their teacher. [...] I've always been an open-minded teacher, [...] I always tried to be their friend; they were able to share their fears and things like that, but it was different.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:27:55 – 00:28:17

*“I felt like I had a barrier in front of me. [...] I didn't feel good about doing anything else, like having a relationship. [...] I couldn't feel that way. I felt this gap.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:21:30 – 00:22:20

In the second interview, Antonio also alluded to the stereotypical teacher-centred metaphor of students being “vessels to be filled with knowledge”:

*“Now, [looking back,] I see myself [...] [as] only a transmitter of knowledge, [...] like vessels to be filled with knowledge.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:22:31 – 00:23:04

A final way in which Antonio described his role during this period was as a “guru”, whose sole purpose was to help solve his students' problems:

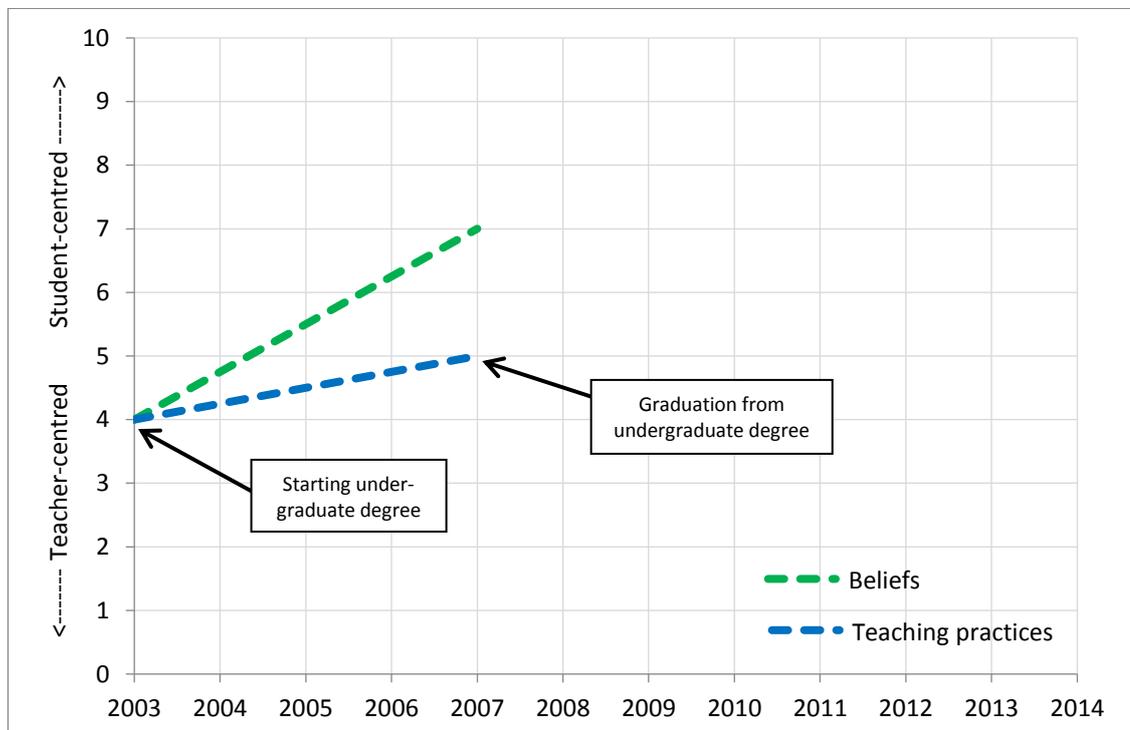
*“Back then I thought that I could be like their "guru", like I knew that I was a really good teacher, and I had the responsibility of helping them learn. I thought I was that kind of teacher, like a superteacher, and that I was going to help them.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:17:05 – 00:17:28

### 5.2.1.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs

Although Antonio was not formally employed as an English teacher at the USM until 2007, he was involved in some teaching experiences before then. As is shown in the graph below, between 2003 and 2007, he felt that the extent to which his teaching was student-centred would have varied between a ‘4’ and a ‘5’. This suggests that while he was doing some things that he would now consider student-centred, he was also working in a somewhat teacher-centred way:

*Fig. 5.2.1.2(i). Graph summarising Antonio’s perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 2003 and 2007*



On the graph above, a slight gap is apparent between Antonio’s beliefs and his practices. He felt that one of the reasons for this may have been the lack of consistency in the way he was taught on his university degree. As mentioned in the previous sub-section,

although he did learn about some aspects of the *theory* of more student-centred approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching, the course itself was generally not taught in a student-centred way. Given that he rarely “lived” student-centred learning on his degree, it is understandable that he might have found it difficult to actually implement student-centred approaches in his practice. Moreover, as he had received generally positive feedback from his early experiences teaching in a more teacher-centred way (during his teaching practices), there appears to have been little incentive for him to diverge from these approaches.

The relationships between Antonio’s beliefs and his practices become more meaningful in the next chronological period, when he started working with many different groups of students at the USM.

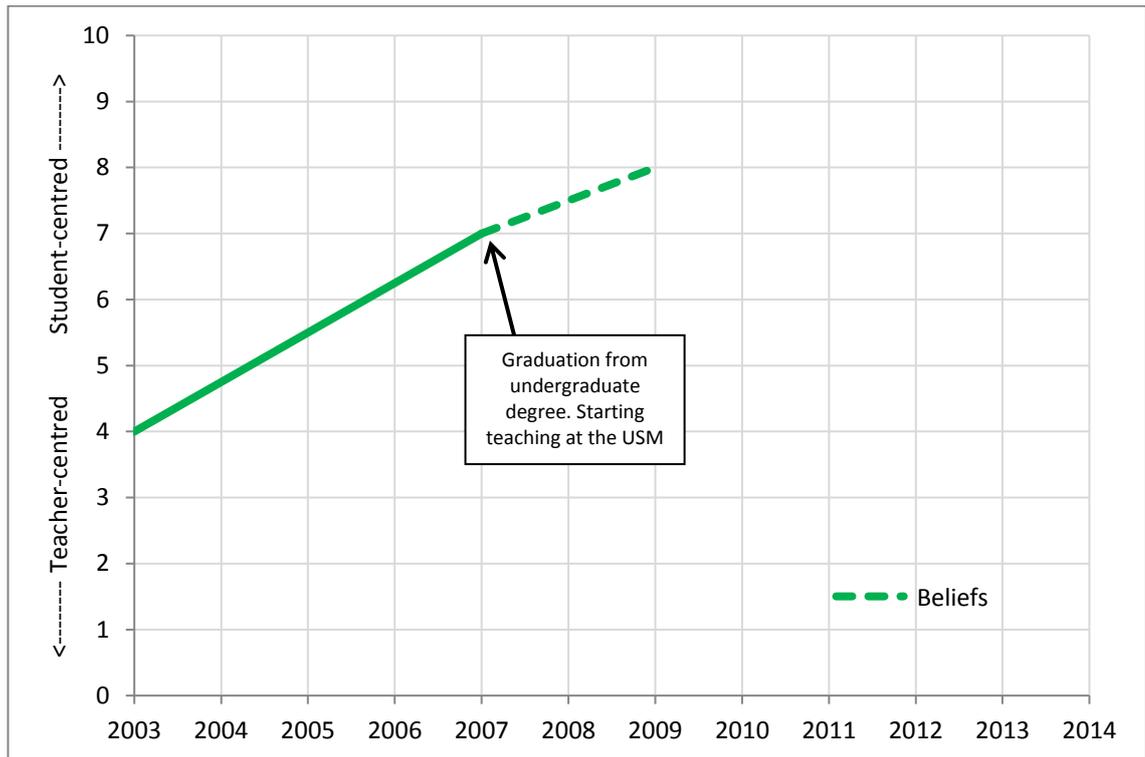
#### *5.2.2. Period 2: 2007-2009: First two years teaching at the USM*

This section analyses Antonio’s first two years working at the USM. By the end of this period, various experiences had steered him towards the realisation that the teacher-centred approaches that he had been using were not wholly effective and that he would have to make changes to his practices.

##### *5.2.2.1. Evolution of beliefs*

The graph below indicates that Antonio felt that his beliefs continued to become slightly more student-centred during Period 2, rising from a ‘7’ in 2007 to an ‘8’ in 2009:

Fig. 5.2.2.1(i). Graph summarising Antonio's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 2003 and 2009



This gradual movement towards believing in more student-centred approaches may be linked to a number of experiences in Antonio's first two years teaching at the USM. In 2007, Antonio was called in for an introductory meeting with the coordinators of the University English Department, who (at the time) were in charge of hiring and providing training for the USM's English teachers. During this meeting, he was told that he would be expected to teach English in a student-centred way:

*"[In] the introductory meeting [...] I asked [the coordinator] how the University works and she told me, she said it herself, "we're supposed to be working Communicative Language Teaching"."*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:12:45 – 00:13:08

*"The approach that was used at the University, and I'm quoting, was "Communicative Language Teaching", and also with a mixture of student-centredness, that we shouldn't be using grammar or things like that."*

Antonio, Interview 1a, 00:01:00 – 00:01:17

However, this initial briefing did not seem to have a particularly long-term impact on Antonio, given that the individual Schools that he was assigned to had different ideas about what approaches would be needed:

*“I had to communicate with the coordinators of each School, and I asked them what the teaching was like in those Schools, and they just told me “just follow this book, and just do this and that”; it was mainly teaching grammar.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:15:44 – 00:16:01

Another aspect worth mentioning during this period was Antonio’s experience as a tutor. Alongside his regular teaching responsibilities, Antonio was asked to work several hours of one-to-one tutoring at the USM’s Independent Learning Centre. In a similar way to his early experiences with classmates at SMELC and throughout his teaching practices, he realised that he was very good at explaining the grammatical aspects of English:

*“I was also a tutor at the Independent Learning Centre, and all the students told me that I was very good at teaching grammar; that it was easier for them to learn with me.”*

Antonio, Interview 1a, 00:02:43 – 00:02:53

*“I realised that I was able to help students with their problems. They were always like, “I need a lot of help because tomorrow I have the most awful exam that I have to take with this teacher, and it's this and this and these topics”, and we would spend like three or four hours, but they managed to learn, [...] and they would recommend me to other students. I was very, very famous at that time [...] I realised that I was able to do miracles.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:23:40 – 00:24:27

It is likely that working in Schools which encouraged largely teacher-centred approaches, combined with the highly teacher-centred environment of “helping students with their problems” as a tutor, would have reinforced Antonio’s beliefs in more teacher-centred approaches to EFL learning. However, over time, he felt that some of these experiences also pushed him towards believing in more student-centred approaches. One example of this was that, through the tutoring, he started to see the value in a more vocabulary-based approach:

*“One teacher here asked me about the conflict that most teachers face: it is either grammar or vocabulary. So I started wondering, “I’ve always tried grammar, what if I try vocabulary?” And why did I ask myself that? Because of these tutoring sessions.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:18:28 – 00:18:58

*“In the tutoring sessions, I realised that the students were not stupid; they were really, really bright; they even managed to learn the whole set of rules, very complicated grammatical rules; they learnt them, mastered them. But the problem was what to put in the slots; in each little space; they didn’t know vocabulary.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:19:34 – 00:20:10

Antonio felt that these experiences as a tutor began to gradually pull him away from traditional teacher-centred approaches and more towards something different. As he moved into his second year of teaching at the USM, he started to become particularly sceptical of solely grammar-based approaches, as he encountered many students who were able to recite all of the grammatical rules but were unable to apply them in communicative situations:

*“It was around my second year as a teacher when I started to see that grammar probably wasn’t the best option, because the students couldn’t communicate.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:05:45 – 00:05:56

*“I started to discover that they weren’t progressing; they weren’t learning; they were like stuck on the same tenses all the time. [...] I was concerned about their progress; I couldn’t see it.”*

Antonio, Interview 1a, 00:02:54 – 00:03:20

Nicky: *“What do you think was the most significant thing that happened to you, to make you change your mind? [...]”*

Antonio: *“The lack of results.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:22:33 – 00:22:40

Antonio considered that the point in which he became totally convinced that he would have to change his practices was when he designed an exam to assess the language levels of high school students in a neighbouring state:

*“We created an exam, [...] and they used my group [as a pilot], and when I was grading the test, I had a breakthrough. I discovered that grammar wasn't the best option.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:06:22 – 00:06:57

*“The test was on reading, listening, writing, and a little bit of grammar. In grammar they did more or less ok, but on the rest, awful. That's why I was like "no, we have to change this".”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:07:15 – 00:07:27

This period could be defined as a sort of “mini-crisis” for Antonio:

*“I was really worried here [...] I had to get rid of grammar [...] I was lost, I didn't know what to do.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:07:30 – 00:07:51

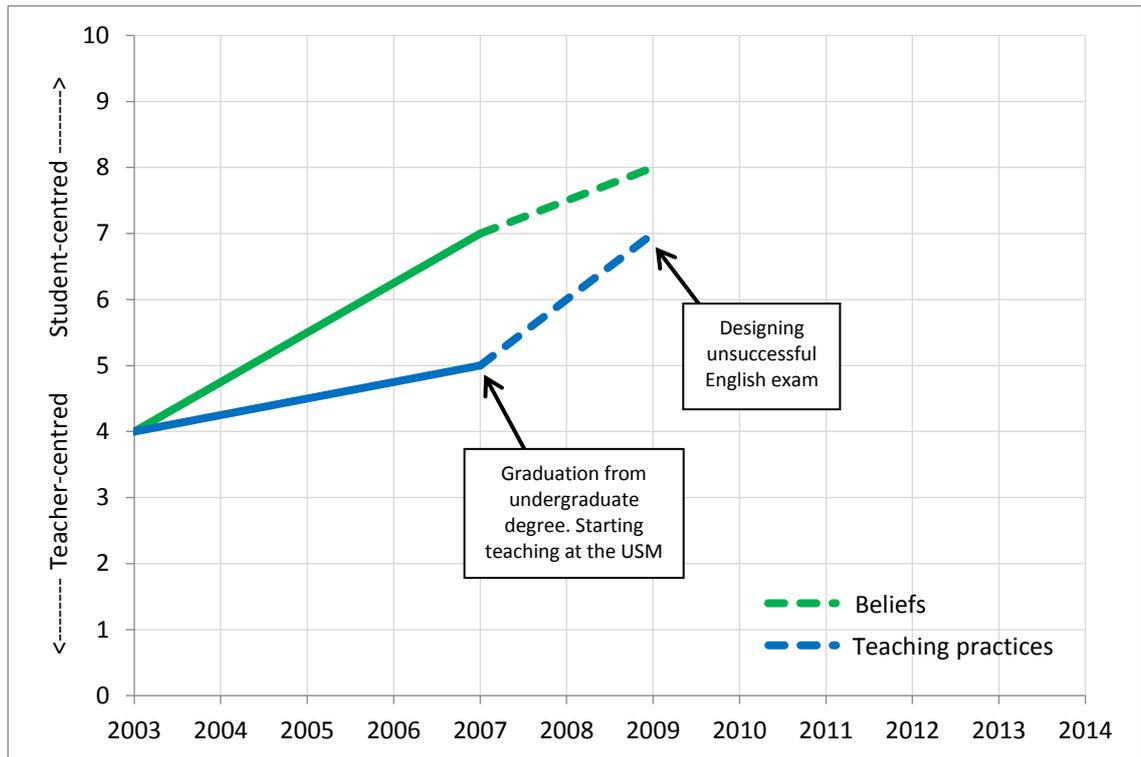
*“Up to this point, I always thought that I had the answers [...] I was really, really, really sure about what I was doing; I was confident. I'm always like that, but here, I was really wrong; now I realise that I was wrong.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:16:45 – 00:17:08

#### 5.2.2.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs

The previous sub-section identified that Antonio felt his beliefs became gradually more student-centred in the period between 2007 and 2009. As the graph below indicates, he perceived that these belief changes were accompanied by some changes to his teaching practices. Indeed, he felt that the extent to which his practices were student-centred increased from about a ‘5’ in 2007 to a ‘7’ in 2009:

Fig. 5.2.2.2(i). Graph summarising Antonio's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 2003 and 2009



The graph above reflects the tendency for Antonio to slowly starting to introduce more student-centred teaching approaches, both within his classes and his tutoring sessions:

*"I kept on reflecting on what to do, and then I did some experiments."*

Antonio, Interview 1a, 00:03:34 – 00:03:41

*"It was difficult; it was different. So "you do this, and this", "oh yes, I'm going to try that myself", and "oh, yeah, it works!" And at the beginning I was doubtful, and then I was convinced, and finally I started to teach in this way."*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:25:13 – 00:25:32

Throughout this period, Antonio felt that his teaching practices would have been slightly more teacher-centred than his beliefs. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons he gave for this was that the individual Schools in which he was working expected him to teach in a largely teacher-centred way, using their approved grammar-based textbooks. Furthermore, when he did try to implement more student-centred approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching, he found it very difficult to do so with such a variety of language levels in the same group:

*“It was really difficult to do Communicative Language Teaching. I tried [...] but it was really difficult because of the students' levels.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:16:15 – 00:16:26

A number of other obstacles which may have prevented Antonio from implementing more student-centred approaches emerge later on in his educational life history. These are discussed in the next section.

### 5.2.3. *Period 3: 2009-2014: CLIL and the Master's*

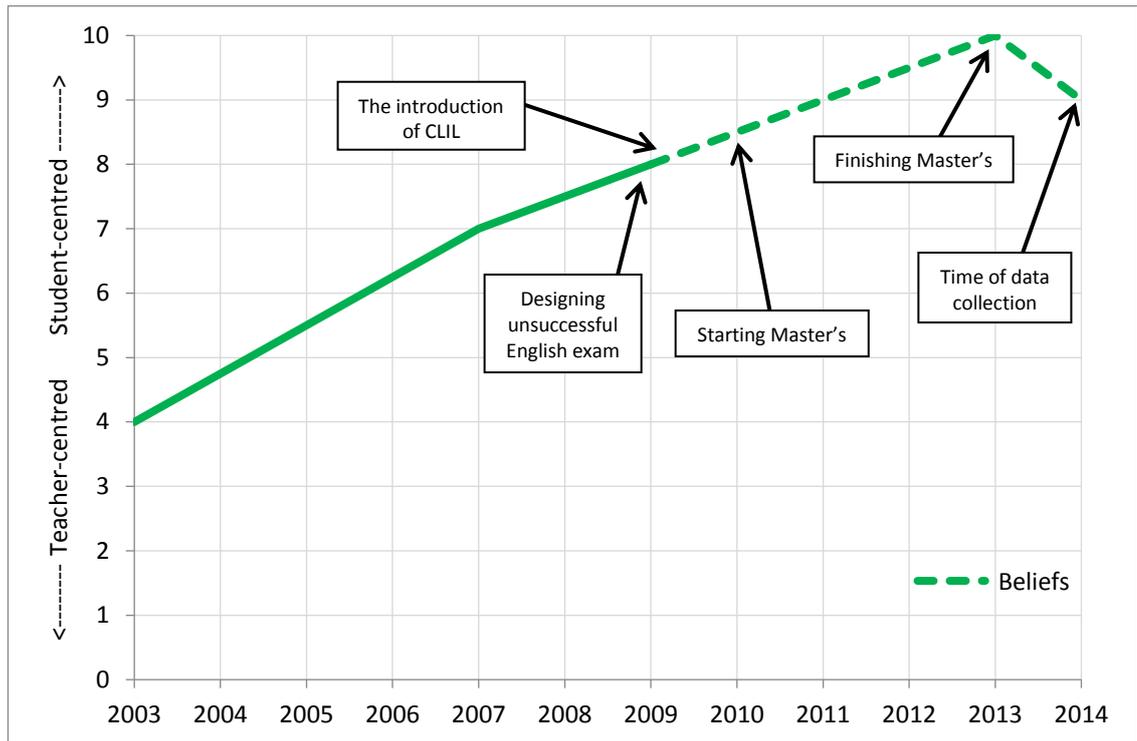
In 2009, a teaching approach called Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was introduced by the University English Department. CLIL is an approach to language learning in which teachers try to adapt the content of English classes to the content of different area disciplines. As highlighted in his definition of student-centred EFL learning (Section 5.1), Antonio felt that CLIL should be considered a “student-centred” approach, given that it adapts its classes more closely to students’ needs and encourages more meaningful, real-life uses of the language. Antonio was one of the first teachers to become involved with CLIL, and has tried to implement these strategies over the last few years.

It is also relevant to mention that, in 2010, Antonio started a part-time distance Master’s in English Language Teaching offered by a UK university. This gave him more of an opportunity to reflect upon his teaching and consider making changes to his practices.

#### 5.2.3.1. *Evolution of beliefs*

As mentioned in the previous section, by this point Antonio had become increasingly disillusioned with traditional grammar-based approaches. It therefore appears that CLIL arrived at just the right time for him. Indeed, although the CLIL course did not necessarily revolutionise Antonio’s beliefs about how English should be taught, he felt that it encouraged him to move further away from the teacher-centred end of the spectrum and closer towards more student-centred beliefs. This is illustrated in the graph below, which shows that the extent to which he felt he believed in student-centred EFL learning rose steadily from an ‘8’ in 2009 right up to a ‘10’ in 2013:

Fig. 5.2.3.1(i). Graph summarising Antonio's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 2003 and 2014



It must be recognised that this change in Antonio's beliefs did not happen overnight, especially given that CLIL represented a considerable change to what he and his fellow teachers had been doing:

*"It was really difficult, because it demanded a lot from the teachers; a lot of planning."*

Antonio, Interview 1a, 00:03:51 – 00:03:58

*"You have to change your cassette. You have to take out everything you know about teaching and you have to discover your own way of doing it."*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:17:42 – 00:17:53

However, a key factor which appears to have contributed towards convincing Antonio of the value of CLIL was that it seemed to improve results with his students. In addition to this, he felt that teaching CLIL has increased his students' motivation:

*“When my students did their presentations, I was like “wow! They managed to do this, to do a presentation [...] not just standing there reading line by line!””*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:01:45 – 00:02:00

*“[The students’ response has] been really positive.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:30:25 – 00:30:27

#### Δ TRIANGULATION:

##### POSITIVE STUDENT RESPONSES TOWARDS MORE STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACHES

##### Students’ opinions from focus groups:

The students I spoke to in the focus groups certainly supported Antonio’s perceptions that his students have responded positively to the introduction of more student-centred approaches. For example, one of Antonio’s key interpretations of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 5.1) was that it encourages students to participate more than teacher-centred approaches. This was confirmed by the students:

*“The way Antonio teaches is really good, because he gets us to participate.”*

Juan David (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 00:58:25 – 00:58:30

*“The classes are really dynamic and that makes the time go quicker.”*

Araceli (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 00:01:05 – 00:01:09

Another aspect of Antonio’s definition of student-centred EFL learning was to include more communicative activities:

*“It’s cool and fun that you’re in a class and you’re being taught in English but you don’t even feel like you’re being spoken to in English.”*

Arturo (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 00:03:41 – 00:03:48

Finally, the students seemed to enjoy the CLIL / ESP aspects of his teaching:

*“For example, he asked us to write a cover letter, and that really left an impression on me.”*

Marina (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 01:01:22 – 01:01:37

Antonio’s beliefs in student-centred EFL learning seem to have been further reinforced by his experiences studying his Master’s. During this time, he found that he was able to better understand some of the changes demanded by CLIL, as well as other useful topics related to EFL teaching.

By the time Antonio completed his Master’s, he was strongly in favour of CLIL. However, this was not the case for all of his EFL teaching colleagues:

*"I've seen a lot of English teachers who don't approve of CLIL. [The director of the University English Department] tried to encourage all the teachers to take the CLIL workshops, seminars, and courses, but most of them have decided not to teach CLIL. Why? Because they still believe in grammar. And they have told me, personally, "I don't believe in CLIL. It's not going to work. It's never going to work"."*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:19:40 – 00:20:16

In fact, he particularly recalled the example of one teacher:

*"I remember very clearly one of the new teachers. [...] Right after he finished [the CLIL course] [...] he was like, "oh, yeah, CLIL is very good". [...] And then when we were chatting about CLIL I asked him "what do you think about CLIL, really, honestly?" And he said "I don't believe that it's going to work. [...] I have this vision that the students have to learn by grammar. How can the students learn without grammar? [...] You have to give them the basics"."*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:20:30 – 00:21:43

Still, a lack of support from some of his English teacher colleagues has not deterred Antonio from continuing to believe in CLIL. When I asked him about his beliefs during the data collection, he was still positive about more student-centred approaches and sceptical of previous teacher-centred approaches. However, in a similar way to Rebecca, he did reflect that at the present time he did not *unconditionally* believe in CLIL, or student-centred EFL learning for that matter. As indicated in the graph above, the extent to which he felt he believed in student-centred EFL learning in 2014 was a '9':

*"I can always change my mind. I continue reading about teaching, and methodologies keep on evolving."*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:17:45 – 00:17:52

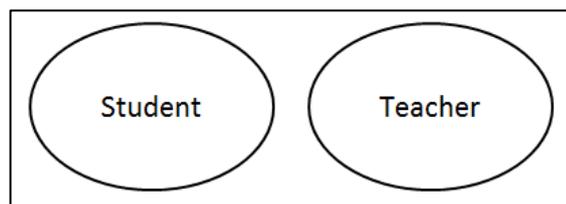
*"[CLIL is] a good approach, but [...] we have to evaluate it, just to see if it's appropriate for this context, I think."*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:08:06 – 00:08:18

The last quotation, which alludes to the challenges of actually implementing CLIL in the USM context, is especially relevant to the next sub-section, which explores some of the continuing difficulties Antonio has faced in putting student-centred beliefs into practice.

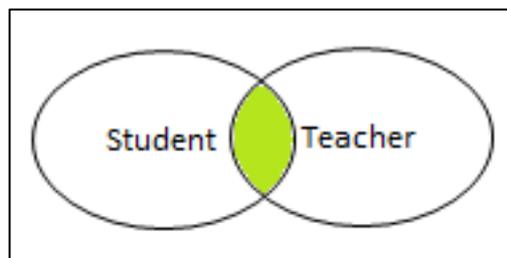
A final aspect to mention within this sub-section relates to how Antonio's beliefs about the role of the teacher evolved between 2007 and 2014. It is therefore relevant to reacquaint ourselves with the concept map for the period between 2003 and 2007:

*Fig. 5.2.3.1(ii). Antonio's concept map showing his perceived relationships with students between 2003 and 2007 (extract from timeline)*



In contrast to the diagram above, Fig. 5.2.3.1(iii) below shows the concept map Antonio produced for the period between 2007 and 2014:

*Fig. 5.2.3.1(iii). Antonio's concept map showing his perceived relationships with students between 2007 and 2014 (extract from timeline)*



A clear distinction can be observed between the two concept maps. The first shows the teacher and the student as visibly separate entities, whilst the second depicts the student-teacher relationship as interlinked. This suggests a more friendly relationship in which there is more interaction between teacher and students. During the interviews, Antonio mentioned the importance of the CLIL course in contributing towards such a change:

*“During these last three years, the students are now like my friends. There’s a big difference, because they come to me and they talk to me about this and that, and they see me as a friend, or as someone they can trust.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:26:42 – 00:27:03

*“[From CLIL onwards, I’ve been] closer to the students, [...] and the students realised. They’ve told me “you’re the best teacher”, but I don’t consider myself to be better; maybe they meant that I was more available than other teachers; more willing to help.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:23:22 – 00:24:12

Antonio considered that this change of role has generally been welcomed with open arms by the students:

*“They like that. You see the difference right away; you’re not like the other teachers who are always telling them off, complaining, and who don’t like to teach. I’m their friend, they have told me that, “you’re like our friend because you do this, you do that; you’re like more open-minded”.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:29:53 – 00:30:14

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
A MORE POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

My interpretations from classroom observations:

From the classes I observed, I would have to agree with Antonio's perceptions of a friendlier teacher-student relationship. There was a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in his classes, there were lots of examples of students and teacher laughing together, and the students seemed generally comfortable in the classroom. There did not seem to be a great deal of formality or "distance" between Antonio and his students.

Students' opinions from focus groups:

During the focus groups, the students also highlighted a positive relationship between themselves and Antonio:

*"Antonio makes you feel comfortable. [...] The atmosphere that he creates in the class makes you want to participate."*

Juan David (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 01:13:17 – 01:13:27

*"Other teachers [...] are just teachers and that's it, but Antonio is different; he's also a "guide" out of the classroom. [...] I really like that about him."*

Marina (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 01:25:01 – 01:25:27

*"Not once this semester have I felt that he's been like "I'm the teacher and I'm far away from you"; he's been interacting with us."*

Ana María (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 00:52:16 – 00:52:23

*"He doesn't make you feel like he's the boss, but just another member of the group."*

Carla (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 00:52:39 – 00:52:43

*"Yes, I think I would [consider him a friend], if I saw him outside of the University."*

Juan David (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 01:26:42 – 01:26:48

Being a teacher who is "always there to help his students" might be interpreted as a fairly typical *teacher-centred* characteristic. However, Antonio stressed on a number of occasions during the interviews that the responsibility for learning has begun to shift from the teacher to the students:

*"At first I thought that I was the one doing the miracles, but then I realised that it was the students; that I was just a motivator."*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:25:47 – 00:25:54

*“I always tell them: “you guys are responsible. I’m not a magician, to do practically everything myself; I’m just here to provide you with materials, activities, and my experience”.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:06:35 – 00:06:51

This reflects the general change in Antonio’s role from a “guru” or a “superteacher” towards more of a “guide” to help facilitate students’ (autonomous) learning. In fact, autonomous learning was one of the main aspects which he identified in his definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 5.1):

*“Now I realise that I’m not that [a “guru”; a “superteacher”], and no one is; [students] learn because they want to.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:17:27 – 00:17:34

*“That’s where I’m placing my bets, on the role of autonomous learning.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:28:37 – 00:28:42

#### Δ TRIANGULATION:

MORE STUDENT AUTONOMY; THE TEACHER AS MORE OF A “GUIDE”

##### My interpretations from classroom observations:

Antonio was clearly trying to encourage his students to work more autonomously. There were several examples of independent learning tasks. For example, in one class, Antonio sent groups off in teams to carry out a writing task which was part of a CLIL project. Another example was when he left time at the end of a class for students to finish an activity.

##### Students’ opinions from focus groups:

The students supported Antonio’s views that he was less of a traditional “provider of information” and more of a “guide”:

*“Antonio is like a guide [...] he doesn’t force you to do anything, he just guides you.”*

Lalo (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 01:12:39 – 01:12:51

*“You have the freedom to decide if you want to speak in English or not; if you do then you get the satisfaction and if not, well that’s your choice.”*

Arturo (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 00:04:46 – 00:04:56

*“I don’t think a student who is getting low grades can blame Antonio [...] He gives you all the tools and if you don’t learn after that, then I don’t know how you’ll learn.”*

Yolanda (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 00:59:32 – 00:59:52

A final point worth mentioning within this sub-section was another change in role that Antonio perceived as a result of being part of the CLIL project. During the interviews, he expressed that teaching “content” through CLIL has given his status as a teacher somewhat of a boost. He felt that this was especially important given the perceived “peripheral” status that tends to be granted to the USM’s EFL teachers in comparison to teachers of other subjects:

*“I felt like a “content” teacher; I felt like I was teaching something which wasn't English anymore, something in which English was the means of doing it.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:02:29 – 00:02:43

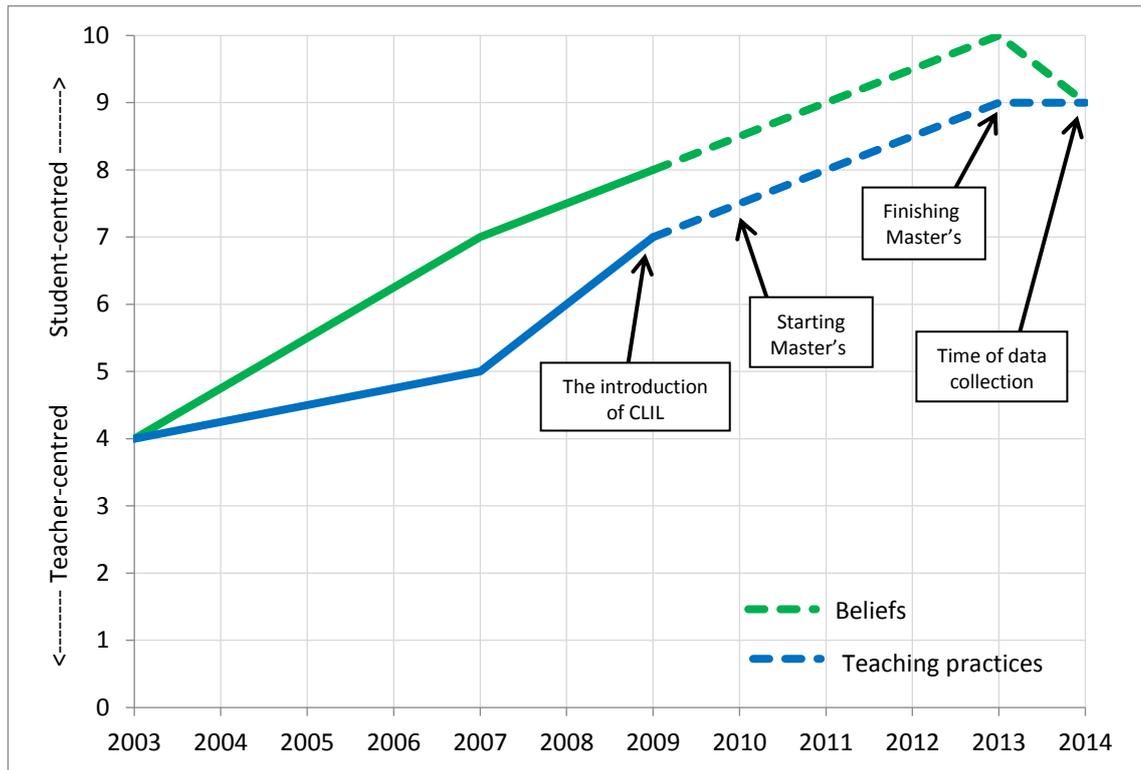
*“It was life-changing, because here English teachers have a low status: it's English teachers, then the teachers who are paid hourly, and then the “full-time” [tenured] teachers. So we were on a very low level on the pyramid. That's why I felt different.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:02:58 – 00:03:22

#### 5.2.3.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs

The graph below shows that Antonio’s perceived teaching practices continued to rise gradually from about a ‘7’ in 2009 to a ‘9’ in 2013:

Fig. 5.2.3.2(i). Graph summarising Antonio's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 2003 and 2014



This highlights the general tendency that, as he became increasingly confident working with CLIL, he gradually began implementing these new approaches in his classes:

*“I changed; I wasn't focusing on grammar anymore. I was focusing more on reading skills, for them to practise the chapters that they were supposed to read with [the “content” teacher], to avoid trying to learn the whole thing by heart or understanding the whole thing, but just to get the main ideas.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:01:14 – 00:01:33

In addition to CLIL, Antonio felt that studying his Master's degree was especially important in helping him adapt his teaching practices. In particular, he found it especially interesting to read about how he could encourage more autonomous learning strategies:

*“I did a lot of research on how I could help student-centred students; how I could help them with teaching strategies, vocabulary, learning logs, and things like that. So I just gave them strategies, and if they followed those strategies, they could learn English or any other language.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:18:11 – 00:18:33

### Δ TRIANGULATION:

#### EXAMPLES OF MORE STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES

##### My interpretations from classroom observations:

From the classes I observed, there were certainly a lot of activities consistent with Antonio’s definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 5.1). Firstly, the vast majority of activities encouraged students to participate. Secondly, many activities were communicative. For example, in one class there was a “have you ever?” game to practice using the present perfect tense. There were also several examples of activities in which students had to adapt the contents of the course to their lives. Moreover, Antonio used a number of videos which were very engaging. One example of these was a motivational video which focused on the importance of fluency and communication over accuracy. English was used most of the time, with only the occasional use of Spanish. Finally, there was a focus on real-life tasks. For example, in one class, the students had to produce CVs and cover letters in English.

##### Students’ opinions from focus groups:

In the focus groups, the students confirmed my interpretations from the classroom observations:

*“What I like about Antonio’s method is that he really encourages us to participate.”*

Juan David (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 00:49:27 – 00:49:52

*“Antonio is “stimulation” [...] he gets your brain working so you can start speaking in English.”*

Lalo (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 00:57:06 – 00:57:19

*“For example, he makes us watch videos and shows us images. I really like that.”*

Marina (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 00:50:25 – 00:50:31

*“Antonio leaves the [grammatical] rules to one side; we learn in a different way.”*

Arturo (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 00:02:27 – 00:02:38

*“I’ve never seen Antonio teaching from behind a desk or from far away; he’s always on his feet and close to us, moving from table to table.”*

Ana María (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 00:51:53 – 00:52:06

The graph in Fig. 5.2.3.2(i) above shows that Antonio’s perceived beliefs and practices were fairly close to each other throughout this period, suggesting that he was generally

able to teach in a way that was consistent with his beliefs. However, he did also mention certain obstacles to him fully putting his beliefs into practice. One of the most important of these was the difficulties of persuading students to work in a more autonomous way:

*“This kind of teaching involves having the students with an open mind for challenges. [...] [But] they always try and go for the easy way.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:03:28 – 00:05:45

The fact that Antonio has continued to employ a “stamp system” to reward his students for participating suggests how difficult it is to encourage his students to work independently (students are awarded “stamps” every time they participate in class, and the number of stamps they acquire contribute towards their final grades). In the interviews, Antonio explained that he is aware of this, but pointed out that if he were to stop offering the incentive of stamps to motivate his students, they would be more reluctant to participate:

*“[The stamps are] a must, because otherwise, you saw it yourself, they don't do it. [...] That was the reason so many people were writing, otherwise they would have been doing other things, or just chatting.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:35:32 – 00:36:59

*“On Monday they were supposed to do it on their own; I gave them the freedom to go outside the classroom and work for more than an hour and 30 minutes, for only one learning activity, and I only received like five of them. [...] I told them, after finishing, [...] “I only got five papers, and that's all that I'm going to check.” And they were like making all these excuses, and I was like “I'm going to give you a second chance, but take it seriously.” [...] And I only received six papers. 11 in total, out of 27.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:35:42 – 00:36:29

It must be recognised that students in some Schools are easier to work with than others:

*“It depends on the School. For example, [...] [in the School of Social Work] their attitude is really, really bad. [...] They don't even try, that's the problem.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:14:55 – 00:15:34

*“For example, students in [the School of] Engineering are autonomous. [...] You even ask them, “What do you think I should include in the criteria for evaluation?” [They tell me] “I think you should consider this and this” [...], and we agree on something that's fair, [...] and then we go. No one ever complains.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:15:34 – 00:16:05

*“And for example here [in the School of Tourism], even though they know that they didn't study, [...] and they have warned me that they were going to fail, they'll come tomorrow, and I'll have like the same 30 students asking me “why did I fail?”.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:16:06 – 00:16:23

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
STUDENTS AS OBSTACLES (1/2)

My interpretations from classroom observations:

From the classes I observed (and my own experiencing working with Mexican university students) I can understand Antonio's frustrations at his students not being used to working autonomously. For example, when Antonio dedicated some of his class time to independent work, most of the students left the room and started chatting outside. Moreover, despite expressing how much they liked the more “hands-on” activities, many students seemed quite reluctant to participate in them, and only seemed to respond when there was the incentive of stamps. For instance, in the School of Computing, most of the students chose to sit towards the back of the room, and many of them were slumped in their chairs. Antonio tried to motivate them by employing more practical activities (as well as offering them stamps). The problem seemed partly due to the students' attitudes and partly due to the limitations of the teaching space (a lecture theatre), which seemed to encourage teacher-centred lecturing.

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
STUDENTS AS OBSTACLES (2/2)

Students' opinions from focus groups:

Some students expressed how difficult it was for them to adapt to Antonio's more student-centred teaching approaches after having been taught in a generally teacher-centred way throughout their entire lives as learners. For example, Juan David from the School of Computing expressed the following:

*"You come from teachers who don't make you talk very much, who just make you write, so when you do start trying to talk, it's hard."*

Juan David (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 00:48:21 – 00:48:34

However, many students, including Juan David, also recognised that they can be somewhat reluctant to work autonomously:

*"I wouldn't say I was the best student; I can be lazy sometimes."*

Juan David (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 01:16:17 – 01:16:22

*"I'm not really one for working independently either."*

Yolanda (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 01:15:43 – 01:15:46

In fact, some students suggested that they would like Antonio to be stricter when it came to setting homework tasks, as opposed to leaving them alone to carry them out:

*"I think that perhaps an obstacle for me and the way I work is that we aren't forced to do the homework. [...] I consider myself a very lazy person, and if I'm not forced to do something, I don't do it."*

Arturo (Student at the School of Tourism), Focus Group 5, 01:12:59 – 01:13:15

Moreover, it seems even more difficult to motivate students to work in a more student-centred way when authority figures such as the Heads of School do not go out of their way to support the English teacher. This is illustrated by the example below:

*“Last semester, I had the most difficult group. [...] The students were really lazy, and they had the support of the Head Teacher, and they felt powerful. [...] I tried bringing games, I tried everything. [...] But you see the difference; they didn't learn anything because they didn't want to. [...] I never give a grade for free; I never pass the students even if the Head Teacher asks me to, which was the case. [...] I knew my reputation was on the line because it was half the class, it was like "Antonio, half of the class is not passing, it might be the teacher". But I was like "no, they don't study, they don't deserve it, they won't get it".”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:30:31 – 00:32:01

Not having support at times from certain authority figures leads us to the next key obstacle: the “Administration”.

*“I always thought the main obstacle [...] for doing things differently was the University. Well, not the University, the "Administration". I could have written the "Ministry of Education", because it's the same thing there [...] The Ministry of Education, the Directorate of Higher Education, you can call it whatever you want, but it's the "Administration".”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:08:23 – 00:08:48

Antonio especially expressed his frustration at certain interventions made by the USM’s central authorities which he saw as a constraint to his teaching:

*“They gave us training on different perspectives, like for example e-learning, distance learning, the new trend "competences"; they are changing and changing, but things are still the same; they never really change, because of this. This is the main problem. They always want exams: "you have to give an exam, because that's proof, for us, that you're doing things!" [...] "you have to come here to class", "you never have to be absent", "give them homework". It's always the same. [...] So nothing changes really, because of them. For me, that's the biggest problem.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:09:04 – 00:10:03

Antonio also pointed out that students are not always divided into levels, commenting that more student-centred approaches such as CLIL are more difficult with students at basic levels:

*“They need a certain level of English, so that they can defend themselves. [...] I have the advanced students, I have no problem with them, but I understand the other group, the pre-intermediate students, have a lot of problems.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:03:37 – 00:04:49

Δ TRIANGULATION:

STUDENTS NOT DIVIDED INTO LANGUAGE LEVELS

My interpretations from classroom observations:

Again, I would have to agree with Antonio’s perceptions after having observed three of his groups. There were a wide range of different language levels in each group. Some had barely any English at all, while others were fairly advanced. This meant that some activities were too hard for the beginners but too easy for the advanced students.

Students’ opinions from focus groups:

The students expressed similar frustrations about the variety of different language levels being placed in the same group:

*“We were saying that there are lots of different levels in the group. [...] Sometimes [the lower level students] forget the basics.”*

Lalo (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 00:42:31 – 00:42:42

*“I think that another obstacle could be that we are put into groups with people who know more. [...] Those who don’t know fall behind and it’s really boring for those who do know [...] I think it’s important to divide students into levels so that it can be more personalised.”*

Yolanda (Student at the School of Computing), Focus Group 4, 01:05:28 – 01:16:24

Moreover, when teaching CLIL, Antonio mentioned that English teachers are often not able to reduce the difficulty of an activity to a more appropriate level, as they must follow the indications of the “content teachers”:

*“Sometimes I don’t agree with a task, but [we have to follow] what the content teacher says, more or less.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:04:00 – 00:04:08

*“It is really difficult because at times, like for example today, I wanted to do something different, but I couldn’t, because the students have this assignment for the portfolio.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:34:52 – 00:35:04

In fact, in a similar way to Rebecca, Antonio suggested that he is in a better position to teach in a student-centred way when there is as little intervention as possible from outside sources:

*“When I’m on my own, like if I design my own program and all that, like for example here in [the School of] Computing [...], it’s the easiest thing in the world, because I already know my stuff, I already know my materials, I know what works.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:34:02 – 00:34:18

*“When I’m on my own, I’m good; I feel good. When I depend on other teachers like this and CLIL, it’s difficult, because you’re not on your own; you have to agree as a group of teachers working together, which can be difficult at times.”*

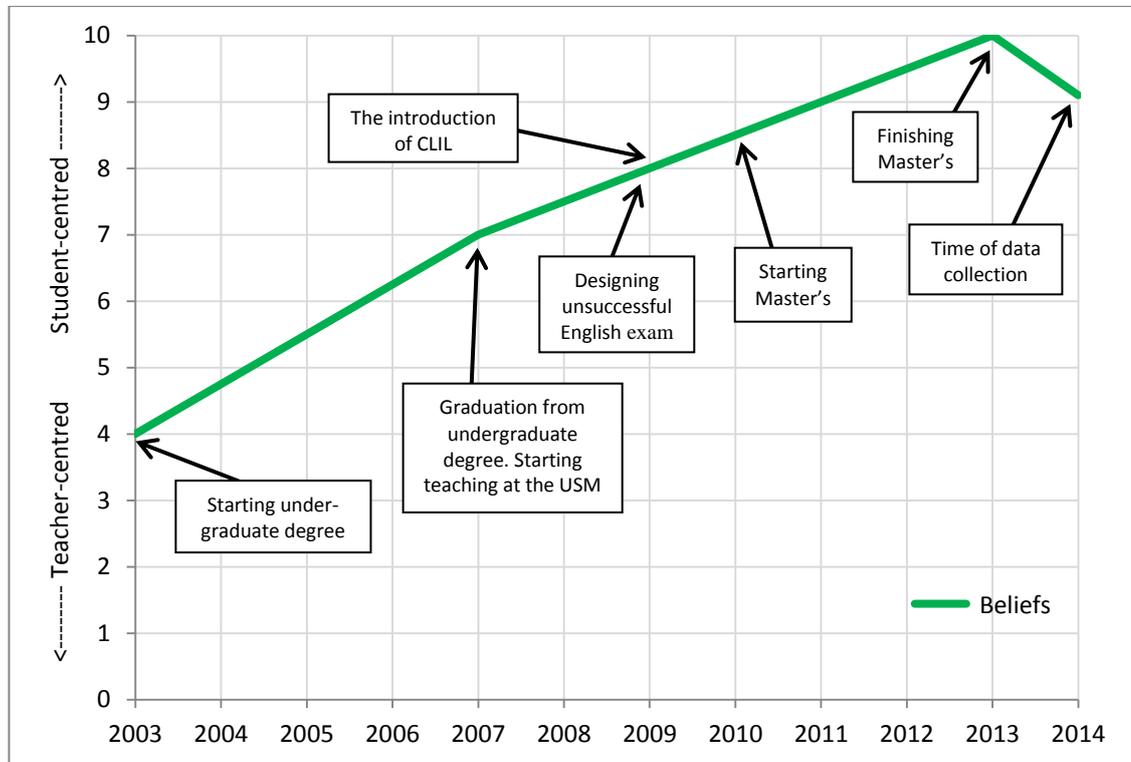
Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:39:38 – 00:39:59

Given the obstacles that Antonio mentions, it seems that the gap between his perceived beliefs and teaching practices could have been interpreted as being somewhat wider than that which is shown on the graph in Fig. 5.2.3.2(i) above. However, having observed Antonio’s classes for a number of weeks, it is difficult to disagree with his perception that the vast majority of his practices are “student-centred”.

### 5.3. Summary

#### 5.3.1. Summary of the evolution of Antonio's beliefs

Fig. 5.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Antonio's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of his educational life history



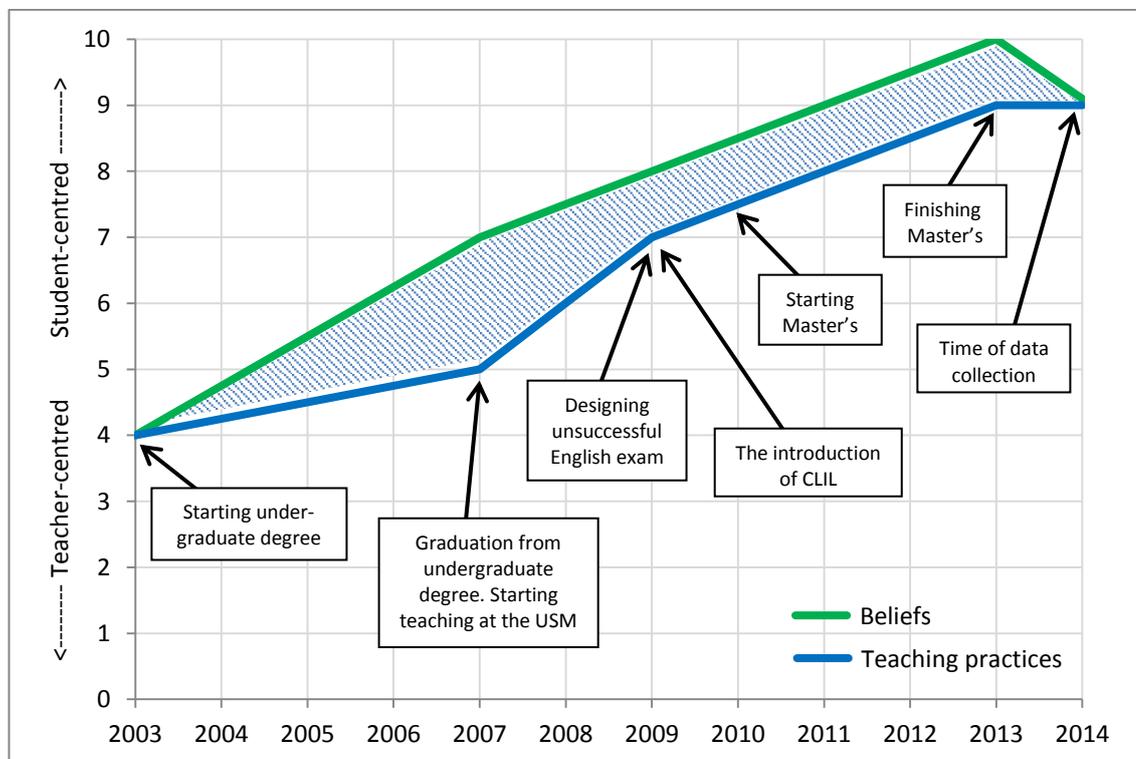
The graph above summarises the evolution of Antonio's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning between 2003 and 2014. In general, the graph shows a gradual movement from marginally more teacher-centred beliefs towards much more student-centred ones. Having received a generally teacher-centred education which included studying at a fairly traditional private language school, Antonio felt that the extent to which his beliefs were student-centred would have been about a '4' at the start his undergraduate degree in 2003. Throughout the four years of the degree, this score rose to a '7', although Antonio still felt that he was somewhat in favour of grammatical approaches at this time. After starting teaching at the USM, he felt there was a further movement towards believing in student-centred EFL learning, mainly due to an increasing disillusionment with the perceived lack of results when using predominately teacher-centred approaches.

In 2009, Antonio began participating in the CLIL project, which encouraged him to do a lot of things differently. Given his lack of faith in existing approaches, he welcomed these changes with open arms. Over time, as he experienced positive results implementing

CLIL, and became increasingly convinced by these new approaches. In 2013, he felt that the extent to which he believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been a '10'. Recently, in 2014, he considered that this rating would have reduced to a '9', as he has experienced some issues implementing student-centred EFL learning and wishes to maintain an open mind. However, on the whole, he remains largely in favour of student-centred approaches.

### 5.3.2. *Summary of Antonio's teaching practices in relation to his beliefs*

Fig. 5.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Antonio's beliefs in relation to his teaching practices over the course of his educational life history



The graph above summarises the relationships between Antonio's beliefs and his teaching practices between 2003 and 2014. The graph shows a certain degree of similarity between his beliefs and teaching practices, as they both become gradually more student-centred over time. This reflects the fact that, as he started to believe in more student-centred approaches, he began experimenting and implementing these approaches in his classroom. By the time of the data collection, he felt that the extent to which his practices were student-centred would have been about a '9'.

However, the student-centredness of Antonio's perceived teaching practices has always been slightly lower than his beliefs, indicating that he has rarely been able to *fully* put his beliefs into practice. This appears to have been due to the various obstacles which he has encountered while working at the USM. For example, in 2007, although he was encouraged to teach in a communicative way by the director of the University English Department, he was not able to actually do this in practice because individual Heads of Schools encouraged him to teach grammar using a grammar-based textbook. He also encountered several other obstacles further down the line, such as students not being used to the new approaches, a wide variety of different language levels in the same group, and having to set grammar-based exams in some Schools.

## **CHAPTER 6: THE EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORY OF ISABELLA**

This chapter is the third of the five Data Analysis chapters. It focuses on the educational life history of the third participant, Isabella.

### **6.1. Isabella's interpretation of student-centred EFL learning**

The aspects of student-centred EFL learning which Isabella identified as most important in terms of her individual practices were as follows:

- Flexibility in teaching; being open to students' thoughts and suggestions; adapting classes to meet students' needs;
- An increase in student talk time, and a decrease in teacher talk time;
- A change in the role of the teacher towards more of a "guide" or "facilitator";
- A movement away from English for General Purposes towards English for Specific Purposes.

(Adapted from my field notes taken during Interview 3 with Isabella)

Therefore, as with previous participants, it will be important to bear these ideas in mind whenever we refer to student-centred (EFL) learning in this chapter.

### **6.2. Key periods in Isabella's educational life history**

The key chronological periods which emerged from Isabella's educational life history were as follows:

- *Period 1*: 1994-1999: Studying at the USM and first year of teaching
- *Period 2*: 1999-2008: Living and working in the USA
- *Period 3*: 2008-2014: Returning to Mexico to work at the USM

These periods are examined separately in the following three sections.

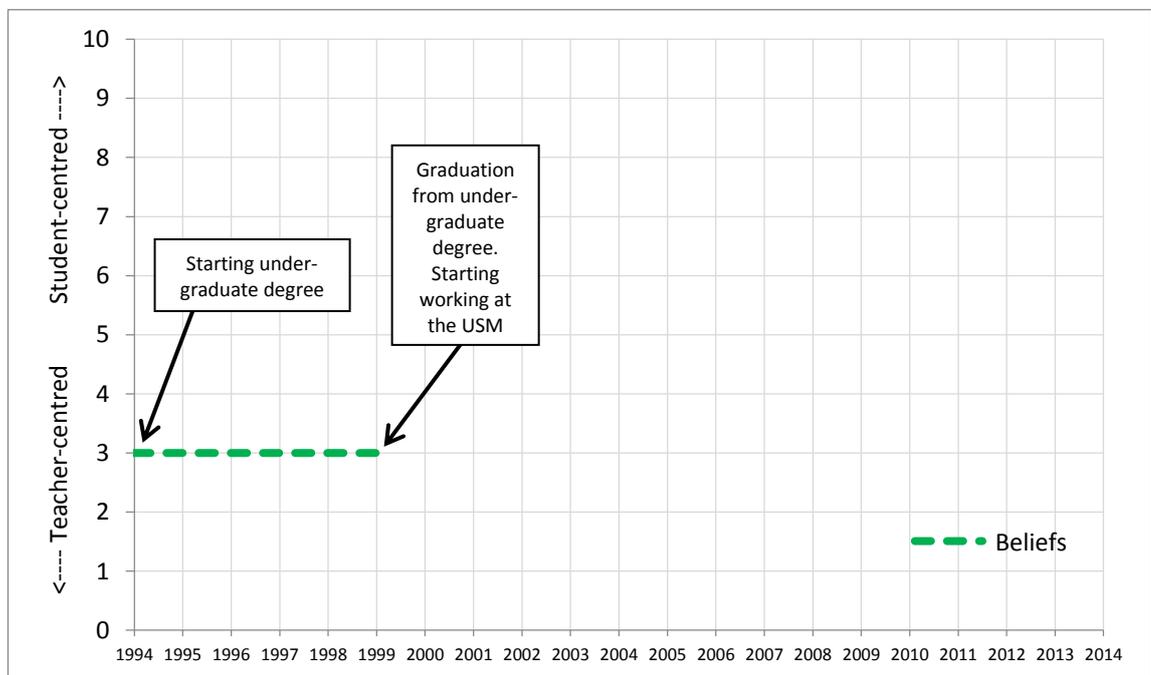
### 6.2.1. *Period 1: 1994-1999: Studying at the USM and first year of teaching*

The first main period of Isabella's educational life history was between 1994 and 1999, which included her time studying at the USM and her first year of teaching. Like Rebecca and Antonio, Isabella studied her undergraduate degree at the USM's School of Languages, and was hired as an English teacher at the University immediately after graduating.

#### 6.2.1.1. *Evolution of beliefs*

Isabella expressed that her early beliefs about teaching English were predominately teacher-centred. This is shown in the graph below, which indicates that the extent to which she felt that her beliefs were student-centred would have been about a '3' between 1994 and 1999:

Fig. 6.2.1.1(i). Graph summarising Isabella's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1994 and 1999



As was the case with Rebecca and Antonio, this early tendency to believe in more teacher-centred approaches appears to have been linked to the generally teacher-centred education which Isabella had received before starting her undergraduate degree in 1994. Moreover, as the straight line in the graph above shows, Isabella felt that these teacher-centred beliefs

continued throughout the course of her undergraduate degree. Indeed, although her degree at the USM's School of Languages did focus on teaching (unlike Rebecca's experiences), she felt that the course was particular teacher-centred:

*"I became an English teacher at the University of San Martín with the same traditional method: "read after me and copy from the book"."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:04:56 – 00:05:05

*"We had many classes where they taught us to teach the subject, the verb, the complement."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:27:08 – 00:27:15

*"The teacher was always talking, or dictating, and the students were just listening; the students didn't have any opportunities to ask questions."*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:00:49 – 00:00:59

Having received a generally teacher-centred education right up to the end of her undergraduate degree, it is understandable that Isabella's early beliefs as a teacher would have been largely teacher-centred:

*"My beliefs when I started working as a teacher were teacher-centred: the students would listen, and I would talk. I would talk for, say, 80% of the time, and the students would produce for 20%; it was only focused on the teacher."*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:00:20 – 00:00:43

Unlike Rebecca and Antonio, Isabella did not provide a "concept map" of how she viewed her role as a teacher. However, we did discuss how she interpreted her role during the interviews, and like Rebecca and Antonio, she felt that her role as a teacher was generally teacher-centred. Indeed, although the teacher-student relationship appears to have been friendly during this period, she felt that she was very much a "provider of knowledge", with her main responsibility being to provide students with the answers:

*"I would solve all their problems; try to give them all the solutions."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:38:28 – 00:38:35

*“I thought I was a perfect teacher because I was talking the whole time: “I’m great, I can teach and teach because I know the grammar off by heart”. I thought that was what it was all about, for me to show how much I knew, like an encyclopaedia: “you ask me and I answer”.”*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:09:34 – 00:09:54

#### 6.2.1.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs

Isabella felt that her early teaching practices between 1994 and 1999 were also generally teacher-centred. Again, this is understandable, given that she had not really been exposed to anything different up to that point:

*“I was teaching in a teacher-centred way; I didn’t know otherwise.”*

Isabella, Extract from timeline

*“That was the only way to teach, you know?”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:26:50 – 00:26:57

Isabella felt that these predominately teacher-centred practices continued throughout her time studying at the USM, as well as during her first year of teaching:

*“In my first year [of teaching at the USM] I was teaching them grammar and verbs and pronunciation, but with a textbook; we followed the textbook by heart. We did a little bit of content, but it wasn’t very student-centred; it was more teacher-centred.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:09:21 – 00:09:48

*“There was too much structure for the students, and not very much freedom. They had to memorise, and write things down ten times whenever they made a mistake.”*

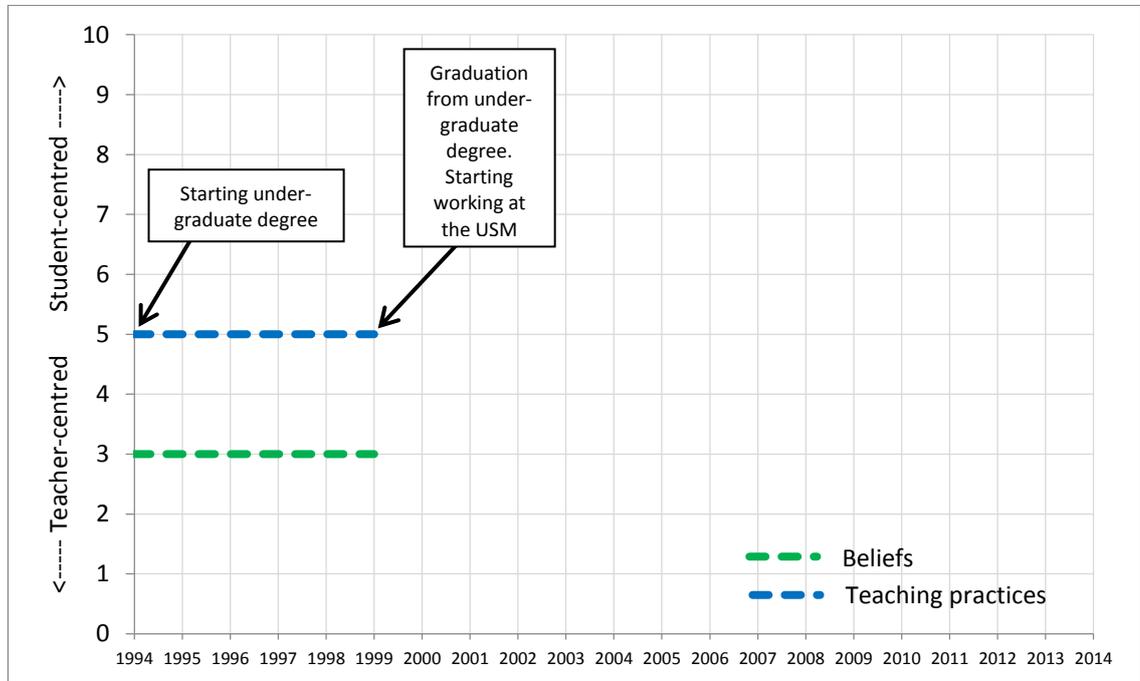
Isabella, Interview 1, 00:09:54 – 00:10:10

*“I was talking too much, and the students were producing very little.”*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:12:45 – 00:12:50

The score which Isabella chose to rate the student-centredness of her teaching practices during this period was a ‘5’. This is shown in the graph below:

*Fig. 6.2.1.2(i). Graph summarising Isabella’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1994 and 1999*



The graph above is interesting, because it shows an example of perceived teaching practices actually being *more* student-centred than beliefs. Isabella justified this decision by explaining that, in retrospect, she felt that her practices were somewhat “student-centred”, but without being consciously aware of this at the time. Although these graphs should not be treated as “hard facts”, these findings nevertheless suggest that unconscious teaching practices may occasionally “override” teachers’ stated beliefs. I address this phenomenon again in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

### 6.2.2. Period 2: 1999-2008: Living and working in the USA

In 1999, Isabella was awarded a place on the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program, an international exchange program which places foreign language teachers in US schools. She therefore moved to the United States, and began working as a Teaching Assistant at a Spanish immersion elementary school. It was around this time that she met her husband. At the end of her one-year Fulbright placement, Isabella and her husband made the decision to continue living in the United States. Therefore, in her

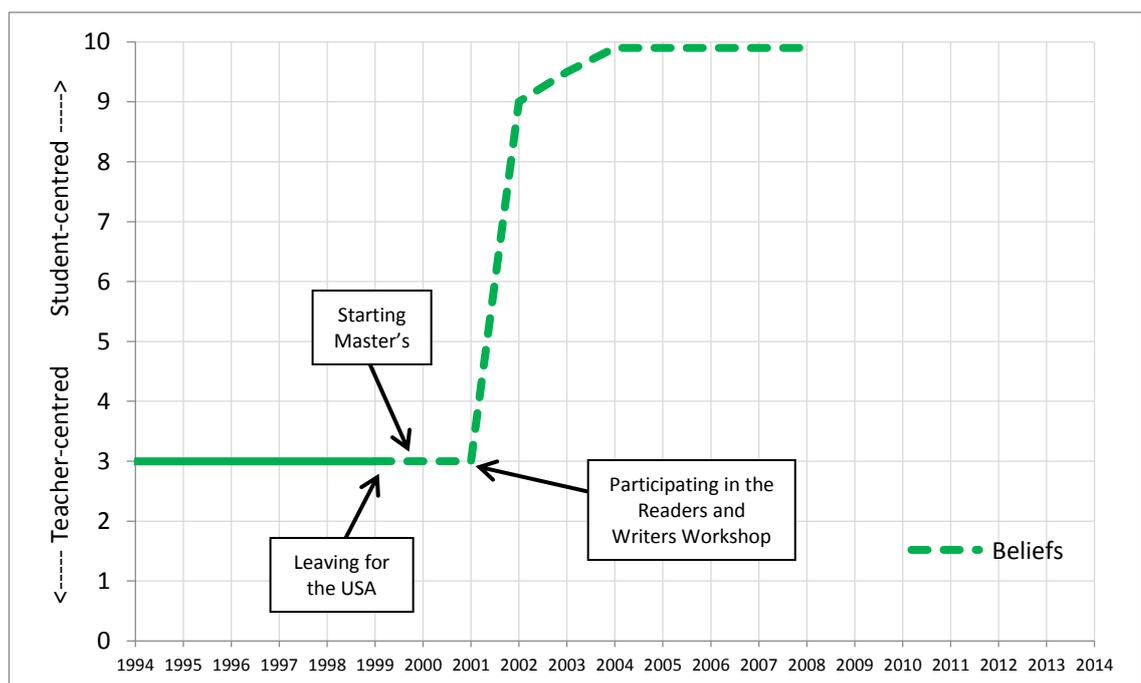
second year, Isabella started working part-time as a reading teacher and a librarian in the same school.

However, these positions were only temporary, and Isabella knew that if she was going to be able to work full-time as a teacher in the United States, she would have to study a postgraduate degree. With this in mind, she enrolled on a part-time Master's in Education at a local university. As she was in the process of completing her Master's, she was allowed to return to work as a full-time teacher. It was at this point that one of the most important experiences of her educational life history occurred. This was the "Readers and Writers Workshop": a large-scale US government reform which encouraged teachers to shift from traditional teacher-centred approaches towards more student-centred approaches to the teaching of literacy. This reform had a great impact on Isabella's teaching throughout her next seven years working in the United States.

#### 6.2.2.1. *Evolution of beliefs*

The graph below demonstrates how Isabella felt her beliefs evolved during her time living in the United States:

Fig. 6.2.2.1(i). Graph summarising Isabella's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1994 and 2008



As the graph above shows, Isabella reported a radical change in her beliefs during her time living in the United States. However, it is interesting to note that she felt that her beliefs remained generally teacher-centred throughout her first two years living there. Looking back, she considered that the Spanish immersion school where she worked as a Teaching Assistant was fairly traditional, and largely encouraged her to continue to teach in a teacher-centred way. In addition, Isabella did not feel that her Master's had a significant impact on her beliefs. Although she recognised that she did learn some useful things on the Master's, student-centred approaches do not appear to have been a fundamental part of the course. Furthermore, Isabella highlighted that the course itself was taught in a largely teacher-centred way:

*"I don't think there was a point where I realised that they were teaching [in a student-centred way] during my Master's."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:14:01 – 00:14:09

*"My teachers were kind of old school, so I didn't exactly see [student-centred learning] during my Master's."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:14:09 – 00:14:18

However, in 2001, the real life-changing event in Isabella's educational life history occurred. This was a large-scale educational reform implemented by the US government called the "Readers and Writers Workshop". The essence of the reform was a move away from teaching students "about" the English language, towards letting them experiment for themselves and produce their own pieces of writing. These new approaches implied considerably less teacher talk time, as most of the lesson time was dedicated towards giving the students the opportunity to produce their own creations. Isabella felt that this was the first time she was truly exposed to the concept of "student-centred learning":

Nicky: *"When was the first time that you can remember being exposed to the concept of student-centred learning?"*

Isabella: *"It was during a training course, the Readers and Writers Workshop, in about the year 2001 in [a city in the United States]."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:00:17 – 00:00:34

*“It was not necessarily grammar-focused, but more content-focused; how to read for example fiction or non-fiction, and how [the students] could produce a whole story. They would give their ideas and their opinions; the class was more about the students' production. There was just like a mini-lesson [at the beginning]; the teacher would talk for five to seven minutes, and the rest was the students. It was 90 minutes every day of students producing.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:01:29 – 00:02:08

The new approaches introduced by the Readers and Writers reform implied a significant increase in student talk time and a significant decrease in teacher talk time, with the teacher's role becoming much more of a “guide” (these were key components of Isabella's definition of student-centred learning; see Section 6.1). However, these new approaches represented a considerable change to the way Isabella had been used to working, and initially it was difficult for her to adapt. In fact, it was quite an emotional experience for her at first, as her entire concept of teaching was turned upside-down:

*“When I realised that I was doing the wrong thing, I kind of felt "oh, poor kids, I'm teaching them wrong!" [...] [I was] like sweating; [it was] like "oh my goodness, I've been doing something wrong!", because it's not going to be meaningful for them for the rest of their lives. If I have them write down one word ten times, in two weeks they're not going to remember that word, but if they actually create a sentence or a paragraph using that vocabulary, as part of their own story, they're going to memorise that word, and they will know it because they know how to use it; they've created something with it, so it's more meaningful.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:46:17 – 00:47:18

Indeed, despite some early problems getting used to the reform, Isabella soon began to become more convinced by it:

*“It was hard at first, but the more I saw different teachers teaching this way, how they structured their classes, [I realised] it was better; the students actually learnt more, because if they're just sitting listening, they don't learn as much as if they're producing.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:11:44 – 00:12:07

As mentioned earlier, the Readers and Writers Workshop reform was large-scale and mandatory. Being “forced” to change her practices may well have been a factor in helping Isabella to make eventual changes to her beliefs. However, Isabella stressed that it did not take her too long to start believing in the new approaches after she was given the chance to try them out:

*“Part of it was mandatory, and part of it was that I was convinced, because I saw they could actually create a book, these little kids from 3rd grade!”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:48:06 – 00:48:16

It is important to highlight that the Readers and Writers reform seems to have been planned and implemented in a comprehensive fashion. Aside from the initial process of awareness-raising, there were also various types of ongoing support for teachers as they experienced the change process. Two examples of this were observed teaching practices and peer observation schemes. Isabella feels that these support mechanisms helped her become gradually more convinced by the new approaches:

*“We observed other schools where they already had this approach, so that opened our eyes.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:47:45 – 00:47:55

*“I saw how they were doing these activities, and I started slowly putting them into practice into my class, and I realised that it worked, and that the students were learning, they were producing; it worked.”*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:02:05 – 00:02:27

After the initial movement towards believing in more student-centred approaches, Isabella felt that her beliefs were further reinforced as she acquired a better understanding of actually implementing the new approaches. By 2004, she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred learning would have gone up to a ‘10’.

The transition towards believing in more student-centred teaching approaches appears to have been accompanied by a change in Isabella’s beliefs about the way she saw herself as a teacher. It must of course be recognised that the role that she would have adopted with younger children in the United States would have been different to her role working

with university students in Mexico. However, from 2001 onwards, she did begin to perceive certain changes in the way she saw the teacher-student relationship:

“[I] realised that the students need to produce most of the time, and the teacher needs to talk for as short a time as possible; the teacher has to provide guidance, and the students have to raise questions, and be more centred on what they need in order to learn, rather than just dictating everything, and having them produce the minimum.”

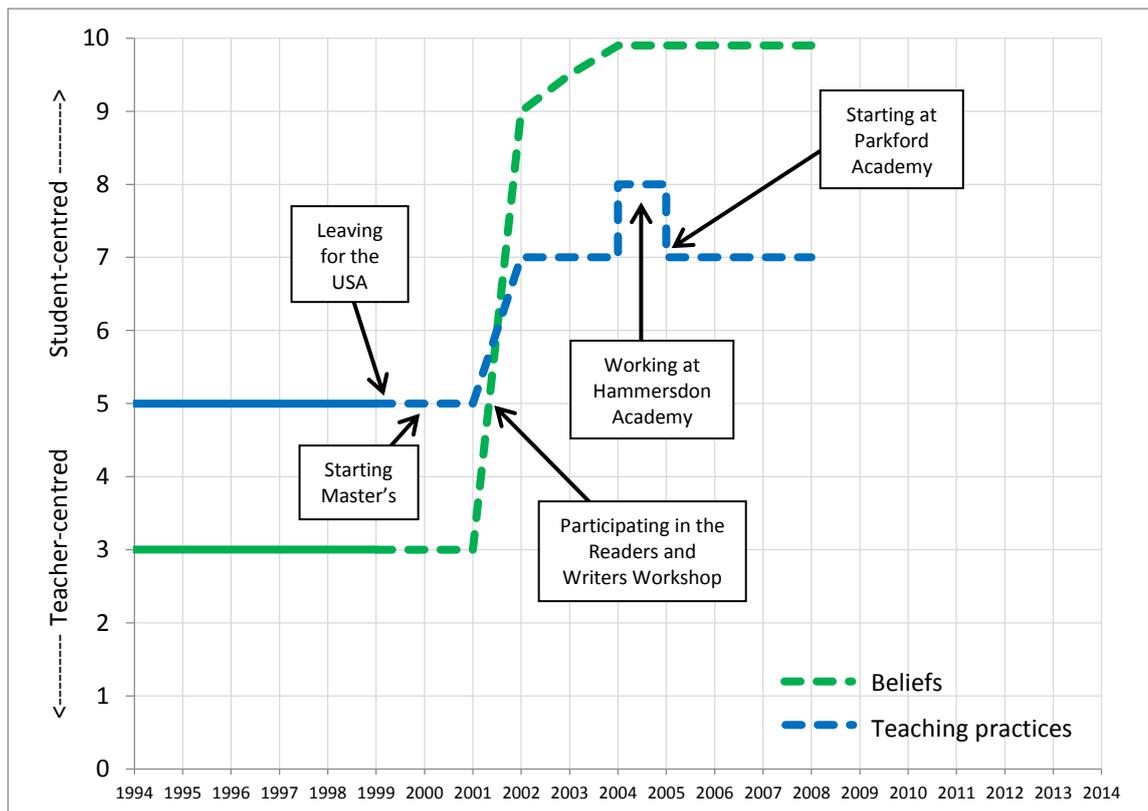
Isabella, Interview 2, 00:01:21 – 00:01:45

The way in which Isabella’s perceived role as a teacher gradually evolved over time becomes more apparent in the next chronological period, when she reflected about how she saw herself with her students at the USM.

#### 6.2.2.2. *Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs*

The blue line in the graph below shows how Isabella feels her teaching practices evolved during her time in the United States:

Fig. 6.2.2.2(i). Graph summarising Isabella’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1994 and 2008



The first time period that I will focus on is between 1999 and 2001, which represented Isabella's first two years working in the United States. When she first began working as a Teaching Assistant on the Fulbright Program, she felt that she began to teach in a largely similar way to the way she had been teaching in Mexico. She attributed this to the fact that the Spanish immersion school was generally happy for her to teach in a teacher-centred way. Moreover, she was unaware that there were any other ways of teaching:

*“At first I started teaching the same way, because I didn't know otherwise.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:10:21 – 00:10:26

Isabella did not feel that beginning to study her Master's in Education led to any meaningful changes in the student-centredness of her teaching practices. As mentioned previously, she felt that this was due to the fact that the course itself was fairly traditional and did not cover themes related to student-centred learning. Indeed, it was not until Isabella experienced the Readers and Writers reform that she reported any considerable changes to her teaching practices. Between 2001 and 2002, she felt that the extent to which her practices were “student-centred” would have risen from about a ‘5’ to a ‘7’.

As mentioned in the previous section, it is interesting to consider whether Isabella's beliefs or teaching practices changed first. This is a difficult question to answer, and the reality probably involved a combination of trying the reform out, evaluating results, and repeating this process. It is beyond the scope of the study to identify exactly how and when Isabella's beliefs and practices changed during this key period. However, it might be interesting to ask ourselves whether any change in beliefs or practices would have happened if the reform itself had not been mandatory. This touches upon an interesting dilemma for those deciding upon the degree of obligation needed in external reforms, a debate which I revisit in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

An important aspect worth highlighting was the way in which Isabella was trained and supported by the US government as she experienced the Readers and Writers reform. As mentioned in the previous sub-section, it appears that substantial time, effort and resources were invested in a variety of short and long-term support for teachers in order to facilitate their process of belief and behaviour change. This seems to have helped Isabella overcome her initial period of uncertainty and resistance:

*“We were encouraged to observe other teachers that were already teaching this way in other schools, so we learnt about the whole routine.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:03:17 – 00:03:32

*“It was hard at first to make the transition, because I wanted to continue doing it the way I had done it before, for me to talk for like 50 minutes and the students 10. But slowly my supervisors gave me advice, [...] and the trainings helped too, to see the other way of teaching.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:10:50 – 00:11:20

Moreover, Isabella felt that having reasonably clear and understandable instructions as to how to carry out the initial “routine” helped her to get used to the new approaches:

*“There was a routine that we needed to follow, and we even had manuals to follow, so it was a little bit nerve-wracking because it's not what you've been doing, [...] [but] the students got used to the routine: first we would do a mini-lesson, for example we would teach what is the fiction style, or we would read like a little passage of fiction, and then "ok, now you're going to go on your own", and every student had a book, they would practise, they would talk to each other about what they understood, and then they would start creating their own book.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:14:39 – 00:15:46

This is interesting, as it suggests that some teachers may benefit from the support of somewhat more prescriptive support (at least initially), as they gradually become more confident in implementing new approaches.

One factor which must be highlighted is that Isabella felt that it was easier to implement an approach like this with native or near-native speakers in the United States:

*“I was teaching in the United States, and the students already spoke English [...] It was easier.”*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:03:37 – 00:04:03

Having said that, Isabella did not find it easy with all her students:

*“Some students were very hard to teach, because they hated reading; they just didn't want to read, and it was hard to convince them to actually do it.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:49:54 – 00:50:11

*“They eventually felt good about themselves and learnt, but at first it was hard to even convince them to open the book.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:50:44 – 00:50:54

As the graph in Fig. 6.2.2.2(i) above shows, Isabella considered that the extent to which her teaching practices were student-centred would have been about a ‘7’ by 2001. She felt that this difference between her beliefs (a ‘10’) and actual teaching practices (a ‘7’) was partly to do with her needing time to get used to teaching in this way. However, she also felt that this discrepancy may have been linked to the different conditions she experienced in the different schools in which she worked between 2001 and 2008.

For example, she highlighted a slight increase in the student-centredness of her teaching practices between 2004 and 2005. This was because, during this period, she moved to a school called Hammersdon Academy, which she felt provided her with better facilities to actually teach in a student-centred way. Hammersdon had already gone through a process of transition towards more student-centred approaches, and Isabella felt that this was a factor in helping support her as she tried to implement the changes. Moreover, she identified that the students’ levels were generally higher at Hammersdon, which meant that they were able to adapt to the changes more easily.

Unfortunately, Isabella was only able to work at Hammersdon Academy for one year, as she had still not completed her Master’s degree. She did manage to find work at another school called Parkland Academy, but here she found it slightly more difficult to teach in a student-centred way. For example, she recalled that the new school asked her to use a textbook which was not particularly student-centred. In addition, the students’ levels were comparatively lower, which meant that it was harder for them to produce their own pieces of writing without the same degree of intervention from the teacher. Furthermore, she experienced increased problems with student discipline, which tended to be more of an

issue under more student-centred approaches because the students were expected to be left on their own to produce their work.

I was not able to explore in more detail the factors which made it easier for Isabella to implement student-centred learning at some schools as opposed to others. However, I feel that these examples are worth mentioning as they highlight that different school contexts may have an impact on the potential student-centredness of teachers' practices, even when the teachers' beliefs about teaching remain generally student-centred.

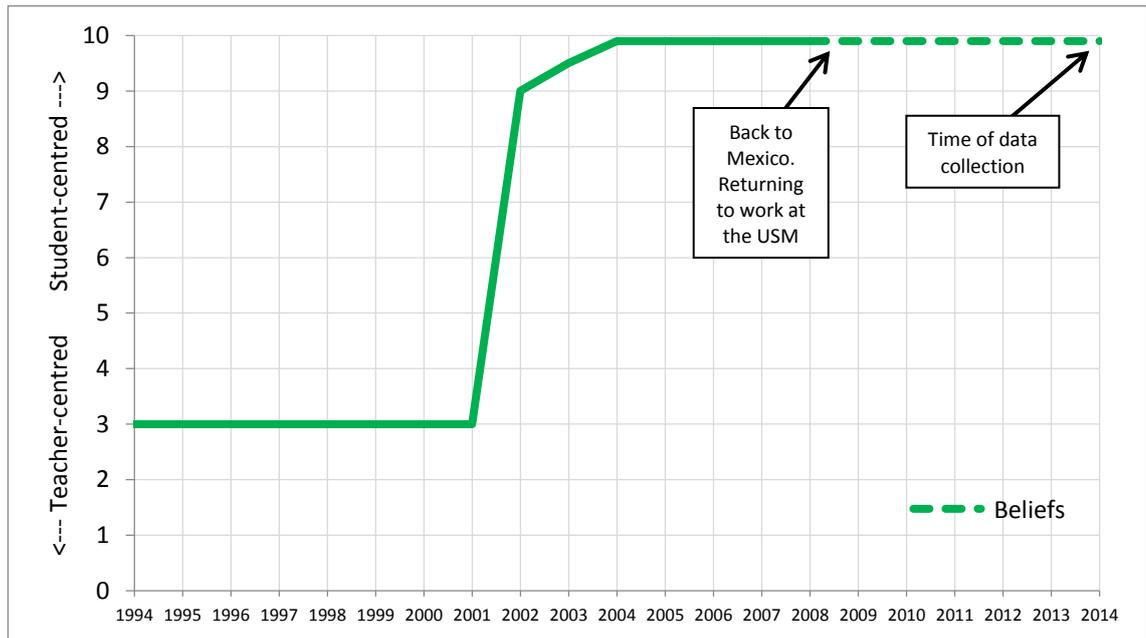
### *6.2.3. Period 3: 2008-2014: Returning to Mexico to work at the USM*

In 2008, Isabella and her husband decided to return to Mexico, where she was re-hired by the USM. During this period, she worked at a number of different Schools at the University. At the time of the interview, her most recent teaching position was at the School of Modern Art, where she began to adapt her classes to the needs of the students through English for Specific Purposes.

#### *6.2.3.1. Evolution of beliefs*

Isabella did not report any significant changes in her beliefs after returning from the United States. As the graph below shows, in 2014, she still felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been a '10':

Fig. 6.2.3.1(i). Graph summarising Isabella's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1994 and 2014



A number of factors seem to have contributed towards maintaining Isabella's student-centred beliefs. One of these was her perception that student-centred approaches have been more effective with her students:

*"I like the more communicative [activities]. I think they learn more. Sometimes we start with a topic and then we finish with a completely different topic and I say "it's ok, as long as we're talking"."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:26:10 – 00:26:22

In particular, Isabella felt that adapting her classes to her students' degree programs has seemed to work much better than previous teacher-centred approaches (this was an important part of her individual interpretation of student-centred EFL learning; see Section 6.1):

*"The student-centred approach is better because it prepares [students] for life, to solve their own problems. [...] Sometimes I go out of the room, and they're still working. I notice they learn a lot by helping each other, and trying to solve their problems by themselves; without me having to tell them everything, they are actually learning more than if I was there trying to tell them everything."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:31:48 – 00:32:22

Isabella also reported that her students' responses to student-centred learning have been generally positive:

*“When I have received feedback at the end of the semester, it's been good. They actually feel they are learning; they like this style.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:41:57 – 00:42:11

*“Two students came in today that I haven't even met, and this is the 3rd week! [...] I explained to them that the English class has to be relevant for their futures; it's not just to pass the class. So then they looked at me and kind of realised, "why didn't I come to the previous classes?"; they did something important for their lives, so they said "I like you teacher!", one of them even gave me a hug and a kiss and I was surprised; it was the first time he had met me and he was so excited about it, so that's the rewarding part.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:55:42 – 00:56:50

#### Δ TRIANGULATION:

##### POSITIVE STUDENT RESPONSES TOWARDS MORE STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACHES

##### Students' opinions from focus groups:

From the focus groups I carried out with students from the School of Modern Art, the students seemed to support Isabella's perceptions that student-centred EFL learning (especially in terms of the introduction of ESP) has been more motivating than previous teacher-centred approaches:

*“With Isabella I like that it's more based around art.”*

Arnoldo (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 3, 00:02:06 – 00:02:11

*“We're interested [in learning] with [Isabella] because it's technical English, it's focused on our degree [...] so it's not as tedious as learning “I am” and “you are” again.”*

Marco (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:27:36 – 00:28:12

Moreover, the students expressed that they enjoy the more communicative activities:

*“[The conversation activities] are what we like the most.”*

Leticia (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:54:46 – 00:54:48

*“When we have conversations between ourselves, it's really good, because it's topics that we like; we don't just talk about anything, but things that we like, that we know, that we're interested in.”*

Leticia (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:06:30 – 00:06:50

Another issue which appears to have reinforced Isabella's beliefs in the value of student-centred EFL learning was her frustrations at standardised English language tests which focus on grammar as opposed to more meaningful content:

*"The tests don't test [communication skills]. I've had many students who were great at talking, great at expressing their feelings and ideas, but when they took the exam they didn't necessarily pass it because they didn't know the grammar off by heart."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:30:55 – 00:31:12

A final point which Isabella felt helped reinforce her beliefs in student-centred EFL learning was that, in 2014, she was given the "green light" by the School of Modern Art to adapt her classes to the students' needs. Although to a certain extent she was already teaching in this way, she does feel that receiving this "official" recognition helped her to feel even more confident in her beliefs:

*"Before I felt that I was kind of doing a bad job because I wasn't teaching the grammar that my boss was making me teach; I was kind of teaching something different behind their backs. And now that I was given the green light I told my Head of School about it, so I can feel relaxed if they come and observe me, because I'm actually doing what they told me to do."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:34:42 – 00:35:07

Although Isabella reported that she strongly believed in student-centred approaches at the time of data collection, it must be noted that she also recognised the validity of a more flexible, "hybrid" approach which might include certain teacher-centred approaches in certain situations. She reflected:

*"Sometimes the classes are "hybrid"; some students don't need so much teacher guidance, but others do; they're more shy and they need more grammatical structures to feel confident; they cannot produce if they don't know the rules. That's how I perceive them."*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:02:42 – 00:03:11

This is comparable to what both Rebecca and Antonio mentioned, although both Rebecca and Antonio decided to actually lower the ratings on the graphs to an '8' and a '9'

respectively. My interpretation of this is that Isabella's understanding of "student-centred learning" may actually include a built-in awareness that teacher-centred approaches might be appropriate at certain times within specific contexts. I explore these issues in more detail in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

Of course, classes may also become more teacher-centred (or "hybrid") because of the obstacles that prevent teachers from putting their beliefs into practice. The obstacles that Isabella has encountered while teaching at the USM are explored in Section 6.2.3.2 below.

A final aspect to mention in this sub-section relates to Isabella beliefs about her role as a teacher and her relationships with students. These beliefs seem to have evolved gradually since she participated in the Readers and Writers Workshop in 2001. As established in her definition of student-centred EFL learning in Section 6.1, at the time of data collection she saw her role as more of a "guide" or a "facilitator":

*"I think I'm a "facilitator". I told the students: "I'm not just going to spit out the information; I don't know it all". I think I'm just trying to give them some tools to facilitate their learning."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:38:03 – 00:38:25

*"I'm not this big person up here who tells them "you do as I say"; we're both at the same level. Sometimes, I try to sit at their level when they're reading, if possible, so I'm not so far away and distant but close, like we're buddies; "we're here to learn together"."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:39:39 – 00:40:13

*"There should be freedom; it should be a comfortable place. I believe that if they feel comfortable and confident doing different activities, they will learn easier than if they are scared in a rigid and very strict environment."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:40:51 – 00:41:13

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

My interpretations from classroom observations:

Isabella's comments about being more of a "facilitator" seem to be consistent with the classes I observed. There was an extremely relaxed and laid-back atmosphere at the USM's School of Modern Art, which is located in a small village away from the city of San Martín. The students generally seemed to be doing their own thing, and time seemed to be a rather abstract concept. Isabella was not strict at all, and generally left the students to get on with work autonomously. She did not tell them off when they arrived late, or lost focus.

Students' opinions from focus groups:

Isabella's students also reported that there was a very relaxed teacher-student relationship:

*"We're all really relaxed; maybe that's why we get on so well."*

Gabriel (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 01:05:20 – 01:05:26

*"The teacher is closer to the student; in High School everyone is in the classroom behind their desks, and the [teacher is like] "I'm here at the front and we're not equal." [...] [But Isabella] does come closer to us and we move closer to her."*

Ángel (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 3 00:38:33 – 00:39:09

*"The teacher gives us a lot of freedom in class."*

Gabriel (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 01:02:37 – 01:02:41

*"It's more down to the individual; everyone has to worry about themselves, their own learning and their own growth; the teachers aren't worrying about us. That's why the atmosphere is more relaxed."*

Marco (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 01:13:54 – 01:14:12

The aforementioned change of role (towards more of a "facilitator") does not appear to have been instant or easy for Isabella, but on reflection, she has found the change to be very rewarding:

*"[The change in role] wasn't that quick, because at first I wanted everybody to be quiet, "just listen, and repeat after me, and read in silence, and nobody move". Things started to change slowly, and now I know it's ok if the classroom looks chaotic, because these people over here are learning, those people over there are learning, and these will eventually learn, and some of them already know a lot."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:41:22 – 00:41:51

*“At first it's a little bit nerve-racking not being able to solve all their problems. They ask me a word and I'm like "Oh my goodness I don't know! Let's figure it out!" But then when they actually figure it out and they are learning and they are actually teaching me, it kind of feels good, because it's two-way learning, and then I tell the students "both of us are learning here: you're learning and I'm learning, you're teaching me and I'm teaching you, so we both win!", and then they feel good.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:38:41 – 00:39:16

Isabella considered that her students at the USM have generally responded positively to the change from a more traditional teacher-student relationship:

*“They feel smart; they know that I don't know everything and they can actually teach me, so it's rewarding for them too, that they know things that they could transfer to another person.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:39:22 – 00:39:39

Nevertheless, she also expressed that some students would like there to be slightly more discipline in her classes:

*“Some students want more strictness in the learning; they feel that this freedom that I give them means there's no [...] discipline. But it shouldn't be this strict class where you cannot talk and you cannot move.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:40:22 – 00:40:52

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
STUDENT RESPONSES TOWARDS MORE STUDENT AUTONOMY

Students' opinions from focus groups:

As Isabella herself recognised in the interviews, there were somewhat mixed views regarding how much freedom students should be granted at the School of Modern Art:

*"I like the more relaxed atmosphere, because I'm not worried about having to do things that I don't like doing."*

Marco (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 01:19:09 – 01:19:21

*"I feel a bit strange with Isabella [...] I liked English in High School; I liked that we were put under pressure to do the work [...] And now that the classes are so relaxed, [...] I don't know, it feels a bit strange to have so much freedom."*

Gabriel (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 01:20:27 – 01:21:25

*"[But] it's our problem, because we're supposed to use that freedom to do our homework and the projects that our teachers give us."*

Gabriel (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 01:02:41 – 01:02:52

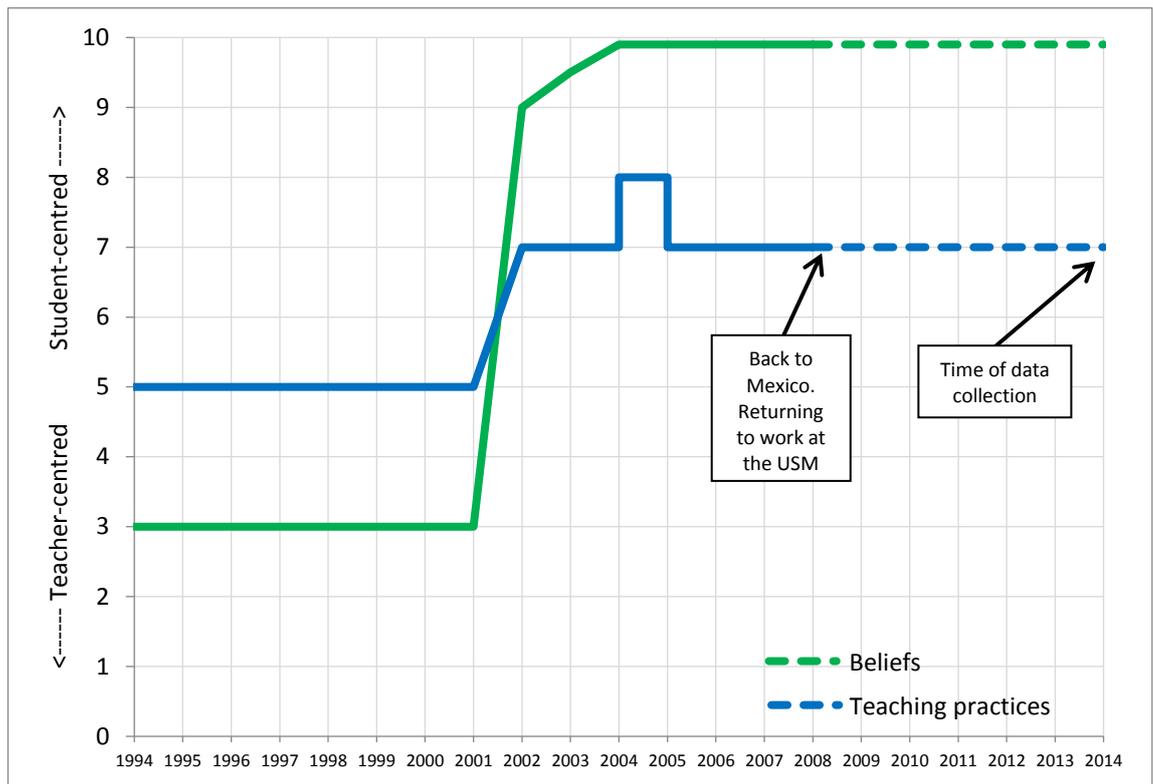
*"In a way it's our fault. But we can change that, ourselves."*

Leticia (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:59:14 – 00:59:21

6.2.3.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs

As the graph below shows, Isabella felt that the extent to which her practices were student-centred between 2008 and 2014 would have been about a '7':

Fig. 6.2.3.2(i). Graph summarising Isabella's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1994 and 2014



Indeed, when Isabella returned to work at the USM, she tried to apply some of the approaches she had acquired abroad to older university students in Mexico:

*“I tried a little bit to mould my teaching to content, depending on the School where I was working.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:21:06 – 00:21:18

*“For example in [the School of] Economics we read different articles, we discussed them and the students would give me their opinions.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:21:36 – 00:21:49

*“[The School of] Modern Art is more of a hands-on place, so we do a lot of writing [...] and having conversations about what they're creating.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:21:51 – 00:22:04

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
EXAMPLES OF MORE STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES

My interpretations from classroom observations:

From the classes I observed, there were many examples of activities which would be consistent with Isabella's definition of "student-centred EFL learning" (see Section 6.1). For example, Isabella had designed a special textbook which was full of activities specifically related to art. In one class, students produced a poster in English for their own art exhibition. In another class, the students had to design their own "colour wheel", with all of the different colours in English. Moreover, there were a number of conversation activities in which the students had to ask themselves questions about topics relevant to their subject area.

Students' opinions from focus groups:

Isabella's students also highlighted several activities which would fit with her interpretation of student-centred EFL learning. In particular, they gave examples of her adapting the English class to the content of their degrees:

*"The first main difference is that it's technical English; it's English which is focused on us and our degree."*

Leticia (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:01:59 – 00:02:09

*"She gives us tasks to do which are based on projects that we are doing in other modules, so we're working with the same information but in English."*

Gabriel (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:14:11 – 00:14:24

*"[There is] interaction; we're always asking her things in English; we're practising it in that moment; we see [content related to our areas] in the written form, and then we use it again through the conversations that we have with each other, as well as in the readings."*

Gabriel (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:05:40 – 00:05:59

Isabella's practices throughout this period seem to have been notably more student-centred than during her first spell of teaching between 1998 and 1999. However, as with the cases of Rebecca and Antonio, she felt that she has not been able to implement student-centred EFL learning to the extent that she would have liked. This is illustrated in Fig. 6.2.3.2(i) above, which indicates that, although she rated her beliefs as a '10', she felt she has only ever been able to reach about a '7' in terms of her practices. Indeed, like Rebecca and Antonio, she has had to resort to more of a "hybrid" mix of teacher-centred and student-centred approaches:

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
EXAMPLES OF “HYBRID” TEACHING

My interpretations from classroom observations:

Although a lot of what I saw during Isabella’s classes could be described as student-centred, there were also some examples of more teacher-centred practices. This appears to be consistent with her acknowledgement that she may sometimes teach in a more “hybrid” way. For example, certain parts of the lessons were taken up with explicit grammar explanations, and some of the grammar was presented in quite a mechanistic fashion: e.g. showing students the positive, negative, question and negative question forms. Isabella also used individual and choral repetition of grammar points and vocabulary items. Finally, a part of one of Isabella’s lessons was spent preparing students for the TOEFL test.

During the interviews, Isabella identified certain factors which she felt have led her towards including more “hybrid”, teacher-centred approaches. The most frequently mentioned of these was that many students have found it difficult to adapt to student-centred approaches:

*“Some students are so shaped into the old-fashioned way that when they receive this new approach they don't know how to react to it; they're so used to having to write and copy things down, but not to create, and not to speak freely. Some of them are not ready for this yet, so I have to do something in class for them to participate.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:22:14 – 00:22:46

*“Some students actually ask me for more grammar. And I say "it's coming, it's going to be embedded in what we read, in what we talk about; the more you read and the more you talk, you're going to acquire these structures”.*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:23:41 – 00:24:08

*“The students are not used to content-based classes; I want to teach them with more readings and more conversation; I want them to acquire the grammar more like we acquire the grammar in our first language [...] [But] some of them, not all of them, ask me "but I don't know how to create a question", or "I don't know this structure of the past or the present perfect", or "I haven't memorised these verbs". [...] So I feel like we're going backwards, instead of going forwards. It's a setback I think, when they want me to go more traditional and dictate the rules and the formulas.”*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:07:12 – 00:08:17

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
STUDENTS AS OBSTACLES

My interpretations from classroom observations:

The notes I made during the classroom observations seem consistent with the quotations above. In a similar way to Rebecca and Antonio, many students at the School of Modern Art did not seem particularly used to autonomous learning. For example, in one class Isabella left the students an independent task while she went round to check each student's reading. However, I noted that many students simply stopped working during this time. In contrast, when Isabella delivered a more teacher-centred class (the preparation for the TOEFL test), the students seemed to be much more focused on the task.

Students' opinions from focus groups:

In the focus groups, the students did recognise that they often lacked discipline when it came to the more autonomous activities:

*"Thinking about it now, [the main obstacle] is our discipline in the classroom."*

Marco (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:58:46 – 00:58:51

*"Speaking of obstacles, well it would be our level of discipline, which we can change."*

Leticia (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 01:02:20 – 01:02:27

*"When [Isabella is checking our reading], she is only with each of us for 5 minutes at a time, so people can do the activities she leaves us or choose to do something else. And generally, people start talking and things like that, and those of us who want to do the activities get really distracted, because sometimes we start talking and messing around too."*

Gabriel (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:57:36 – 00:58:14

*"Obstacles? Well it would be our laziness; the lack of effort that we put into it."*

Arnoldo (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 3, 00:28:20 – 00:28:33

Having to prepare students for examinations was another factor which Isabella mentioned in preventing her from teaching in a more student-centred way:

*"For test-taking, I think we need a more traditional way [of teaching]. I don't particularly like tests, so I don't give tests to my students; I grade them as we go: "you participate, you come to class, you are producing, you're trying, then you [will pass]". But I have had classes where I prepare them to take the TOEFL exam, for example. I feel I have to teach them the grammar, and I feel I have to teach them, explicitly, how to take tests."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:29:00 – 00:29:42

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
STANDARDISED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTS AS OBSTACLES

Notes from classroom observations:

As mentioned earlier, Isabella dedicated part of one of her lessons to the TOEFL test. This was definitely one of her more “teacher-centred” classes. There was little communication or meaningful output from the students; the focus seemed very much on training them to pass the test. However, this seems understandable given that many students are interested in passing the TOEFL test.

Isabella also felt that she has been restricted in some Schools because she has been asked to follow a grammar-based program:

*“When I came back [to Mexico from the United States], I was given a program. [The University authorities told me] “you need to teach these grammar topics”.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:33:26 – 00:33:34

However, as mentioned earlier, this has not been the case in recent years at the School of Modern Art, where Isabella has finally been given the green light by the Head of School to teach more ESP.

Another obstacle which Isabella highlighted was that students have not always been divided into language levels at the USM, meaning that there is often a wide variety of different abilities within the same group:

*“The fact that I have many different levels in one group is a little bit hard to teach. For example, I want them to talk to each other, but one of them is advanced and the other one is beginner level. So that huge difference affects the results.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:36:16 – 00:36:41

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
STUDENTS NOT DIVIDED INTO LANGUAGE LEVELS

My interpretations from classroom observations:

As was the case with Antonio's classes, there was a wide variety of different language levels in both groups I observed at the School of Modern Art. In fact, levels varied from total beginner to near-native. It seemed very challenging for Isabella to design classes which would be useful for students of all levels.

Students' opinions from focus groups:

Within the student focus groups, there were mixed opinions regarding the mixture of language levels in the same group. For example, one student, Marco, argued that it might be a good thing:

*"[On one hand,] it's a good thing, because in any case we've got the book so we can learn new vocabulary; even though we know English, there are lots of things we can learn, and at the same time we can help those who don't know as much."*

Marco (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:11:48 – 00:12:13

However, in general, a lack of language levels was seen as a negative:

*"There's a mixture of levels and I don't know [...], I don't know if that's really a good thing."*

Leticia (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 2, 00:07:05 – 00:07:17

*"I get stressed because I already [have a good level of] English but we have to go slow because not everyone has that level."*

Arnoldo (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 3, 00:04:28 – 00:04:32

*"In my opinion, one obstacle is that the education system makes it out as if we're all the same and we all learn the same, but we're not; they should design programs for different types of people."*

Ángel (Student at the School of Modern Art), Focus Group 3, 00:33:19 – 00:33:35

Interestingly, Isabella also cited her co-workers as sometimes undermining her teaching in a more student-centred way:

*"When you asked me about what was hard for me [...], I think the rest of my co-workers view my class as crazy. [They say things like] "why are the students doing all the work, not the teacher?""*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:52:18 – 00:52:44

*“Some of them have told me: “you need to do this, and you need to do that”; they give me advice, because they think the students are doing nothing, or there is too much chaos. I tried to explain to them that there’s a purpose for what they’re doing; there’s a communicative purpose behind this, or there’s a productive writing purpose.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:52:46 – 00:53:13

Finally, Isabella feels that insufficient and/or inappropriate classroom conditions may constrain her ability to include more student-centred activities:

*“Even though I’m trying to do a good job, it’s not possible at all times. We have many issues like today, [...] we don’t have technology, we didn’t have the projector; they were using it for other art projects, so we didn’t do listening.”*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:10:50 – 00:11:14

*“I try to structure my classes, and I try to think “ok, we’re going to do this, and that, and that”, [but then] many things happen, and everything’s out the window; we end up doing something else.”*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:11:38 – 00:11:53

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
INSUFFICIENT AND/OR INAPPROPRIATE CLASSROOM CONDITIONS

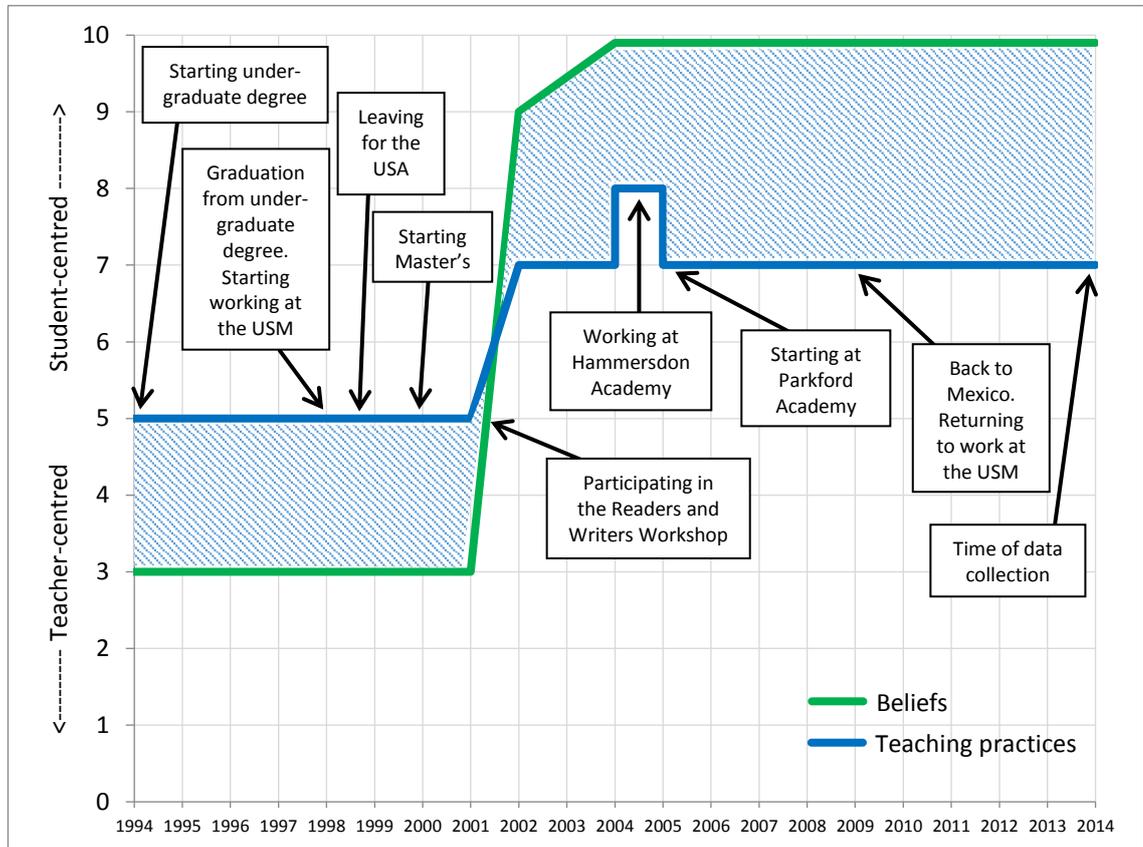
My interpretations from classroom observations:

Although the classroom where I observed most of Isabella’s classes at the School of Modern Art was fine, one of her classes was moved to another room, which was completely inappropriate for EFL learning. It was an “arts workshop”, which was right next to a room in which some other students were using a mechanical saw. The sound was deafening, and Isabella had to improvise by giving the students a different activity.

### 6.3. Summary

#### 6.3.1. Summary of Isabella's teaching practices in relation to her beliefs

Fig. 6.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Isabella's beliefs in relation to her teaching practices over the course of her educational life history



The graph above summarises the relationships between Isabella's beliefs and her teaching practices between 1994 and 2014. In the period between 1994 and 2001, she felt that her teaching practices were probably slightly more student-centred than her beliefs; that is to say, she felt that she was probably teaching in a somewhat student-centred way, but without being consciously aware of this at the time.

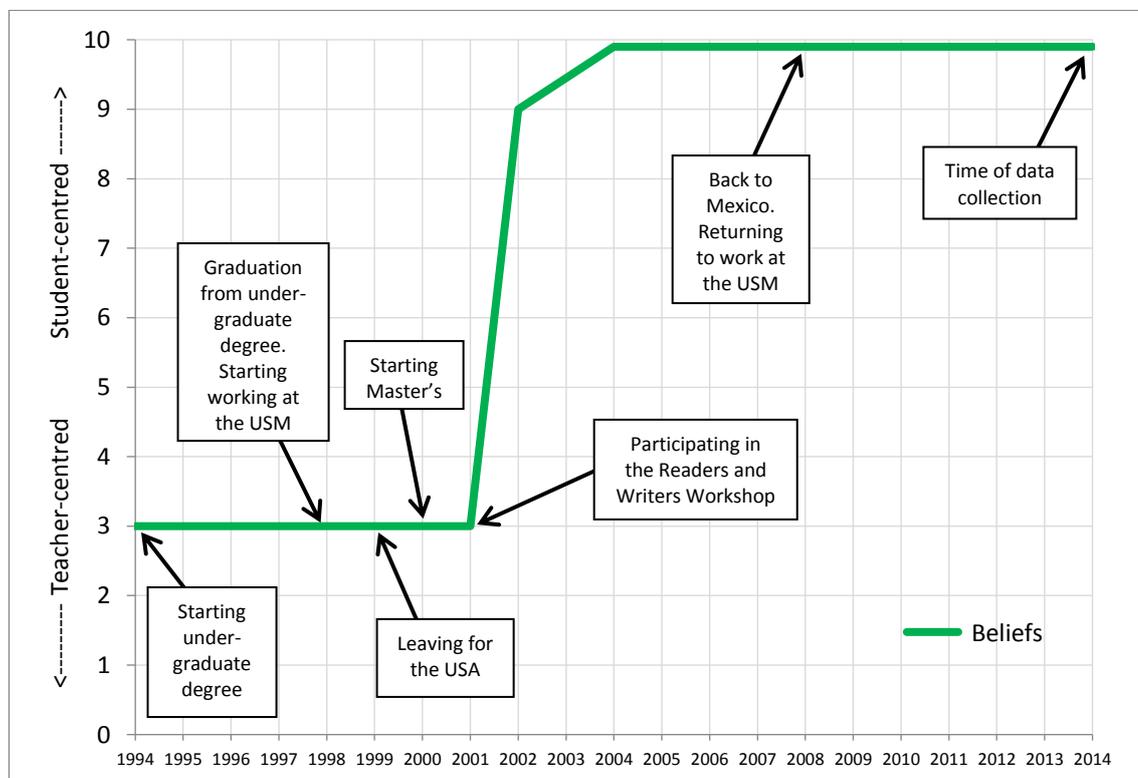
This score rose to a '7' after the Readers and Writers Workshop in 2001. A fairly sizeable gap between her beliefs and teaching practices then starts to become apparent. Initially, this may have been due to her needing more time to get used to putting the Readers and Writers reform into practice. However, as time passed and she became more confident implementing these new approaches, external factors seem to have been more significant in preventing her from putting her beliefs into practice. There was a slight reduction in the gap between 2004 and 2005, when she worked at a school called Hammersdon Academy, which had higher level students and generally seemed to be better geared

towards facilitating student-centred learning. However, when she moved on to another school called the Parkland Academy, there were certain issues such as the lower language levels of students and discipline problems which she felt prevented her from implementing student-centred learning.

Finally, when she returned to Mexico to work at the USM, Isabella tried to implement student-centred EFL learning, but she felt that the extent to which her classes were student-centred would have only been about a '7'. Some of the reasons for this mismatch were: students not being used to student-centred approaches, being obliged to teach for examinations which are inconsistent with the goals of student-centred EFL learning, being forced to teach a grammar-based program (although this was not the case in the School of Modern Art where she was working at the time of data collection), different language levels within the same group, and inappropriate classroom facilities.

### 6.3.2. *Summary of the evolution of Isabella's beliefs*

Fig. 6.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Isabella's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of her educational life history



The graph above summarises the evolution of Isabella's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning between 1994 and 2014. When she started her degree at the USM's School of Languages in 1994, she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been a about '3'. This score did not change for the next seven years. In 1999, she moved to the United States to work as a Teaching Assistant under the Fulbright Program, but this does not seem to have had much of an effect on her beliefs, as the environment that she was working in did little to promote anything else but teacher-centred approaches. In 2000, she began a Master's in Education, but again, she did not feel that this contributed towards changing her beliefs, given that the course was taught in quite a teacher-centred way and did not cover any student-centred topics.

It was not until 2001 when the most significant event in Isabella's educational life history took place. This was a large-scale literacy reform introduced by the US government called the Readers and Writers Workshop. The reform advocated a teaching approach which was much less teacher-centred and much more focused on developing students' practical reading and writing skills. This was a considerable change to what she had been used to up to that point, but through participating in the training courses and other support sessions such as a peer observation scheme, she started to put the new ideas into practice. She soon began to see positive results and eventually became very convinced by the changes. This is reflected by the fact that she felt her beliefs rose to a '9' in 2002, and continued to a '10' by 2004.

Her beliefs about student-centred EFL learning continued until 2008, when she moved back to Mexico to work at the USM. At the time of the data collection in 2014, she stated that she still believed strongly in student-centred EFL learning. Indeed, although the context sometimes may push her towards using more "hybrid" approaches within certain situations, she still rated the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning as a '10'.

## **CHAPTER 7: THE EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORY OF RICARDO**

This chapter is the fourth of the five Data Analysis chapters. It focuses on the educational life history of the fourth participant, Ricardo.

### **7.1. Ricardo's interpretation of student-centred EFL learning**

Ricardo provided me with a detailed description of how he understood student-centred EFL learning during his third interview. This may be summarised as follows:

- Activities which encourage students to be more autonomous and less dependent on the teacher;
- More of a focus on the process of learning, as opposed to just its outcomes;
- Developing students' independent critical thinking skills;
- Incorporating more learner choice;
- A change in the role of the teacher towards more of a tutor, counsellor, or guide;
- A movement towards English for Specific Purposes as opposed to solely English for General Purposes.

(Adapted from my field notes taken during Interview 3 with Ricardo)

In comparison to previous participants, it is interesting to note that Ricardo seems to have placed much more of an emphasis on *autonomous learning* in his definition of student-centred EFL learning. It will be important to bear this in mind in this chapter.

### **7.2. Key periods in Ricardo's educational life history**

The key chronological periods which emerged from Ricardo's educational life history were as follows:

- *Period 1*: 1988-1996: Preparing to become an EFL teacher
- *Period 2*: 1996-2003: Working at SMELC
- *Period 3*: 2003-2014: Working at the USM

These periods are examined separately in the following three sections.

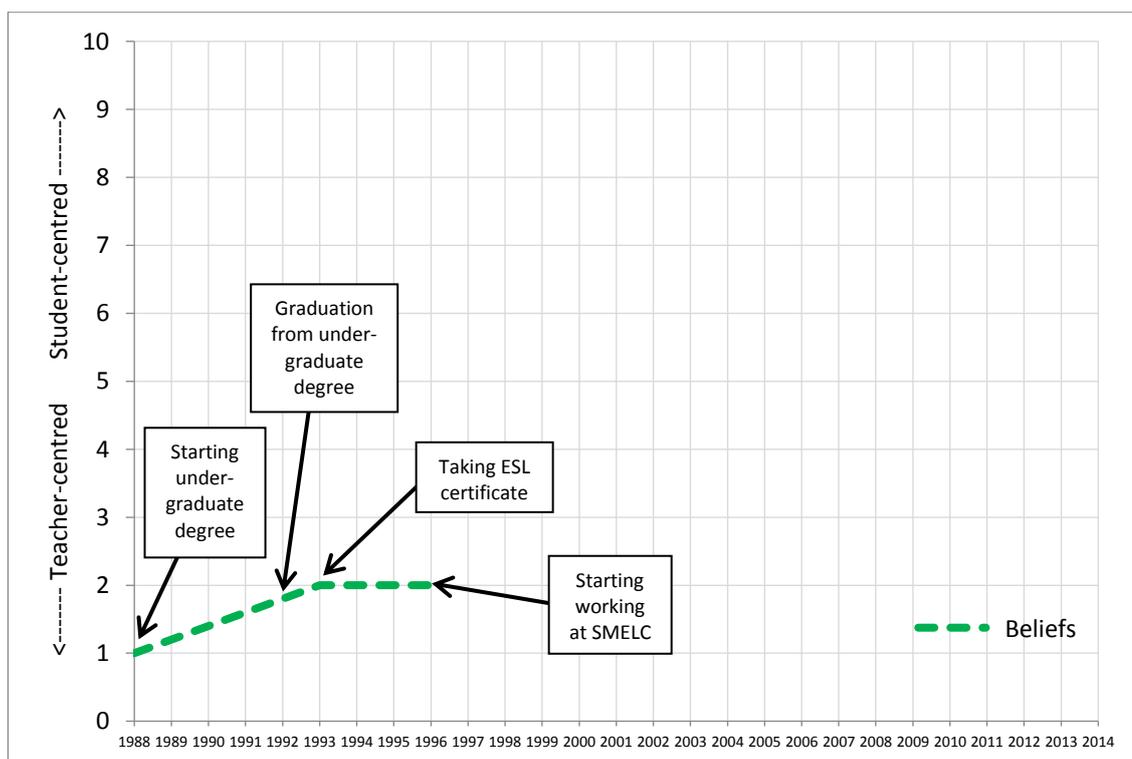
### 7.2.1. *Period 1: 1988-1996: Preparing to become an EFL teacher*

The first main period which emerged from Ricardo's educational life history was between 1988 and 1996, which was before he started working formally as an EFL teacher. Like the previous three participants, Ricardo studied his undergraduate degree at the USM's School of Languages. However, unlike them, he did not start working at the USM immediately after graduation. Between 1992 and 1996, he worked in a variety of different contexts which were not directly related to teaching. In 1996, he started teaching at SMELC, the private language institute where Antonio had studied (as well as Elizabeth; see next chapter). It was there that he would have his first practical experiences of teaching.

#### 7.2.1.1. *Evolution of beliefs*

The graph below shows how Ricardo feels his beliefs about teaching evolved between 1988 and 1996:

Fig. 7.2.1.1(i). Graph summarising Ricardo's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 1988 and 1996



As the graph above shows, when Ricardo started his undergraduate degree in 1988, he felt that his beliefs were extremely teacher-centred; indeed, he would have rated the extent to which he believed in student-centred EFL learning as a ‘1’. As was the case with previous participants, he attributed these teacher-centred beliefs to the highly traditional schooling which he had experienced throughout his time in the Mexican public education system:

*“All my educational background was traditional [...] right through elementary school, junior high school and high school.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:39:48 – 00:40:02

*“We were just using books; we had exams and we memorised information to succeed in those exams. Most of the teaching consisted of believing in teachers, authors and books; we didn't give our opinions; we weren't really thinking about the information that we were learning.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:03:51 – 00:04:16

As expressed by previous participants, Ricardo felt that these beliefs were unconscious in nature; that is to say, he was not aware that there might be any other way of learning:

*“I didn't know about any other ways of learning.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:02:29 – 00:02:32

This would change slightly after he studied his undergraduate degree between 1988 and 1992. Unlike Rebecca's experiences of studying at the School of Languages, Ricardo did recall that he was taught different teaching methodologies during his degree. This at least made him realise that merely *knowing* English would not be sufficient in order to be a successful English teacher. He felt that learning about different approaches made him open his eyes to the possibility that there might be other ways of teaching:

*“[I realised] that knowledge about the English language would not be enough in order to become a good teacher.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

*“I learnt that there were a lot of ways of teaching a language, like grammar translation, direct, audio-lingual, reading, communicative, structural, total physical response, immersion, humanistic, and task-based learning. And my conclusion at that moment [...] was that the traditional way I was learning wasn't the only one.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:05:04 – 00:05:29

Still, when I asked Ricardo to rate the extent to which he believed in student-centred EFL learning by the end of his degree, his response was a ‘2’, indicating that teacher-centred approaches still largely predominated. Indeed, although he did recall having somewhat student-centred experiences during his degree, his overriding memories of it were still largely teacher-centred:

*“At the University we had some changes, [...] but it was more or less similar.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:40:02 – 00:40:10

*“Here I had the first chance to experience student-centred learning, through team projects, but in my opinion [the degree] was still traditional, since there wasn't really a full immersion in the approach.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:04:32 - 00:04:51

After he finished his degree in 1992, Ricardo felt that his English language level would need to improve if he was going to work as an EFL teacher. With this in mind, he studied a Certificate in English as a Second Language at a local private language institute. During this time, he also took his TOEFL certificate, which was one of the requirements to formally graduate from his degree:

*“I had finished my degree, but I knew I had to continue practising; in fact, after my degree I took an English as a Second Language certificate, because I felt that knowing about methodologies and information about how to teach a language wouldn't be enough. [...] [This course] helped me a lot, and afterwards I felt more comfortable.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:27:12 – 00:27:53

After completing his Certificate in English as a Second Language, Ricardo spent the next four years working in a variety of different contexts which were not directly related to

EFL teaching. However, in 1996, he was hired as an English teacher in a private language school called SMELC. This would provide him with his first practical experiences of teaching English to real students.

#### *7.2.1.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs*

Between 1988 and 1996, Ricardo was not formally working as a teacher. He did have some limited teaching practices during his undergraduate degree, but these were mainly microteaching sessions in front of his classmates. It would not be until 1996, after he was hired at SMELC, when he would gain his first experiences of teaching real groups.

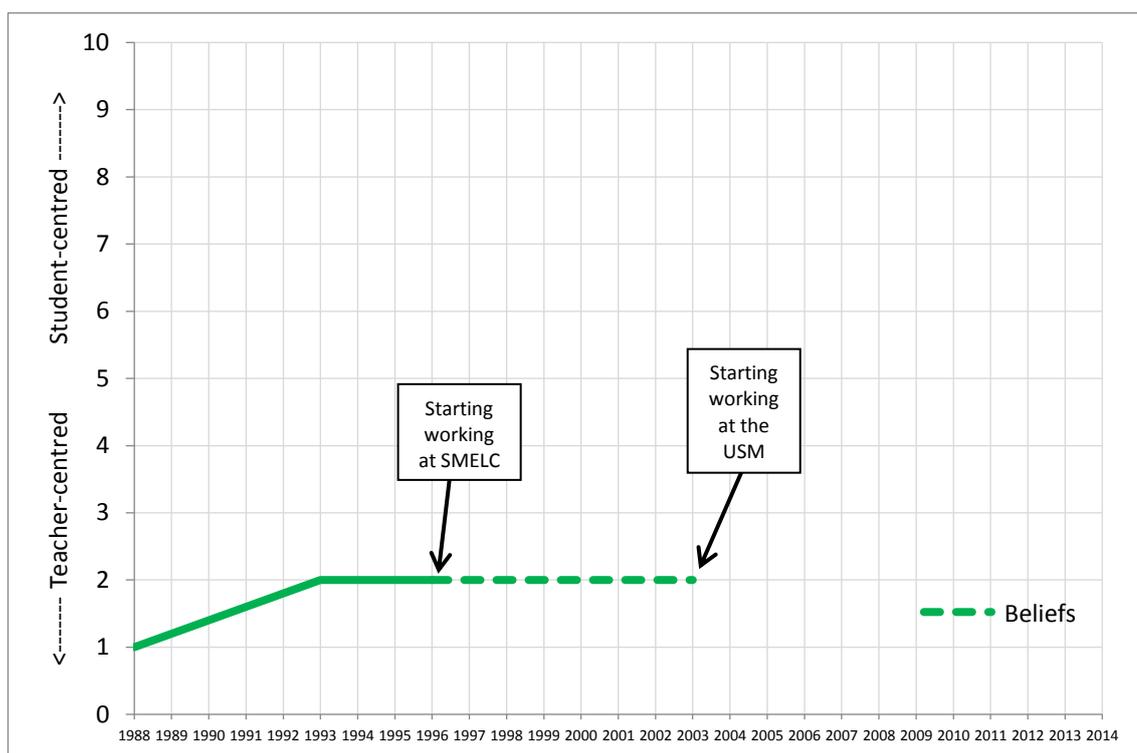
#### *7.2.2. Period 2: 1996-2003: Working at SMELC*

The next important period in Ricardo's educational life history was between 1996 and 2003, when he worked at a private language school called San Martín English Language College (SMELC).

##### *7.2.2.1. Evolution of beliefs*

As the graph below shows, Ricardo did not feel that there were any significant changes to his beliefs during his time working at SMELC:

Fig. 7.2.2.1(i). Graph summarising Ricardo's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 1996 and 2003



He felt that the main reason for such minimal changes was that the school was very traditional:

*“My first experience as an English teacher was in 1996, in a private school which was called SMELC. [...] In this school, the language skills were taught separately: conversation, listening (TV lab), structure (grammar), [and] vocabulary (reading and writing).”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

*“It was a very, very, very structured private school.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:26:14 – 00:26:18

Despite the fact that the teaching approaches at SMELC were very teacher-centred, Ricardo and his students seemed satisfied that learning was taking place. In these circumstances, there appears to have been little reason for him to change:

*“In that moment I thought that [...] the teacher-centred approach was the best way of helping learners.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:08:13 – 00:08:23

*“I thought that I was doing the best I could to help learners, and the students were really thankful because they actually felt they were learning.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:08:34 – 00:08:45

Given the almost totally teacher-centred education he had received up to this point, Ricardo’s views about the role of the teacher were also very traditional between 1996 and 2003. He summarised the way he perceived his role as follows:

*“When you are in class as a student, you expect the teacher to explain everything, and as a teacher you feel that you are responsible for helping learners all the time, and if you don’t, obviously the first impression that the students have is that the teacher isn’t teaching.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:06:32 – 00:06:51

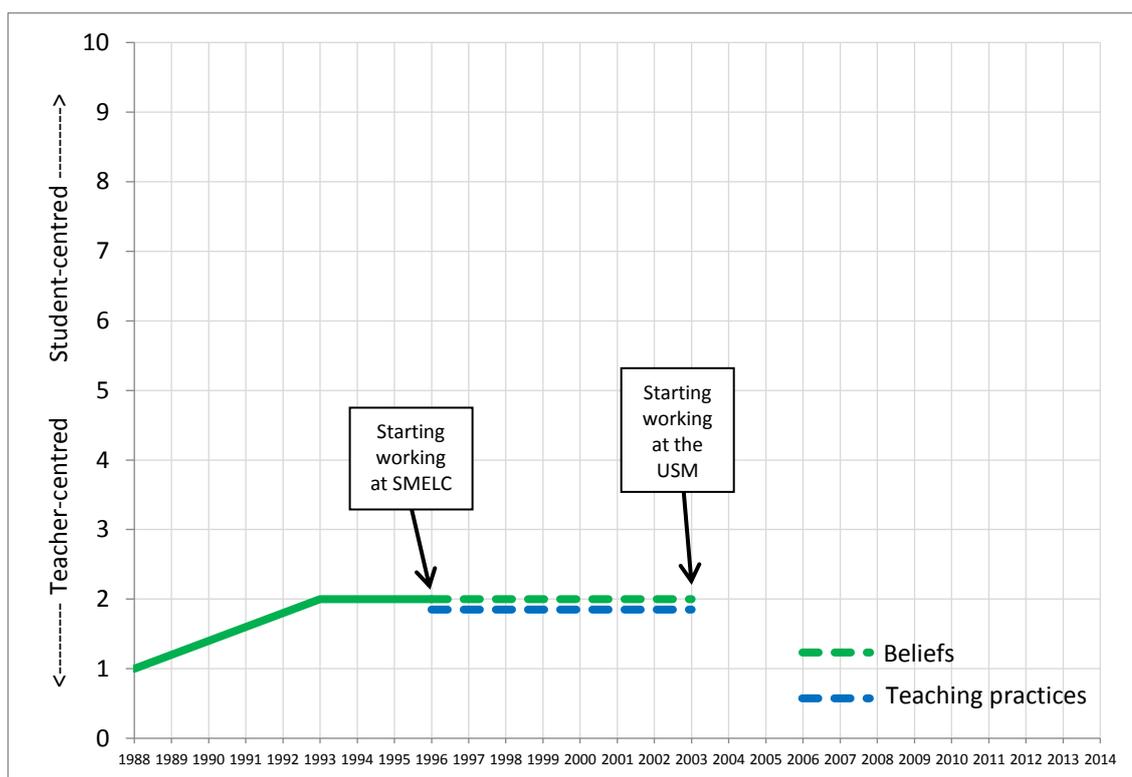
*“Teachers, authors and books [were] the only source of truth.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

#### 7.2.2.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs

The graph below indicates that Ricardo felt his teaching practices were generally as teacher-centred as his beliefs throughout his time at SMELC:

Fig. 7.2.2.2(i). Graph summarising Ricardo's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 1996 and 2003



This degree of coherence between Ricardo's beliefs and practices is understandable, given that he was teaching in a context which largely encouraged him to teach in a teacher-centred way. As mentioned in the previous sub-section, everybody seemed happy with the teaching approach at SMELC:

*“Everybody was happy: students, teachers and my boss. The students were not stressed because they felt they were learning [...] I was an excellent teacher for my students and my boss since students were achieving General English graded goals with constant of evidence progress in graded exams.”*

Ricardo, Notes produced during Interview 3

Furthermore, given the highly structured nature of the school, there would have been few opportunities for Ricardo to make changes to his teaching practices, even if he had wanted to:

*“In that school there was a lot of control on what we were teaching: the materials, the content, the language skills; in fact we couldn't teach conversation when we were teaching reading, so these kinds of restrictions didn't help me be more creative.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:12:59 – 00:13:17

*“The exams were already designed, so we just had to apply them, and they were the judges of whether the students were successful or not. So my purpose as a teacher was mainly to help learners succeed in their exams, more than helping them to learn, or to communicate.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:13:19 – 00:13:40

*“I could not [be creative and reflective as a teacher] since we had to use a book step-by-step and we had to follow some outlines for each class without any opportunity to be creative.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

Given these conditions, Ricardo felt that the student-centredness of his teaching practices would have remained at about a ‘2’ during his seven years teaching at SMELC. It was not until 2003, when he started working at the USM, that this would start to change.

### 7.2.3. Period 3: 2003-2014: Working at the USM

In 2003, Ricardo was hired as an EFL teacher at the USM. From this point onwards, he had numerous experiences which he felt had an impact on his beliefs and practices. Some of the most important of these were as follows:

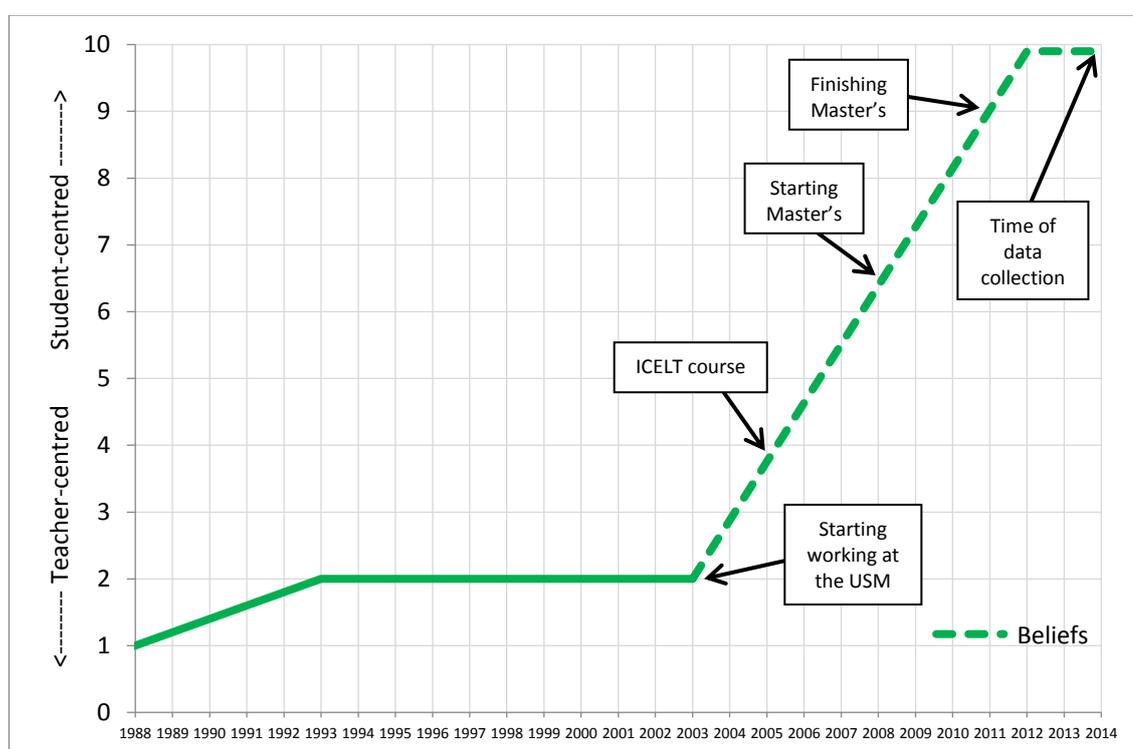
- 2004-2005: Diploma in Educational Technology (USM);
- 2005: ICELT course (British Council). (This was the same course that Rebecca had taken in 2000 and Elizabeth would also take in 2005; see next chapter);
- 2007: E-tutoring Certificate (British Council);
- 2008-2011: MEd in English Language Teaching (Master’s at a UK university);
- 2012-2013: Diploma in Blended Learning (USM).

In addition to the courses listed above, Ricardo also decided to study another undergraduate degree in Senior Management, in order to better place him to teach English for Specific Purposes. For the same reason, at the time of data collection, he was studying a PhD in Governance and Public Management. All of these experiences seem to have contributed towards a gradual change in his beliefs and practices. I analyse these changes in the following two sub-sections.

### 7.2.3.1. *Evolution of beliefs*

The graph below summarises how Ricardo felt his beliefs evolved between starting to work at the USM and the time of data collection. It shows a gradual increase in the extent to which he believed in student-centred EFL learning, rising from a '2' in 2003 to a '10' in 2012:

Fig. 7.2.3.1(i). Graph summarising Ricardo's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were between 1988 and 2014



It must be recognised that the graph above offers only a very simplified summary of what must have been a complex process of belief change during this time period. Indeed, because Ricardo had so many experiences between 2003 and 2014, I found it particularly

difficult to pinpoint exactly which belief changes had happened at specific points. In fact, this was one of the reasons why I decided to group all of these experiences into such a long chronological period (over ten years). Nevertheless, it is worth reiterating that these graphs only serve as a general illustration of the most important changes in participants' perceived beliefs and practices, in order for the reader to be able to see the main patterns of belief and behaviour change. In this case, the main pattern was Ricardo's gradual transition from largely teacher-centred beliefs in 2003 towards considerably more student-centred beliefs by 2014. One of the most important aspects of this change was starting to believe in more autonomous learning approaches, which was one of the key aspects of his definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 7.1).

Perhaps the most important factor which allowed Ricardo to experience these changes was the newfound "academic freedom" which was offered to him at the USM. This was a stark contrast to his working conditions at SMELC, in which he was granted very little flexibility:

*"When I began to work at the University, we didn't have rules like at SMELC; we had more freedom; to a certain extent total freedom. It gave me the chance to experience changes."*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:26:58 – 00:27:24

*"[That was] the chance that I had, [...] to try new things and see if they worked; to make changes and improve [my classes]. This is the flexibility that we have at the University."*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:27:48 – 00:28:06

The USM also provided Ricardo with the option to attend a wide range of training courses, depending on his needs and interests. Over the years, Ricardo attended a number of these courses, and many of them were related in some way to student-centred learning. He feels that every one of them has contributed towards changes in his beliefs:

*"[The University has] invited us to some courses, which have been really helpful."*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:09:43 – 00:09:49

*“All of these courses helped me not only to develop my language skills, but to experience a new way of learning (student-centred learning)”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

*“The change hasn’t been easy, but I have been thinking about all these changes, and I have been trying to use what I have learnt from the different training [courses] that the University has provided. [...] And I think that we learnt something new on each course.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:10:16 – 00:10:39

Similar to the experiences of Rebecca, it is interesting to note that Ricardo highlighted the importance of not only learning *about* student-centred learning, but also being able to “live” student-centred approaches first-hand:

*“After taking these courses and working at the University of San Martín, I experienced in person this authentic student-centred approach.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:16:33 – 00:16:42

*“These kinds of experiences, of being students and teachers at the same time, have given me a different perspective; they help me to think and to see beyond; they give me more options about what I could do.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:25:00 – 00:25:20

One of the first examples of Ricardo “living” student-centred learning was in 2005, when he took the In-Service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT) run by the British Council. It is interesting to note that Ricardo’s experiences of the ICELT course in 2005 seem to have been more positive than Rebecca’s experiences of it in the year 2000. He considered that the course was modelled in a very student-centred way (for example, students were invited to be more autonomous and critically reflect on their practices; as per his definition of student-centred EFL learning). This made him consider the possibility of replicating more autonomous learning approaches within his own classes:

*“On [the ICELT] course, I experienced kinds of classroom activities that were more or less student-centred [...] We had to read, we had to understand what we had to do, and the teacher didn't really get involved too much. So this was when I began to think about how to make that change in my teaching.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:05:20 – 00:05:52

*“There was a lot of self-reflection about my own teaching practice which helped me to make better decisions and changes.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

*“We were given a lot of readings [...] and we didn't have to memorise the information. That was something that I felt was interesting and useful, because we had to apply that information in the real contexts of our teaching. [...] I also had to write some essays where I had to reflect about the theory, my teaching, and my conclusions about whether or not it was possible to apply that theory into practice.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:15:40 – 00:16:20

As highlighted in the last two quotations above, reflection again emerges as an important factor in facilitating a process of teacher belief change. Ricardo was able to continue this process of reflection when he started a distance Master's run by a UK university, which he considered to be the most important student-centred experience in his educational life history. As with the ICELT course, what he found particularly meaningful was that he was able to experience more student-centred learning approaches for himself. Moreover, it was also during his Master's that he realised that content could be taught *through* the English language, as opposed to merely learning *about* the language. This paved the way for him to start believing in the value of English for Specific Purposes, which was another key part of his definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 7.1):

*“The Master’s degree in Education was the most significant student-centred learning experience, since the learning process was mainly reflective, and there was a lot of independent work and immersion in the language through authentic material. [...] We chose the topic of our own interest, read around the topic and applied theory in a practical context [...] We [also] wrote some essays in which we expressed our own opinions about what authors said on specific topics and how we could apply them to our real teaching contexts.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

*“Now I believe that giving students alternative topics to choose from is more motivating and meaningful, as opposed to getting them to read compulsory topics with little or no reflection. I also believe that languages can be taught indirectly; that is, by using them instead of teaching about them. This is made possible by giving students plenty of preparation time out of the classroom (school projects), in which they can read about a specific topic or problem and focus on resolving it using the English language, instead of focusing so much on the language itself.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

As indicated in the final quotation above, Ricardo slowly became more convinced by more student-centred learning approaches, and in particular the importance of reflection, critical thinking, student autonomy, and learner choice, which are all key aspects of his interpretation of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 7.1). Moreover, he started to realise how important *technology* might be in helping his students to work more autonomously. Aside from the ICELT course and the Master’s, another two courses which seem to have been important in this regard were the Diploma in Educational Technology and the E-tutoring Certificate:

*“On the Diploma in Educational Technology, I realised that technology could be used not only for preparing teaching material but also as a tool for learning.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

*“In that moment, I noticed that I could use my time in class for things like conversation activities, and the students could practice grammar outside of the classroom.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:17:54 – 00:18:17

*“I didn't believe too much in technology, but after this experience [on the e-tutoring course], I saw that we can learn more than in face-to-face classes.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:22:48 – 00:22:58

*“I saw in the electronic activities (e-tivities) an opportunity to make the student-centred approach a reality, since e-learners work with projects out of the classroom and they follow written instructions instead of the teachers' direct oral explanations that made the students more teacher-dependent.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

Later, Ricardo took another computer-based course called the Diploma in Blended Learning. Ricardo felt that this course further reinforced his beliefs about the importance of autonomous learning through technology. Furthermore, the course opened his eyes to the possibilities of a more formative approach to student assessment:

*“This course was very important in my development, since I learnt that blended learning would be better to help learners move smoothly from face-to-face classes to a more virtual environment. I also learnt that skills-based learning implied more responsibility and awareness from the same students about their learning progress. I learnt about self, peer and co-assessment; we were online and we had to check each other's work; we also had to give ourselves our own grades. [...] From this course, I began to implement [formative assessment] in my own teaching. I wasn't doing that [before], but now I think it's very important.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:55:25 – 00:56:28

A final aspect of Ricardo's professional development was that he started to specialise in the subject areas that he was teaching as English for Specific Purposes (again, ESP was an important component of his definition of student-centred EFL learning in Section 7.1). As mentioned at the start of this section, in 2006, he decided to study a second undergraduate degree, this time in the area of Senior Management. Furthermore, in 2012, he began to study a part-time PhD in the field of Governance and Public Management:

*“I realised that it would be necessary to specialise myself in a specific area to do a better job as an English teacher on professional degree programs, so I decided to study the Senior Management degree and the PhD in Governance and Public Management.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

*“Before taking these degrees, I thought that being an English teacher would be enough to succeed in my job. Now I know that we need to know about computers, we need to know about social work, we need to know about nursing, to have these kinds of changes that the University needs. Now I know that it was not a bad decision to receive specialised training.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

As is evident from the numerous courses Ricardo has attended, it is clear that he has made a real effort to make the most of the professional development opportunities offered to him at the USM. All of these experiences seem to have contributed towards his beliefs becoming gradually more “student-centred”. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to ascertain exactly *when* or *how* these belief changes occurred, and the process will have definitely been more complicated than the straight line on Fig. 7.2.3.1(i) suggests. Indeed, Ricardo was keen to emphasise that the change towards more student-centred beliefs has been a gradual transition; a combination of all of his experiences he has had since 2003. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of continuing to keep an open mind regarding future changes:

*“My beliefs, I think, are changing [...] constantly.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:23:58 – 00:24:03

*“I think that things are changing step-by-step, but I wouldn't say that we are right or wrong; I think we're in the process of improving, and changing our beliefs. It's not something that you can really change overnight; you have to be really convinced by the changes.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:41:44 – 00:42:06

*“There are a lot of things that I don't believe, but when I learn something new, even though I might not believe in those options, I try to use them [...] with my students, and then I come to my own conclusions: “well, it is in fact possible”, or “it is possible, but in different conditions”, or “I can adapt that idea, to try and make it viable”.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:23:23 – 00:23:57

The final quotation in the box above suggests that changes in Ricardo’s beliefs have been interwoven with changes to his teaching practices. Indeed, although he may not have believed in certain changes immediately, he would nevertheless try them out within his classes and then judge for himself how successful it might be. This supports the argument that beliefs and practices are often complexly intertwined, a phenomenon which I explore in more detail in the following sub-section as well as in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

A final issue worth mentioning in this sub-section is the way Ricardo’s beliefs about his role as a teacher evolved between 2003 and 2014. In a similar way to his beliefs about teaching methods, Ricardo felt that he experienced a gradual transition in the way he saw himself and his students. One of the main changes was that he began to see himself as more of a “tutor”, “counsellor” or “guide”, as opposed to just a provider of knowledge:

*“I realised about other ways of teaching; about other roles of the teacher. [...] [I realised that] as a teacher I didn't have to just teach English; I had to help education in general; to help make changes in society.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 01:01:34 – 01:01:59

*“I think that my new role has been as a “tutor”, since my main goal is not only to teach the English language, but to help learners succeed in life; not only by teaching them the knowledge in their areas of study, but [...] skills and new attitudes to be better professional citizens in society.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 01:03:28 – 01:03:51

It is difficult to pinpoint one particular experience which contributed towards this change in role. Indeed, in a similar way to his beliefs about teaching methods in general, he felt

that this change has been the culmination of all of his experiences since starting to work at the USM in 2003:

*“The Master's degree, the e-tutoring training courses, the educational technologies certificate, [and other courses] [...], all of them have given me a different perspective and some alternatives to change my role.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:40:10 – 00:40:41

As mentioned previously, perhaps the most significant change in Ricardo's role has been an increased emphasis on student autonomy. He expressed that this change has allowed him to start to let go of some of the control and authority typically associated with a more teacher-centred view of education. However, like all of the other changes he has made, he recognised that the transition has been gradual:

*“I have observed in myself that when I am in the classroom, I have this tendency that when somebody asks me a question about a new word for example, I immediately try to help, but afterwards I remember, “no, I don't have to help them; I have to give them a chance to use their dictionaries, to get used to this habit [of working autonomously]”.*”

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:40:41 – 00:41:04

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP (1/2)

My interpretations from classroom observations:

From the lessons I observed, there were several examples of Ricardo trying to encourage autonomous learning. This would support his view of himself as more of a “guide”. For example, in one class he left his students to do activities in pairs; in another he gave them instructions for an independent team project, whilst in another he showed them a website where they could practice grammar in their own time. Like Isabella, Ricardo was not strict with his students, despite some of them lacking discipline. This was especially the case at the School of Nursing, whose students, I felt, were quite disrespectful towards him at times (see subsequent Triangulation boxes).

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP (2/2)

Students' opinions from focus groups:

There were somewhat mixed opinions of Ricardo's role from the student focus groups. Firstly, Ricardo's group at the Social Work were generally very positive about the teacher-student relationship, and especially highlighted how he has encouraged them to be more autonomous:

*"I feel comfortable asking him things. [...] Beforehand [with the previous teacher] I was like scared and I'd keep my mouth shut because she was so strict."*

Sara (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 01:17:02 – 01:17:16

*"Now it's up to you if you make progress or not, because you're autonomous; it's up to you now, not the teacher."*

Margarita (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 00:10:33 – 00:10:42

However, some students from the School of Nursing seemed to perceive this increased freedom as a lack of friendliness or "indifference" on Ricardo's part. For example, one student, Juana, expressed the following:

*"He closes himself off, it's like "you're the student and I'm the teacher and I shouldn't joke with you or have any other kind of relationship except teaching you"."*

Juana (Student at the School of Nursing), Focus Group 6, 00:47:09 – 00:47:21

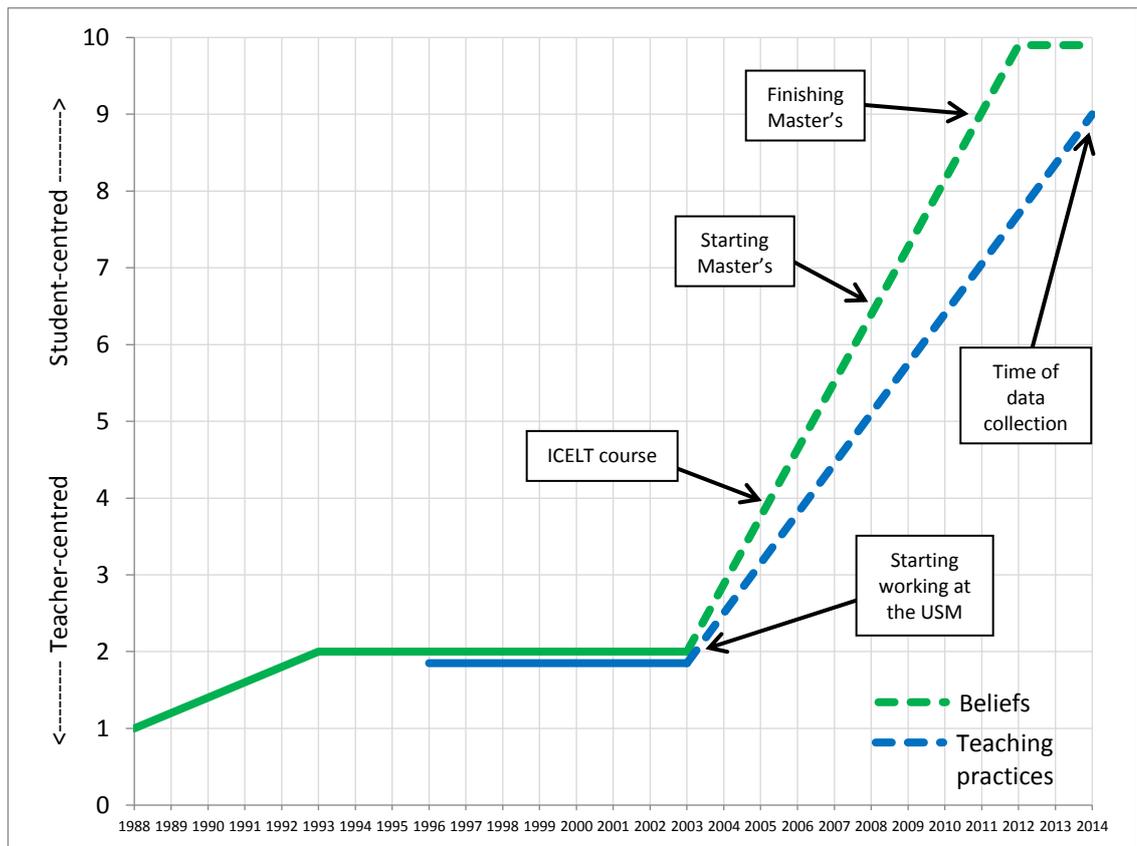
Having observed Ricardo's classes, I would judge the last comment to be quite harsh. I thought that Ricardo was polite and friendly with his students, whilst at the same time coming across as professional. Also, as mentioned earlier, some of the Nursing students were quite ill-disciplined and disrespectful towards him at times. Furthermore, only two students attended the Nursing focus group, which may lead us to doubt how representative their claims are of his teaching in general.

The next sub-section explores changes in Ricardo's teaching practices, which as mentioned previously, appear to have been complexly interlinked with changes to his beliefs.

7.2.3.2. Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs

Fig. 7.2.3.2(i) below summarises how Ricardo feels his teaching practices evolved since beginning to work at the USM:

Fig. 7.2.3.2(i). Graph summarising Ricardo's perceptions of how student-centred his beliefs were in relation to his teaching practices between 1988 and 2014



The graph above indicates that Ricardo felt that his teaching practices became gradually more student-centred between 2003 and 2014, rising from a '2' in 2003 to a '9' in 2014. However, as highlighted in the previous sub-section, these graphs must not be taken at face value, but rather understood to be representative of the general trends in Ricardo's teaching practices. The combinations of belief and behaviour change would have almost definitely been more complicated than the straight lines on the graph suggest.

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
EXAMPLES OF MORE STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES

My interpretations from classroom observations:

During the classroom observations, I observed a number of activities which would be consistent with Ricardo's definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 7.1). For example, Ricardo clearly tried to include activities which were linked to the students' degrees. For example, in one of the Nursing groups, he showed students a series of medical objects and they had to decide which of them they would prioritise if they were stranded on a desert island. Another example was a debate on the pros and cons of smoking. In his smaller groups, Ricardo organised the tables into a "round table" structure, in order to facilitate communicative activities. In larger groups, students were divided into tables of six so they could work together to carry out group work. English was generally used throughout with some exceptions, and in one of the Social Work classes, he gave a speech explaining the importance of using English in class. Finally, there were also many examples of Ricardo trying to encourage autonomous learning, which was one of the key aspects of his definition of student-centred EFL learning (see previous Triangulation boxes).

Students' opinions from focus groups:

The students generally supported my interpretations that Ricardo had included a lot of student-centred activities. For example, the students from the School of Social Work highlighted that they have been involved in more communicative activities:

*"[Ricardo] speaks to you the whole time in English."*

Sara (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 00:01:36 – 00:01:39

*"We've been practising speaking more in English. [...] As we're speaking more, we're learning more words, and at the same time he gets us to look up new words for ourselves."*

Carolina (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 00:08:46 – 00:09:05

*"We practise [speaking] English a lot; we have conversations with other people, [...] I feel like I'm practising my oral skills. That's what I like the most out of the class."*

Tania (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 01:00:40 – 01:00:57

Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous Triangulation box, the students confirmed that Ricardo has encouraged them to work more autonomously:

*"[Ricardo gives us] a lot of online activities to carry out at home."*

Juana (Student at the School of Nursing), Focus Group 6, 00:09:21 – 00:09:23

*"We're like more autonomous [...] you basically have to do everything by yourself."*

Carolina (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 00:05:32 – 00:05:39

It is interesting to note that, like the previous three participants, Ricardo stated that he has not been able to implement student-centred EFL learning to the extent that he would have liked. This is reflected in the graph above, which shows that the perceived student-centredness of his teaching practices was consistently lower than his beliefs.

One of the factors which may account for this inconsistency, especially during Ricardo's first few years teaching at the USM, was that he did not have any practical experience teaching in a student-centred way:

*"It wasn't really easy at the beginning since I didn't know how."*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:33:03 – 00:33:07

*"I received a lot of teacher training [but] I did not have time to apply [it] to my practice."*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:24:23 – 00:24:34

However, when Ricardo did start to feel more comfortable implementing more student-centred approaches, he encountered several obstacles to him doing so at the USM. This led him to take a somewhat cautious attitude towards its implementation, which may be compared to the "hybrid" approach outlined by Rebecca and Isabella:

*"I don't think that the "truth" can be applied to [all] situations; for example in student-centred learning, sometimes we want to apply this as a "recipe" or as a "best way" of teaching, but it is not possible, since we are applying it in different contexts."*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:22:13 – 00:22:34

*"We can't apply the methodology totally, because the situation in the classroom doesn't let us do that."*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:21:31 – 00:21:42

*"I think that what we have to do is to use the best parts of all of the methodologies, and to change according to the way we as teachers and the students can adapt to them."*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:21:59 – 00:22:17

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
EXAMPLES OF MORE TEACHER-CENTRED PRACTICES

My interpretations from classroom observations:

As Ricardo recognises, there were also several examples of more teacher-centred or “hybrid” practices during the classes I observed. For example, there were quite a few examples whole class choral repetition. Another example was when Ricardo explained a grammar point in Spanish and wrote its form on the board. In a later activity, students had to change the positive form of the verb to the negative and interrogative forms. Finally, in one class, he introduced the International Phonetic Alphabet to the group.

Students’ opinions from focus groups:

The students in the focus groups also highlighted that Ricardo sometimes used more “teacher-centred” approaches. For example, Carolina from the School of Social Work stated that he would sometimes spend a fair amount of time explaining similar points:

*“Sometimes we’ll be focused on doing an activity and he keeps explaining the same thing; we can’t concentrate because he keeps on with the same point.”*

Carolina (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 01:03:48 – 01:03:56

Moreover, Francisco from the School of Nursing suggested that the more communicative activities were not particularly frequent:

*“He does [give us communicative activities], but not that often.”*

Francisco (Student at the School of Nursing), Focus Group 6, 00:10:54 – 00:10:57

*“[The rest of the time] he gives us things to read, and then we have to do worksheets, things like that.”*

Francisco (Student at the School of Nursing), Focus Group 6, 00:11:33 – 00:11:39

The last two quotations may indicate that the interactive activities I observed may not have been particularly typical of Ricardo’s everyday practices. However, as mentioned previously, I am cautious to draw conclusions based on only two Nursing students, especially when I judged these two students to have been particularly ill-disciplined in the classes I observed. Indeed, perhaps the only way of increasing the “credibility” of this triangulation would be to observe more of Ricardo’s classes and/or gather a wider range of student opinions.

As was the case with the previous three participants, one of the most significant obstacles Ricardo identified was the students themselves. He expressed that he did not feel that USM students were currently “ready” for student-centred approaches such as autonomous learning, and would ideally need to go through some kind of training in order to prepare them to do so (this may explain the somewhat rebellious attitude I encountered with his students at the School of Nursing).

*“At the beginning the students got really stressed. [...] It was a kind of rejection from the students.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:17:42 – 00:18:05

*“They aren't prepared. I think it's a training process, and it's not only about consciousness or awareness about their own learning, but also skills; they need the skills to know how to use the [online] platform; they need skills to be more independent. That's why I haven't used these kinds of activities 100% online.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:33:26 – 00:33:57

*“These courses [will] only [be] successful if they have previous training.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 01:08:15 – 01:08:20

He also reported that asking learners to participate in self-assessment exercises has been particularly problematic, as many of the students give themselves higher grades than they deserve:

*“I know that student-centred learning implies some kind of student self-evaluation and reflection on their learning, but this is something that we don't really have much chance to do, because as a teacher we don't want to risk students grading themselves, because we know [...] all of them will try to give themselves a high grade.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:07:34 – 00:08:05

*“Some of them are honest, [but] not all of them.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:57:22 – 00:57:25

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
STUDENTS AS OBSTACLES

My interpretations from classroom observations:

As mentioned already, some of Ricardo's students seemed particularly difficult to teach. Students in both Schools, but particularly at the School of Nursing, seemed quite demotivated, and at times disruptive. I would agree with Ricardo's claims that these students may not be "ready" for autonomous learning activities. For example, in one class, several students had clearly not done the independent tasks Ricardo had left them. In another class, the students complained that the instructions had not been explained clearly enough, but in my view they had been explained extremely clearly (and several times). Furthermore, in the same class, the students manifested that they disagreed with the peer grading system. They seemed reluctant to grade themselves, and when they did, most of them gave themselves a '10' (the highest mark).

Students' opinions from focus groups:

As I have mentioned, some of Ricardo's students seemed not to enjoy the more autonomous learning activities he gave them. For example, Juana from the School of Social Work expressed that she especially did not like them:

*"I really don't like the online [autonomous learning] activities."*

Juana (Student at the School of Nursing), Focus Group 6, 00:05:01 – 00:05:04

Moreover, Juana commented that it was "stressful" to carry out communicative activities on a round table:

*"It's stressful that we're all together [on a round table]; no, we don't like it. [...] Yes, [I'd prefer if we were sat in rows], in a [normal] classroom."*

Juana (Student at the School of Nursing), Focus Group 6, 00:10:19 – 00:10:27

However, as mentioned earlier, students from the School of Social Work spoke much more positively about Ricardo's classes. In fact, like Isabella's students at the School of Modern Art, some of them admitted that their struggles to work autonomously may have been down to their own attitudes:

*"An obstacle would be our attitudes; we're like really [...] really lazy."*

Carolina (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 00:59:10 – 00:59:26

*"Honestly I don't consider myself to be a particularly good student [...] I could be a good student if I studied or if I handed in my work on time, but I'm one of those people who leaves everything until the last minute."*

Tania (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 01:21:19 – 01:21:39

*"We're really bipolar, I mean, we like it when [...] he gives us [more freedom]. But at the same time we want him to be stricter."*

Carolina (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 00:50:27 – 00:50:37

As mentioned in the box above, some of Ricardo's students (from the School of Nursing) have complained about some of his more student-centred activities. Unfortunately, when

this has happened, he has not always been able to count on the support of University authority figures. This has left him in a very uncomfortable situation, in which he would ideally like to teach in a more student-centred way, but is fearful to do so:

*“If you make very fast changes, the students might begin to feel uncomfortable and complain. Then the Head of School becomes aware of that, and they begin to question your teaching.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:40:26 – 00:40:31

*“If you want to be successful in the teacher evaluations, you cannot make really big changes. You have to strike a balance. And that’s what gives you the chance to continue working at the University. We have to have changes, but you also have to keep your job.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:52:33 – 00:52:56

*“The management [...] listens to [the students] a lot, and sometimes they believe them more than us, so that's something that has to change.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 01:00:22 - 01:00:37

What Ricardo expresses in the quotations above is quite disturbing. He clearly seems worried that if he implements a version of student-centred EFL learning which the students do not like, then he might be at risk of losing his job. The examples above indicate that Ricardo is being undermined by the very powers that are (supposedly) encouraging him to introduce more student-centred approaches. These authority figures appear to lack a clear understanding of what student-centred EFL learning is and how teachers might be supported in order for it to be implemented successfully. I explore this issue in more detail in the Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
BEING UNDERMINED BY AUTHORITY FIGURES

My interpretations from classroom observations:

Having worked at a Mexican university myself, I am not surprised at all that Ricardo has felt undermined by authorities. Moreover, I observed some examples of this in the lessons I observed. For example, in one of Ricardo's Nursing classes, almost all the students arrived over 30 minutes late. This was because the School had planned another activity at the same time as the English class. In another class at the School of Social Work, Ricardo's students had not even been allocated a classroom, and part of the class had to take place on some picnic tables outside. These two examples clearly constrain Ricardo's teaching, and reinforce the idea that the English class is considered a low priority by the USM authorities.

Another example of authority figures not supporting English teachers was that they have continued to pressure Ricardo to set summative exams, despite this contradicting Ricardo's interpretation of student-centred EFL learning:

*"They still want us to set exams; if we have a problem with a student, [they say things like] "let us check their exam". [...] [But] student-centred learning is supposed to imply some changes to the way we assess students."*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:44:57 – 00:45:19

*"Authorities expect teachers to show evidence of the students' progress. [...] I think this is an obstacle, since the students would perform better under the student-centred approach, by having more formative than summative weighting, because making mistakes and thinking about them is part of learning."*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:51:18 – 00:51:55

This is an example of the growing tendency towards standardisation, which Ricardo is strongly against:

*"An obstacle would be that the University authorities try to implement a uniform way of teaching, despite all the teachers having different educational backgrounds and beliefs about teaching."*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:59:01 – 00:59:12

*“They want to standardise teaching for all the teachers; they want to have exactly the same program with the same procedures and the same classes; the same bunch of photocopies with the same readings. And I don't think this is for the best.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 01:00:50 – 01:01:11

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
EXCESSIVE FOCUSING ON THE GRADE

My interpretations from classroom observations:

Again, my own experiences working in Mexico, coupled with what I saw in the classroom observations, support Ricardo's frustrations that there is often an excessive focus on the grade. For example, in one Nursing class and another Social Work class, several minutes were spent at the beginning of the lesson explaining in detail how the students would be graded, in response to several questions from students.

Along these lines, some Schools have asked Ricardo to teach a specific grammar program, although this is not as common as it used to be:

*“I had to follow a grammar program [provided by] the University English Department, in which there were a lot of grammar topics to cover per semester, and it was an obstacle to me applying what I was learning on my training courses. When there is a program to follow, you fall back again to traditional teaching, since you know that you have to cover all the program and its grammar [...] instead of really helping learners to communicate or to use English in real situations.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:25:59 – 00:26:34

Another factor which Ricardo identified as preventing him from putting more student-centred approaches into practice was a lack of resources. For example, he mentioned that some Schools at the USM are unwilling to provide him with photocopies:

*“A student-centred approach implies more reading and a lot of thinking about what students are learning, but I do not think that students, teachers or the school authorities are willing to pay for all the photocopies that the students would need in a face-to-face course. I estimate that if I was not working online, I would be spending at least 3,200 sheets of paper per year in my three Social Work groups.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

Interestingly, on training courses such as the ICELT course and the Master's degree, photocopies *were* provided for the teacher participants. However, when teaching their regular English classes, teachers were not granted the same privileges. This appears to be a good example of training courses being disconnected from the realities in which educational changes are supposed to be implemented:

*“On the Master's degree, we had the chance to choose a lot of articles, but the University provided those articles. [...] But when we want to apply this methodology in our real classes with the students, it's more difficult, since getting photocopies for all the students would be very expensive for the teachers.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:33:34 – 00:34:03

One way of saving paper would be to upload activities to online platforms. As mentioned earlier, Ricardo has made a real effort to incorporate technology into his classes over the last few years. However, another problem he mentioned was that the availability and quality of computer facilities has not always been satisfactory:

*“In the past, the University gave us these training courses, but when we wanted to use them in the computer rooms, the computers were very, very, very, slow. Fortunately, they are faster now.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:44:30 – 00:44:43

*“Last semester, for example, I was having problems accessing the computer room [...] I told the coordinator that I was having problems. [...] Fortunately they talked with the person responsible for the computer room, and he gave me access again.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:50:57 – 00:52:09

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
LACK OF APPROPRIATE TEACHING SPACE

My interpretations from classroom observations:

The computer room at the School of Social Work was not particularly state-of-the-art. The computers and internet were slow, the wireless internet did not work, and there were not enough computers for all the students. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, one of the Social Work groups had to leave their classroom for part of one of their classes, to make way for another class. They had to finish the last hour or so of the class on some picnic tables outside, which I considered totally inappropriate for university level EFL teaching.

Students' opinions from focus groups:

The students at the School of Social Work also highlighted similar issues regarding the limitations of the teaching space:

*"The space [is an issue] too; [...] we get distracted if we're 15 or 30 minutes in the computer room and then we have to come back to the classroom; we waste so much time going back and forth. And then they kick us out of the classroom and we have to work on the picnic tables, because there's no space; there's no classroom."*

Carolina (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 00:44:08 – 00:44:31

*"From what I'm seeing [...] it's not [Ricardo's] fault at all; [...] we can't blame him for the fact that they kick us out of the classroom."*

Sara (Student at the School of Social Work), Focus Group 7, 00:50:38 – 00:50:53

A final issue which Ricardo mentioned was that that limited resources have been made available to help him to teach English for Specific Purposes. Although he has gone out of his way to specialise in the area of management, he has found it more difficult to teach ESP in other areas:

*"They tell us to [teach ESP], but we don't have lot of [ESP] materials."*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:50:13 – 00:50:20

*"They want English teachers to focus their teaching on the specific subject area, but we aren't really nurses; we aren't really social workers."*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:48:29 – 00:48:42

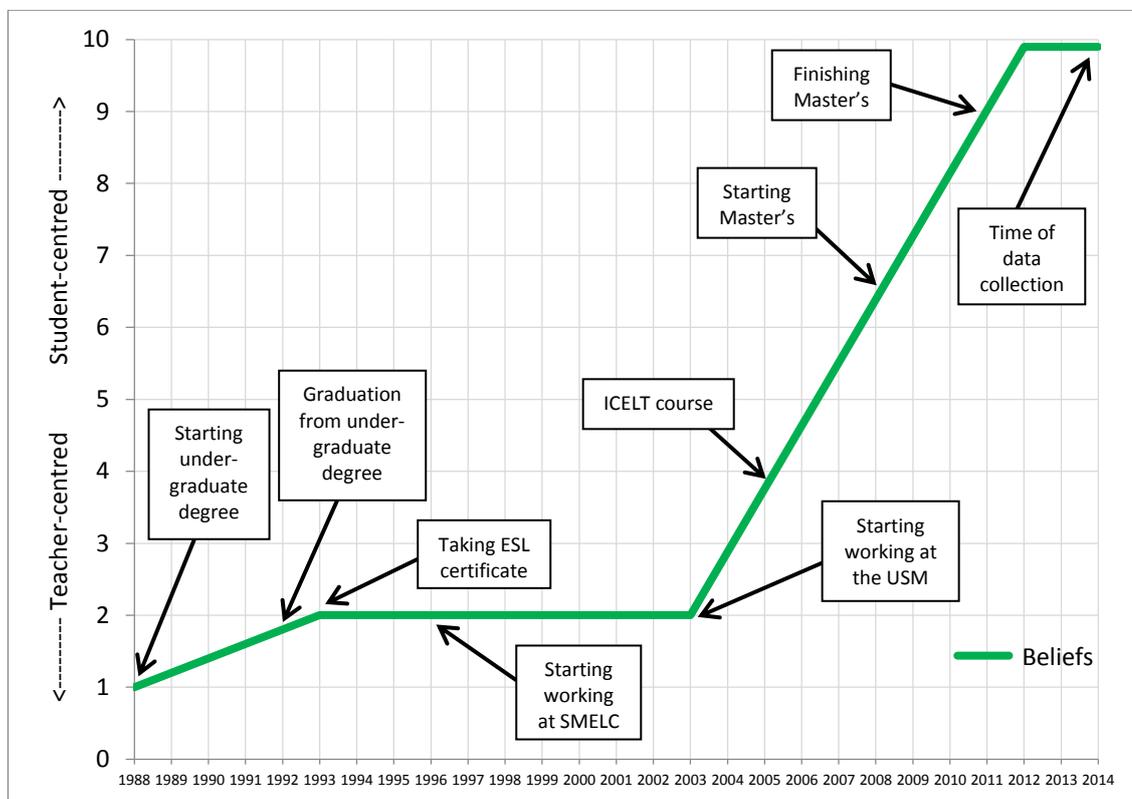
*"We need training in the areas where we want to focus the English subject."*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:53:08 – 00:53:15

### 7.3. Summary

#### 7.3.1. Summary of the evolution of Ricardo's beliefs

Fig. 7.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Ricardo's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of his educational life history



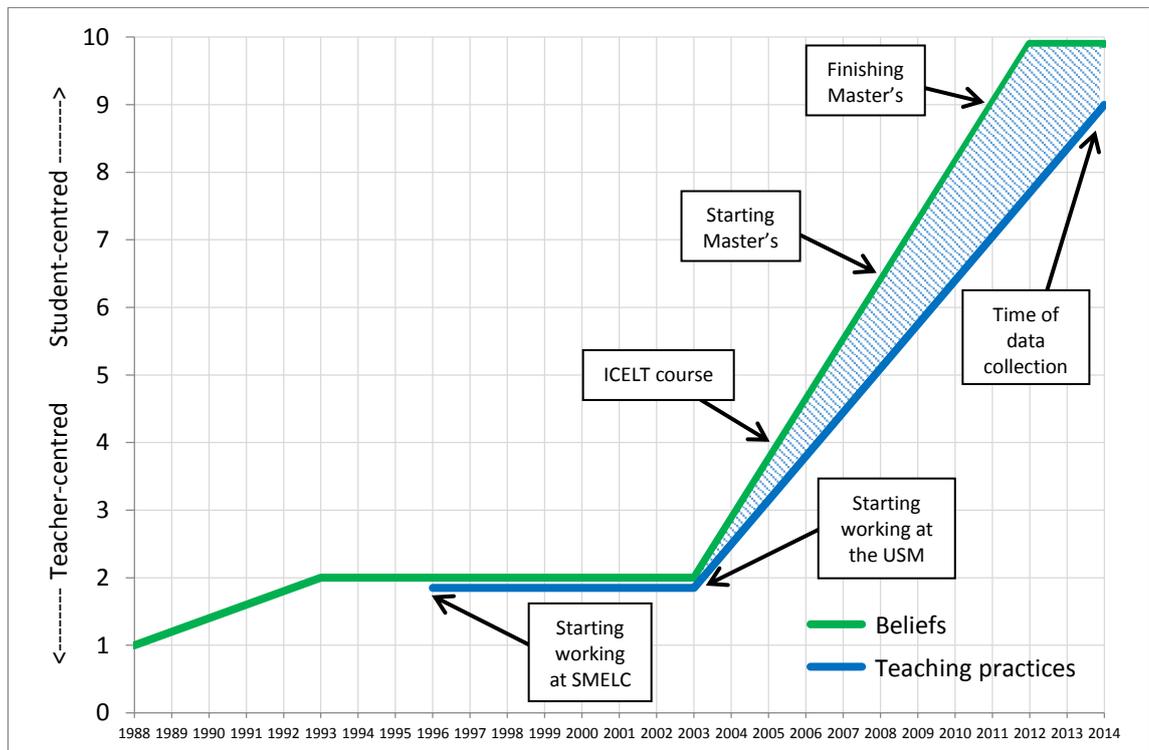
The graph above summarises the evolution of Ricardo's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning between 1988 and 2014. As I have mentioned already, this graph only offers a simplified version of the way Ricardo's beliefs may have evolved over the course of two and a half decades. However, the main trends of belief change are still apparent.

The first chronological period in Ricardo's educational life history was between 1988 and 1996, when he was still preparing to become an EFL teacher. During this time, he felt that the extent to which he believed in student-centred EFL learning would have varied between a '1' and a '2'. He felt that this was due to his experiences at school and university, which provided him with a very teacher-centred model of education. This score of a '2' did not change between 1996 and 2003, when he worked at a private language institute called SMELC. This school was a very traditional and structured school, and offered Ricardo little flexibility to change his beliefs or practices.

It was not until he was hired at the USM in 2003 when Ricardo started to experience any significant changes to his beliefs about teaching. This was facilitated by the certain degree of “academic freedom” at the USM, which allowed him to participate in a number of professional development opportunities. Some of these included the ICELT course run by the British Council, a Master’s in English Language Teaching, and several courses related to implementing technology in the classroom. All of these experiences appear to have contributed towards a gradual change in Ricardo’s beliefs. By the time of the data collection, he felt that the extent to which he believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been a ‘10’. However, like Rebecca, Antonio and Isabella, he was also keen to stress that it was important for him to keep an open mind towards future changes, and that he was happy to use teacher-centred approaches if they were considered more appropriate in certain situations.

### 7.3.2. *Summary of Ricardo’s teaching practices in relation to his beliefs*

*Fig. 7.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Ricardo’s belief in relation to his teaching practices over the course of his educational life history*



The graph above summarises the relationships between Ricardo’s beliefs and teaching practices between 1988 and 2014. Again, the graph does not do justice to the complex relationships between beliefs and behaviour change, but the general patterns may nevertheless be observed.

Ricardo's first real working experience was in 1996, when he started working at a private language school SMELC. At this point, there appears to have been a great deal of coherence between his beliefs and his practices, which he both rated as a '2'. This consistency may be attributed to the fact that everybody seemed happy with him teaching in a teacher-centred way, and that the school itself was very structured, offering few opportunities for him to do anything different.

However, this would change when Ricardo started working at the USM. The University allowed him considerably more flexibility than at SMELC, allowing him to experiment with new teaching approaches. The straight line on the graph above is probably not the best representation of what actually happened to Ricardo's practices between 2003 and 2014, and the reality would have definitely been more complex. However, it does show the general tendency that his perceived teaching practices became gradually more student-centred over time, reaching a score of '9' by 2014.

However, like the previous three participants, Ricardo identified a number of obstacles to him *fully* putting student-centred EFL learning into practice, and in particular the introduction of *more autonomous* learning approaches, which formed an important part of his interpretation of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 7.1). Some of these obstacles included students not being "ready" to work in a more autonomous way, a lack of support from University authorities, being forced to set summative exams, being forced to follow a teacher-centred program, and a lack of resources. In light of these obstacles, Ricardo recognised that he often has to teach in a more teacher-centred way, which is relatable to the idea of "hybrid" teaching which was mentioned by Rebecca and Isabella.

## **CHAPTER 8: THE EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORY OF ELIZABETH**

This chapter is the last of the five Data Analysis chapters. It focuses on the educational life history of the fifth participant, Elizabeth.

### **8.1. Elizabeth’s interpretation of student-centred EFL learning**

The characteristics of student-centred EFL learning which Elizabeth emphasised as being most relevant for her teaching were as follows:

- A more flexible attitude towards what students actually need, as opposed to merely telling them what is best for them;
- Basing learning around what students already know; allowing students to construct their own knowledge and meanings;
- More of a focus on helping students “learn to learn”;
- A change in the role of the teacher from the “star of the show” towards more of a “guide” or “facilitator” of students’ learning.

(Adapted from my field notes taken during Interview 3 with Elizabeth)

As with all of the previous teacher cases, it is important that we bear this interpretation in mind when reading this final Data Analysis chapter.

### **8.2. Key periods in Elizabeth’s educational life history**

The key chronological periods which emerged from Elizabeth’s educational life history were as follows:

- *Period 1*: 1999-2005: Studying at the USM and first two years teaching
- *Period 2*: 2005-2006: The ICELT and “Learning to Learn” courses
- *Period 3*: 2006-2014: Last eight years working at the USM

These periods are examined separately in the following three sections.

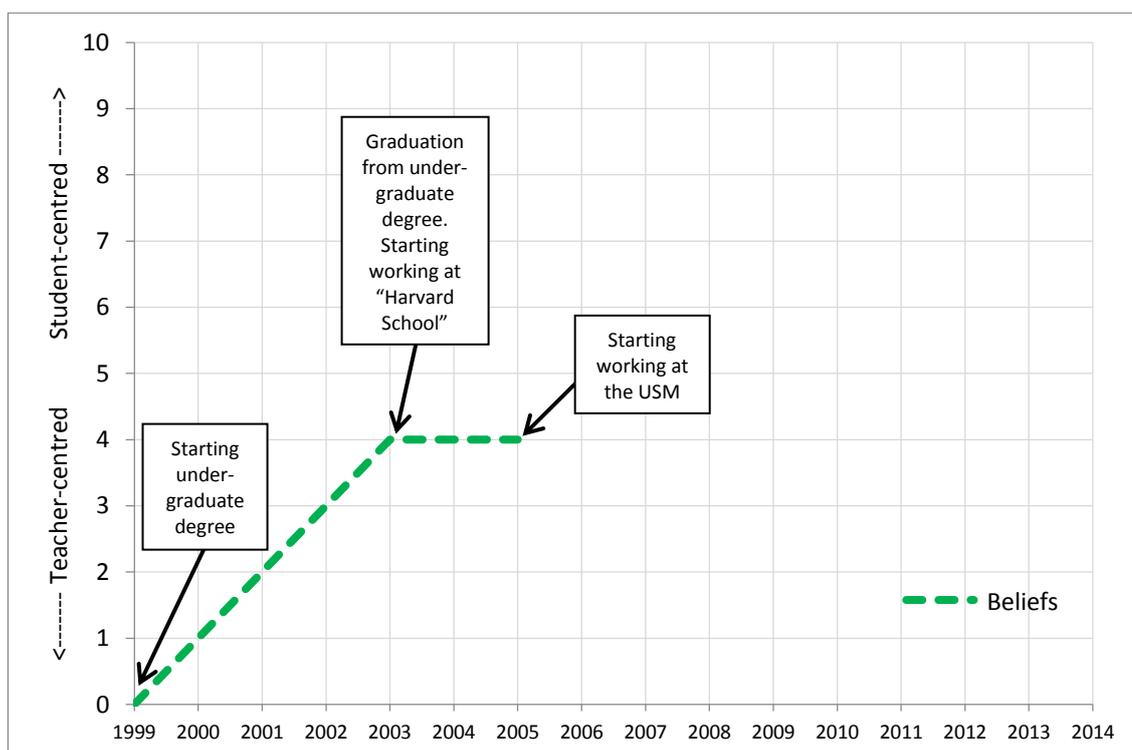
### 8.2.1. *Period 1: 1999-2005: Studying at the USM and first two years teaching*

The first main period of Elizabeth's educational life history was between 1999 and 2005, which consisted of her time studying her undergraduate degree and her first two years working as an EFL teacher. Like all of the previous teacher participants, Elizabeth had studied her degree at the USM's School of Languages. However, unlike Rebecca, Antonio and Isabella, she was not immediately hired at the USM at the end of the course. After graduating in 2003, she began working at a private bilingual institute called "Harvard School", where she taught a variety of age groups, from preschool to secondary level. After approximately six months of working at Harvard School, she was offered the chance to return to the USM as an EFL teacher.

#### 8.2.1.1. *Evolution of beliefs*

The graph below summarises how Elizabeth felt her beliefs evolved between 1999 and 2005. The graph shows that the extent to which she felt her beliefs were student-centred rose from a '0' in 1999 to a '4' by the time she graduated in 2003:

Fig. 8.2.1.1(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1999 and 2005



As was the case with the previous four participants, these early teacher-centred beliefs may be linked to Elizabeth's experiences of education and language learning. Moreover, like the other participants, these beliefs appear to have been unconscious in nature, given that she was not aware at the time that there might be other ways of teaching.

An important example of this teacher-centred model of education was her time studying at the local private institute, the San Martín English Language College (SMELC). This was the same school where Antonio had studied and Ricardo had taught (in fact, Ricardo was Elizabeth's teacher for a time at SMELC). Looking back, Elizabeth concurred with the perceptions of Antonio and Ricardo, who both felt that the school was very traditional:

*“I think it was teacher-centred, because they had to follow a program, not according to what the teacher had planned, but the institution.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:05:12 – 00:05:31

*“There was the structure teacher; the one teaching you grammar, and there was the reading teacher; Ricardo was my reading teacher. The other one was for conversation, and the other one was for listening.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:04:00 – 00:04:21

The generally teacher-centred approach at SMELC was not seen as a bad thing by Elizabeth or her classmates. In fact, as Ricardo highlighted in the previous chapter, everyone seemed happy –teachers and students alike- with the way that the school was organised:

*“I really enjoyed being there [...] I just went there for like two hours every day. It really didn't feel like I was studying anything; I was just going there for fun.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:03:13 – 00:03:36

Although her experiences at SMELC were generally positive, Elizabeth did not feel she was able to communicate with native speakers during her time studying there:

*“That was the way I learnt, but I really didn't know how to communicate when I was studying there; I really didn't feel capable of having a conversation or understanding someone.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:06:12 – 00:06:36

Despite this, Elizabeth felt that she had a relatively advanced level of English by the time she started her undergraduate degree in 1999. This meant that she did not find the degree too challenging from a linguistic point of view, which allowed her to dedicate more of her energy to the “teaching” side of the course:

*“I think I was like an upper intermediate when I started [my degree], so I basically developed reading strategies, and I really didn't have to focus on my language. That's why I really enjoyed studying there, because I was learning about other topics related to education.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:01:03 – 00:01:37

Being able to focus on “teaching” without worrying too much about her level of English appears to have given Elizabeth a platform to start thinking about ways in which she might teach differently. However, her experiences of her undergraduate degree were far from totally student-centred. Although she did remember learning *about* topics related to student-centred EFL learning, she also recalled several more teacher-centred experiences:

*“I had different kinds of teachers; all of them were different. Some taught in a communicative way. [...] And of course, I had my grammar teacher, and he taught us to analyse everything about grammar. [...] Every teacher had his or her own way of teaching; [...] some of them were really communicative, others really structured.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:08:10 – 00:09:30

The combination of Elizabeth's experiences on her degree led to some changes in her beliefs about teaching. When she graduated, she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been about a '4'. Although this score suggests that her beliefs were still slightly more teacher-centred than student-centred, it nevertheless represents a meaningful change from the score of '0' which she gave herself in 1999.

When Elizabeth finished her degree in 2003, she was hired at a private bilingual institute called Harvard School, where she taught groups from preschool to junior high school level. Working with such a variety of students from different age groups gave her a number of interesting experiences:

*“It was really funny, because when you have small children, they don't really accept when you speak to them in English all the time. You say “this is a rabbit”, and they say in Spanish “no, my mom says it's a “conejo”.” So there were some really interesting experiences right there. [...] When I was teaching in nursery I was teaching them a lot of vocabulary, and exploring senses. With preschool, they were 4 and 5 years old, and they were already starting to read, so with them I was working more fluency, more with the language. [...] And with all of them I used to sing and tell stories.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:15:44 – 00:17:21

*“I really didn't like it in primary, because sometimes they don't want to work, so you had to force them. [...] What I used to do with them was like more exploring, experimenting [...] I used to do projects with them, and they would use all the vocabulary and structures they were learning about in their projects. But I really didn't like it because I felt that they were forced to learn.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:18:08 – 00:19:47

*“I liked secondary, because I had students who were conscious of studying, so they were paying attention to you all the time, and I had really good students; they really liked to have good grades so they were always paying attention.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:19:49 – 00:20:09

As the quotations above suggest, working with such a wide variety of age groups meant that Elizabeth's teaching approaches varied considerably during her time working at Harvard School. Indeed, as the students got older, she felt that she taught in a more structured and teacher-centred way. This was in large part due to the fact that the school expected her to teach using a largely grammar-based textbook:

*“At that time, I think because of the program at the school, I had to teach everything in a very structured way; [...] [the students] were not really able to express what they were thinking.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:20:10 – 00:20:33

*“[The secondary program at Harvard School] was grammar-based. There were also communicative activities, but they had to be based around the topics of the book, and they were not really talking about what they were thinking, or what they liked. And because of the timings we had; they asked you to plan the whole week around the book.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:20:50 – 00:21:17

Again, Elizabeth did not necessarily see this structured, grammar-based approach as a bad thing:

*“I think that it was good for them. [The students] were not really expressing their ideas, but they were learning the language.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:21:22 – 00:21:39

This is reflected by the fact that she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning would have remained about a ‘4’ throughout her time working at Harvard School.

After approximately six months working at Harvard School, Elizabeth was offered the chance to return to the USM to work at the School of Politics. There, she encountered a somewhat similar structure to the secondary level of Harvard School, in the sense that she was told to base her teaching around a grammar-based textbook:

*“When I started, the University gave me a program. [...] There were some different levels, and I got the higher ones. [...] The English program was based on a book called "Matters". I started with "Intermediate Matters", and all the grammar points had to be followed with the grammar of the book.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:25:44 – 00:26:47

As had been the case in Harvard School, Elizabeth was quite happy to teach in this generally teacher-centred way:

*“I enjoyed teaching. I think I enjoyed it because at that point I wasn't too overloaded with work; it was easy for me, because I came in, gave them the structure to practice, taught them, and they were practising.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:27:17 – 00:27:44

During her first year working at the USM, Elizabeth felt that the extent to which her beliefs about teaching were student-centred would have remained at about a ‘4’.

Before continuing to the next section, I will briefly consider how Elizabeth perceived her role as a teacher during this first chronological period. She identified two key characteristics of this role, both of which would have to be considered as teacher-centred in nature. The first was that the teacher was generally seen as the “source of all knowledge”:

*“I was the dictionary in the class. They just wanted everything that you were telling them; you were like the Bible.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:17:16 – 00:17:33

The second characteristic was that there was a certain level of formality and distance between herself and her students:

*“I think the relationship between the students and I was really formal, not really friendly; I was the teacher in front of the class; the students were doing what I was asking them to do, and that was it; that was the relationship between the students and the teacher, just following the book.”*

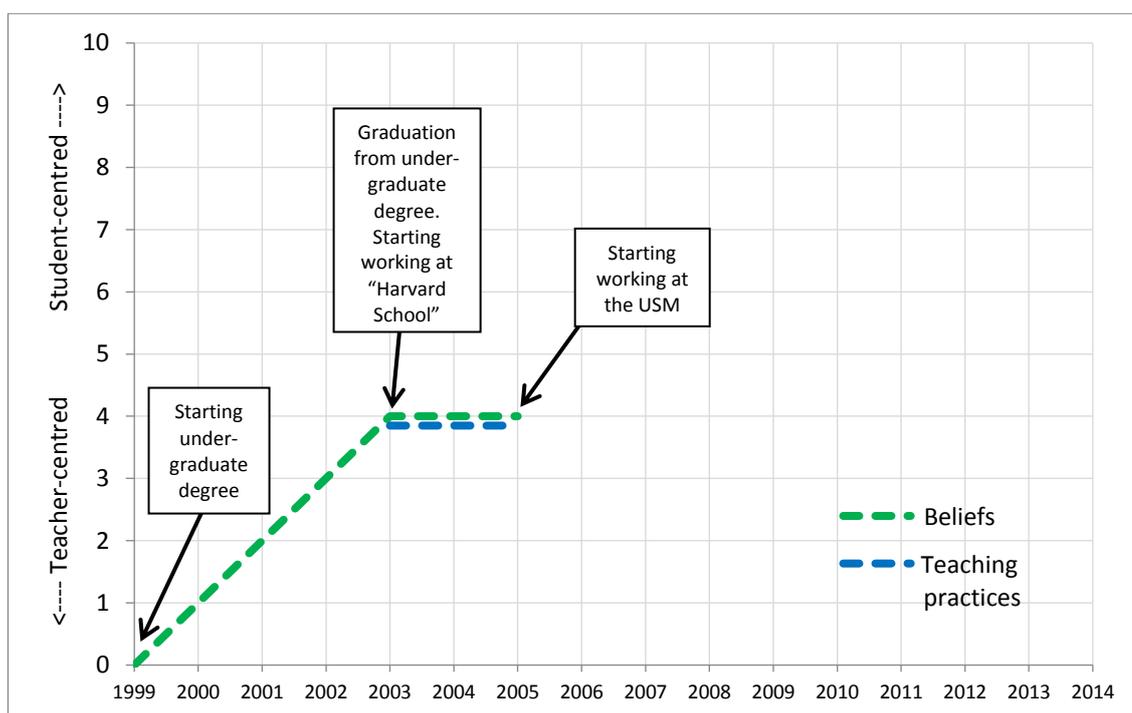
Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:03:38 – 00:04:05

This role would gradually start to change over the next few years. I analyse this change in more detail in the next chronological period (Section 8.2.2.1).

### 8.2.1.2. *Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs*

The graph below summarises Elizabeth's perceptions of her teaching practices during her first two years as an EFL teacher. It shows that the extent to which she felt her teaching practices were student-centred would have been about a '4', which was the same score as she gave to her beliefs:

Fig. 8.2.1.2(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1999 and 2005



This strong level of coherence between what Elizabeth believed was the best way to teach and what she actually did in her classroom might be explained by two main factors. Firstly, as mentioned in the previous section, she found teaching grammar a largely comfortable experience, meaning that there would have been little reason for her to change. Secondly, even if she had wanted to change, both schools (Harvard School and later the USM's School of Politics) were keen for her to teach grammar using a grammar-based textbook:

*“At the beginning I was just following the book. You were not really thinking about designing [...] [classes] depending on what your students needed, you were just going to teach what you had been told to teach.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:27:12 – 00:27:37

*“In that moment, I didn't really have a lot of thinking to do about my teaching, because I had to work with a book, [...] and I had to work a lot with structure, and all the topics were related to that structure.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:03:00 – 00:03:31

However, these predominately teacher-centred practices would soon begin to change. I discuss these changes in the following section.

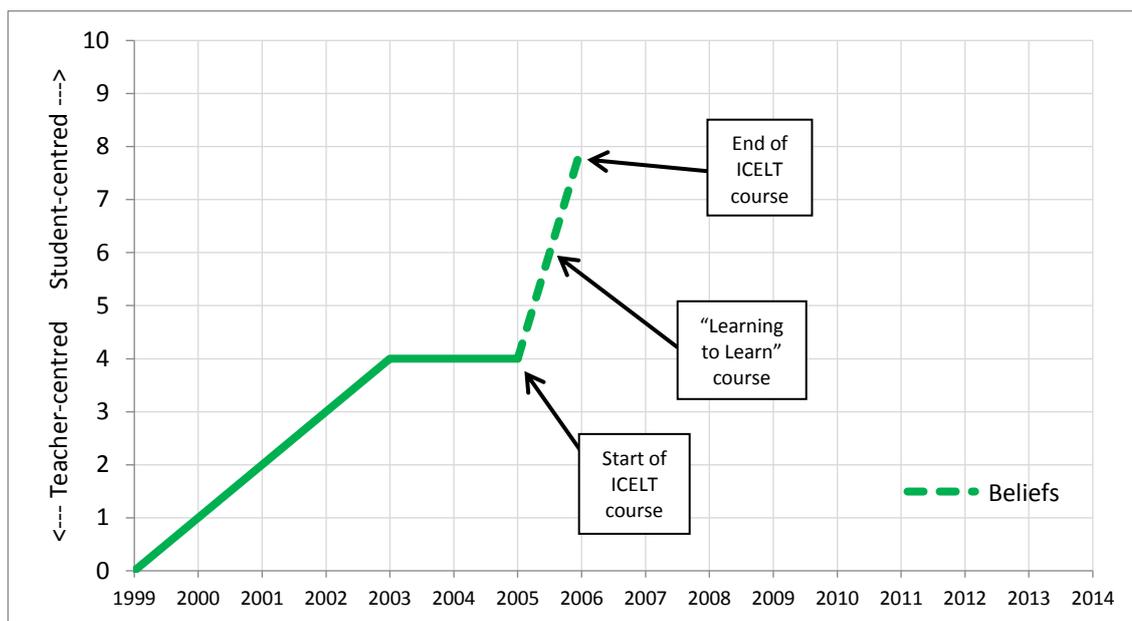
### 8.2.2. Period 2: 2005-2006: The ICELT and “Learning to Learn” courses

Between 2005 and 2006, Elizabeth attended two courses which she felt had a significant impact on her development as a teacher. These were the ICELT course run by the British Council, and another course called “Learning to Learn”, which was offered by the USM. Both of these courses encouraged Elizabeth to reflect upon her current teaching practices and consider how she might start making changes to them.

#### 8.2.2.1. Evolution of beliefs

Both the ICELT and the “Learning to Learn” course appear to have had an important impact on Elizabeth’s beliefs, especially when it came to adapting classes to students’ needs, which was an important part of her definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 8.1). Indeed, as the graph below shows, the extent to which she felt her beliefs were student-centred rose from about a ‘4’ in 2005 to an ‘8’ in 2006:

Fig. 8.2.2.1(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1999 and 2006



The fact that both of these courses gave Elizabeth the opportunity to reflect about herself and her teaching practices appears to have been an important factor in helping her make changes to her beliefs:

*"[The ICELT course] was a time for a lot of reflection about what I was teaching, and other teachers' teaching."*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:04:37 – 00:04:50

*"In that course, you were thinking more about the students' needs, what they needed to learn, what the objective was, and based on that, I had to plan my class."*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:05:16 – 00:05:35

*"We had to do a lot of reflection, a lot of reading, a lot of practice. So I think in that moment, my way of teaching started to change."*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:29:17 – 00:29:36

“[On the "Learning to Learn" course] *I was also reflecting on the way we had been taught before, or the way we had learnt the language. It was not only about English; this "Learning to Learn" course was about all the subjects you have to learn.*”

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:07:58 – 00:08:23

*“I think those courses were really good for me, and kind of influenced the way that I went on to change my way of teaching.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:08:48 – 00:09:01

On both courses, strategies such as observation schemes, especially those which incorporated peer observation, seem to have been particularly useful:

“[On the ICELT course] *I had a lot of observations; I had to observe my peers, and my peers were observing me. I [also] had tutors, who were observing my classes.*”

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:04:50 – 00:05:01

“[On the "Learning to Learn" course] *I was also receiving feedback from other teachers, and we were listening to what the other teachers of the other content areas were doing with their students; how they were teaching them.*”

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:08:27 – 00:08:46

Although Elizabeth did have positive memories of the ICELT course, she also identified some more frustrating aspects of it. One of these was that she was forced to cover a certain number of activities, and all the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), in every single class. In retrospect, she felt that this somewhat undermined the spirit of “adapting her classes to her students’ needs”:

*“I was really stressed at times about the timings. [...] You were always checking how long your activities were taking. [...] In every class your students had to practice all the skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing; you had to manage to get your students to do all these activities in one hour.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:30:22 – 00:31:27

*“It was frustrating because they had really different kinds of students, and some students were able to do it in that amount of time, but some others couldn’t.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:05:57 – 00:06:07

Elizabeth’s opinions of the ICELT course seem to be somewhat similar to those of Rebecca, who also felt that the course was to a certain extent prescriptive in nature. The experiences of Rebecca and Elizabeth suggest that the course was attempting to prescribe one “correct” method, regardless of the different contexts in which it was expected to be implemented. These examples support the argument that courses implemented with such a “one-size-fits-all” attitude may not be as successful as hoped in the long term. I explore these issues in more detail in the following Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

A final aspect to mention is the way Elizabeth’s perceived role as a teacher began to change as a result of the ICELT and “Learning to Learn” courses. She felt that it was around this time when she started to see herself as more of a “guide” to her students, which was another key aspect of her definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 8.1):

*“The relationship with the students started to change after these courses. [...] I started to analyse more what my students needed and what they were asking for; I started considering what they were telling me about what they needed.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:10:01 – 00:10:27

*“So that helped me, and the students [started to see] that I was like a guide to them.”*

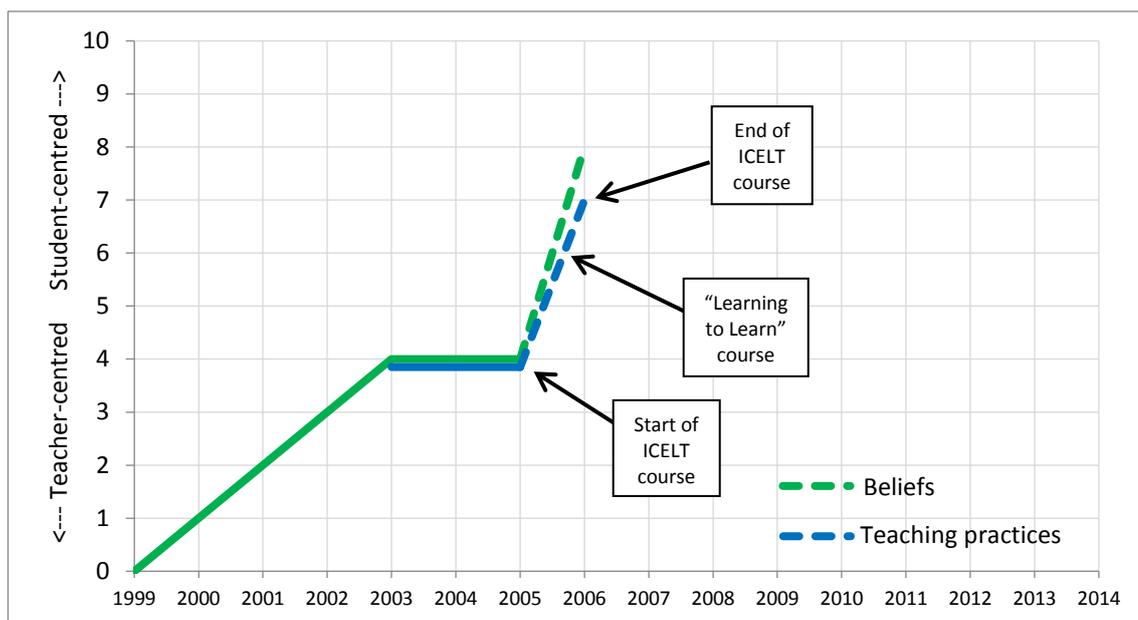
Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:11:33 – 00:11:42

This gradual change in Elizabeth’s role would continue over the next few years. I explore this in more detail within the analysis of the final chronological period (Section 8.2.3).

### 8.2.2.2. *Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs*

The graph below shows that Elizabeth felt that her teaching practices also became more student-centred as a result of the ICELT and “Learning to Learn” courses, rising from a ‘4’ in 2005 to about a ‘7’ in 2006:

Fig. 8.2.2.2(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1999 and 2006



One of the main changes which Elizabeth reported was starting to vary her classes:

*“I think when I was teaching in the beginning, maybe it wasn’t quite enough, like I was just giving the basics to students. [...] When I finished the [ICELT] course, I tried to give my students a lot of different activities; not teaching in the same way all the time. [...] I didn’t want my students to expect the same all the time: the teacher comes, she calls the roll, then she goes to the board, she explains, and then we practice [...] I tried to do different things.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:33:40 – 00:35:09

Another important change for Elizabeth was that she also began to think more about her students’ individual needs, which as mentioned earlier, was one of the key aspects of her interpretation of student-centred EFL learning. Like previous participants, one of the ways in which she did this was by starting to focus on their specific subject areas:

*“That’s when I started teaching their subject’s content. [...] I started to ask them about what they were doing with other teachers, [and] I asked them to do the same but with me. In that way, I started to get to know what they were doing; not only the names of the subjects they were taking, but what they were really doing with the other teachers.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:10:29 – 00:11:33

It must be noted that Elizabeth felt that her teaching practices were slightly less student-centred than her beliefs during this period. As mentioned in the previous section, perhaps one of the reasons for this was that the ICELT course encouraged her to teach in a way which was not always appropriate to her teaching contexts. Therefore, when she tried to apply these practices in her classroom, she inevitably had to make some changes:

*“Looking back, even though they asked me on the course to work and plan my classes depending on what the students needed, it wasn’t really like that, because I was planning with the timings and everything, and kind of pushing the students to complete the activities in that amount of time. That’s why, looking back, I don’t think I was really doing what my students needed.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:07:10 – 00:07:46

I explore more inconsistencies between Elizabeth’s beliefs and her practices in the Section 8.2.3.2.

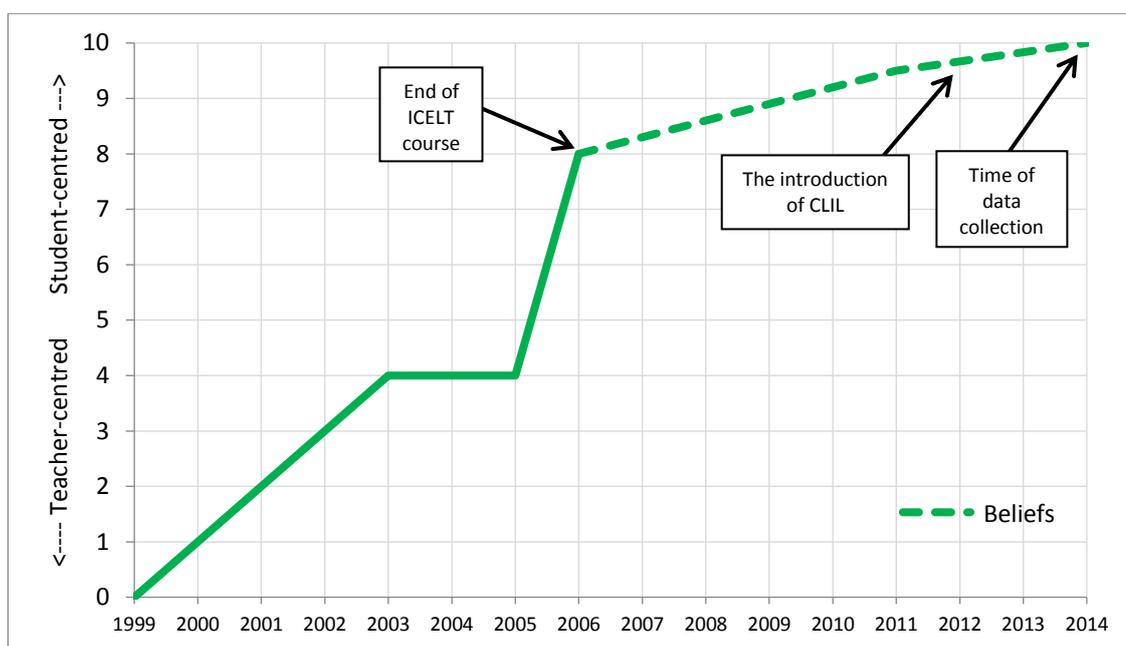
### 8.2.3. *Period 3: 2006-2014: Last eight years working at the USM*

Between 2006 and 2014, Elizabeth continued to work at the USM. Over these eight years, she had a number of experiences which contributed towards her ongoing development as an EFL teacher. Although these experiences were not particularly life-changing, they served to reaffirm her beliefs in the value of student-centred EFL learning.

### 8.2.3.1. *Evolution of beliefs*

As the graph below shows, Elizabeth felt that her beliefs about student-centred EFL learning continued to rise steadily between 2006 and 2014. In fact, at the time of data collection in 2014, she felt that the extent to which her beliefs would be considered student-centred would have been a ‘10’:

Fig. 8.2.3.1(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth’s perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were between 1999 and 2014



There were a number of experiences which she feels contributed towards this gradual consolidation of her beliefs:

*“I’ve taken a lot [of courses]. To tell you the truth, I don’t remember all of their names.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:36:19 – 00:36:27

*“After “Learning to Learn”, I took one called “Strategies for Learning”, and then there was the “competences” boom.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:36:32 – 00:36:49

*“Then, we took a course on “Task-Based Learning”, and then there was “Project-Based Learning”.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:38:23 – 00:38:41

In 2009, Elizabeth actually took a course which was called “Student-centred learning”. However, she did not feel that this course, or any of the others during this final period, were particularly life-changing, given that she had already started to work in what she considered to be a “student-centred” way:

*“[The “Student-centred learning” course] wasn’t really a big change, but it made me think more about the way I was teaching; to analyse the way I was doing things. And I think I discovered that I was not doing anything wrong.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:37:32 – 00:38:01

*“I had already been doing the same thing; the courses were just going to formalise what I was doing, because I had these competences workshops and my colleagues and I were saying “it’s the same as what we’ve been doing!””*

Elizabeth Interview 2, 00:12:31 – 00:12:53

*“I reaffirmed my beliefs, and I added some more, depending on what my students needed.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:38:07 – 00:38:22

Elizabeth was keen to point out that many of these courses were available for teachers of all disciplines – not just EFL teachers. In fact, she found it especially useful to listen to the opinions of a wide range of other teachers:

*“What really helped me to discover about my students was sharing other teachers’ ideas. [...] I think that listening and learning from them and their experiences was what I remember.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:40:56 – 00:41:43

The idea of sharing ideas with different teachers from across the University became even more relevant given its increased emphasis on English for Specific Purposes. In 2012,

Elizabeth started participating in the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) project, which Antonio had begun in 2009. In a similar way to Antonio, this involved her working with content teachers from different Schools in order to teach English that would be as relevant as possible to students' subject areas.

When I asked Elizabeth for her opinion of CLIL, she considered that it has generally been a positive experience, although she again stressed that it was not particularly groundbreaking, given that she was already doing a lot of what was being asked of her:

*“I [had been] working like CLIL without knowing I was really doing it.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:15:21 – 00:15:28

With a few exceptions, Elizabeth reported that the changes have generally been well-received by students. This appears to have further reinforced her beliefs:

*“I have had really nice results; [...] [the students] did better than I [expected], so I felt good in that way.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:08:11 – 00:08:25

*“The students got more interested, [...] and they started to participate more.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:42:14 – 00:42:25

*“Students find it more interesting, and they make the language more of their own.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:43:32 – 00:43:42

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
POSITIVE STUDENT RESPONSE TO MORE STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACHES

Students' opinions from focus groups:

The students I spoke to in the focus groups generally supported Elizabeth's views that her students have generally responded well to more student-centred approaches:

*"Something I really like is that she gives us real situations, [...] for example, you're going to present as a conference" or "you're going to reserve a hotel room".*

Irma (Student at the School of Administration), Focus Group 8, 00:23:39 – 00:23:53

*"I think that these kinds of activities help us to participate more and practice English."*

Julia (Student at the School of Administration), Focus Group 8, 00:11:48 – 00:11:58

*"I really like the personal touch; I think it's a good teaching method."*

Jessica (Student at the School of Administration), Focus Group 8, 00:15:46 – 00:15:55

*"[It's] more of a fun way of learning."*

Daniela (Student at the School of Education), Focus Group 9, 00:09:22 – 00:09:25

In terms of her beliefs at the time of data collection, Elizabeth expressed that they have been the product of all of her combined experiences:

*"I think a mixture of everything has worked for my students. [...] Because I have different kinds of students, I have to use of a mixture of everything I have learnt as a teacher."*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:00:15 – 00:00:39

Indeed, although she rated the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning as a '10' in 2014, she was also keen to point out that there is no "one best way" to teach English:

*"I think there's no best way, because you have to think about your students; what is good for some of them may not be good for the others."*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:09:18 – 00:09:38

This attitude appears to be similar to the opinions expressed by the previous four teacher participants. Indeed, although all of them became strongly in favour of student-centred

EFL learning by the ends of their educational life histories, they nevertheless expressed the importance of keeping an open mind and the possibility of more “hybrid” teaching practices, if these were considered most appropriate within particular contexts. I address the concept of “hybrid” teaching in more detail in the following Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

A final point I will mention in this sub-section relates to the continued evolution of Elizabeth’s perceived role as a teacher. Since experiencing the initial change after the ICELT and “Learning to Learn” courses, she felt that her role has continued to become more student-centred (as she has become more of a “guide” of “facilitator”, which was an important part of her definition of student-centred EFL learning in Section 8.1). At the time of data collection, she expressed the following:

*“Reflecting on what I was before and what I am now, I feel now I'm part of my students. I work with them; we're on the same track. I think we understand each other. I'm not like the teacher who arrives, and they see me like the mom or the dad who is going to tell them what to do or what not to do.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:15:38 – 00:16:20

*“Sometimes I might be a guide for them, sometimes I'm a tutor. I know they see in me someone who can explain to them some questions that they may have, but I think some students don't see me as the sole source of information anymore.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:16:33 – 00:17:10

She also emphasised how teaching more ESP to students has had an impact on the teacher-student relationship:

*“[Now there is more] collaboration; [we're] more like peers. It feels really nice, because you are interchanging knowledge, and they teach us, well my students have taught me.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:37:56 – 00:38:10

Moreover, she highlighted that she has begun to listen to the students' opinions about what they would like to study, as opposed to telling them what is best for them (again, this was an important part of her interpretation of student-centred EFL learning):

*“We don't always do everything that they tell us, [...] but we develop our own strategies based on what the students tell us, and what the course needs.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:39:02 – 00:39:25

She considered that the positive response to such a change in relationship has been mutual between teacher and students, but was also keen to stress the importance of *her* making the change in order to encourage a change in her students:

*“I think it's [...] the way you teach; my students are different because I'm different.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:17:39 – 00:18:00

Δ TRIANGULATION:

THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP (1/2)

My interpretations from classroom observations:

From the classes I observed, I would agree with Elizabeth's perception that there appears to be less distance between her and the students than in a traditional “teacher-centred” class. I noted that there was a very positive atmosphere in the classes I observed; Elizabeth was very friendly towards her students and they seemed comfortable participating in class.

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP (2/2)

Students' opinions from focus groups:

In the focus groups, Elizabeth's students expressed similar opinions to my perceptions from the classroom observations. For example, several of them highlighted that there was a positive atmosphere in Elizabeth's classes:

*"She creates a comfortable atmosphere in the class."*

Alicia (Student at the School of Education), Focus Group 9, 00:03:27 – 00:03:32

*"She's a motivator [...] and she makes us feel comfortable to participate."*

Daniela (Student at the School of Education), Focus Group 9, 00:30:45 – 00:30:57

The students also highlighted that there was less of a distance between themselves and Elizabeth, whilst not losing sight of the fact that she is the teacher and they are the students:

*"I've never had much interaction with my teachers, but with Elizabeth it's easier. If you have to ask her anything, or for some reason you have to leave early, you feel comfortable."*

Jessica (Student at the School of Administration), Focus Group 8, 01:01:57 – 01:02:17

*"She's not traditional; it's not like we have to do everything she says and that's it."*

Gloria (Student at the School of Education), Focus Group 9, 00:18:48 – 00:18:53

*"There's a really friendly atmosphere, but we don't forget that she's the teacher; we respect her, and there's a limit where we say "this is a line that can't be crossed"."*

Gloria (Student at the School of Education), Focus Group 9, 00:22:11 – 00:22:22

Finally, some students also confirmed that they enjoyed that their opinions were taken into account, which as mentioned already, was one of the key ways in which Elizabeth perceived her more "student-centred" role:

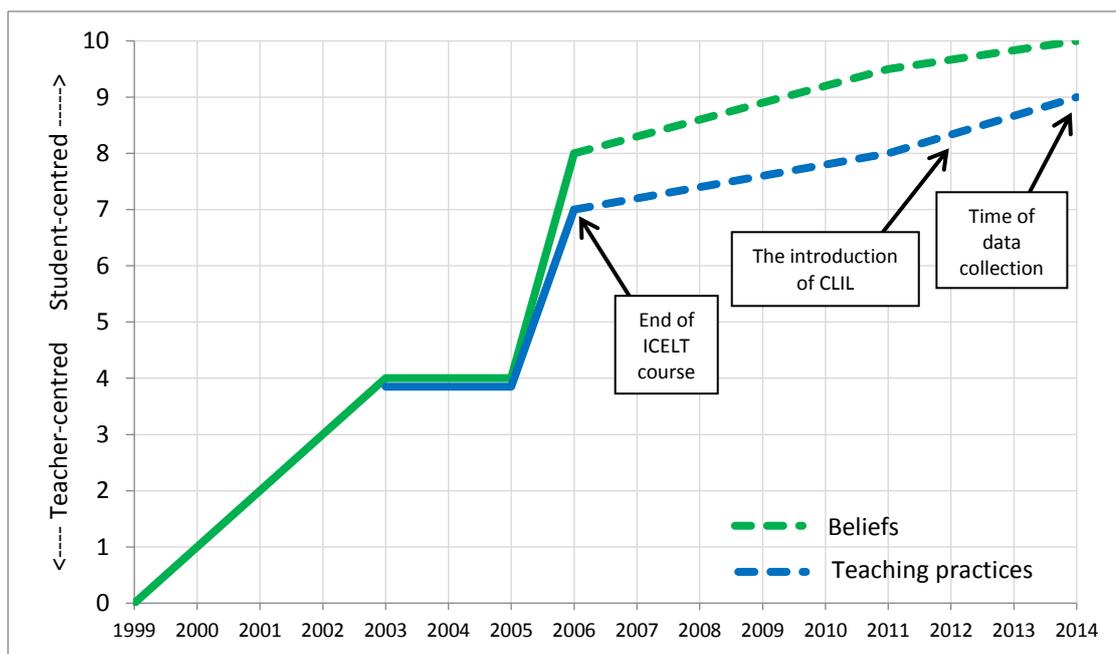
*"What I really like is that she takes us into account; she asks us our opinions. I like being taken into account on a personal level."*

Jessica (Student at the School of Administration), Focus Group 8, 00:36:45 – 00:37:07

### 8.2.3.2. *Evolution of teaching practices in relation to beliefs*

The graph below tentatively summarises the general tendencies in Elizabeth's teaching practices between 2006 and 2014. It shows that her teaching practices gradually became more student-centred from 2006 onwards, reaching a '9' in 2014:

Fig. 8.2.3.2(i). Graph summarising Elizabeth's perceptions of how student-centred her beliefs were in relation to her teaching practices between 1999 and 2014



#### Δ TRIANGULATION:

##### EXAMPLES OF MORE STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES (1/2)

###### My interpretations from classroom observations:

From the classes I observed, there were a number of activities which seemed to fit with Elizabeth's definition of student-centred EFL learning (see Section 8.1). For example, there were several examples of group and pair work. Moreover, a number of activities were based around the students' subject areas. For example, in one class at the School of Education, the students watched a video of someone who had Tourette's syndrome, and they had to think about what they would do if were teaching such a student. English was used throughout all the classes I observed, with only the odd insertion of Spanish. Finally, the focus seemed to be on meaning and communication over accuracy. For example, when the students made grammatical mistakes, Elizabeth generally did not respond by giving explicit explanations.

Δ TRIANGULATION:  
EXAMPLES OF MORE STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES (2/2)

Students' opinions from focus groups:

Elizabeth's students also provided several examples of more "student-centred" activities in the focus groups. For example, they highlighted how Elizabeth adapted the classes to their subject areas and was generally flexible to their needs:

*"Beforehand, the English that we were taught was more general [...] but now it's based on our degrees, for example situations that we might find ourselves in when we're working; related to our degrees, but in English."*

Irma (Student at the School of Administration), Focus Group 8, 00:07:54 – 00:08:18

*"[Elizabeth] is really flexible with us."*

Clara (Student at the School of Education), Focus Group 9, 00:02:20 – 00:02:24

*"[Elizabeth] gives us more projects to do; [...] it's not so much based around the textbook."*

Natalia (Student at the School of Administration), Focus Group 8, 00:03:58 – 00:04:06

*"Something which we all really like is the personal touch. For example, she asks us "what do you think?" or "tell us about an experience that you've had", and I think that makes you remember what you're learning because it's personalised."*

Jessica (Student at the School of Administration), Focus Group 8, 00:10:24 – 00:10:49

Moreover, the students identified that Elizabeth encourages them to participate more than in previous, more "teacher-centred" classes, and to use English whenever possible:

*"[Elizabeth] wants us all to participate."*

Clara (Student at the School of Education), Focus Group 9, 00:31:18 – 00:31:22

*"Elizabeth speaks to us in English almost all of the time."*

Natalia (Student at the School of Administration), Focus Group 8, 00:51:38 – 00:51:43

Broadly speaking, Elizabeth perceived her teaching practices to be fairly consistent with her beliefs. However, as Fig. 8.2.3.2(i) above shows, there was still a slight gap between her beliefs and practices, indicating that she has not been able to *fully* put her beliefs into practice. As with previous participants, there appear to have been certain factors which contributed towards this mismatch. For example, in her first few years of trying to adapt English classes to students' subject areas, it was especially difficult for Elizabeth to teach ESP as she was not an expert in the specific areas that she was expected to teach:

*“In [the School of] Administration we had some books related to business, but in the other Schools where I was teaching, like in Physical Education or Special Education, we didn't have a book to work with, so we had to look for topics related to the content, but we didn't have a book, so for example in Special Education, we took some articles from Nursing, some from Medicine, some from Psychology. So it was a lot of work because you had to investigate those topics.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:14:19 – 00:15:12

This did improve somewhat after the introduction of CLIL, as there started to be more communication between English teachers and content teachers. However, like Antonio, Elizabeth recalled that there were sometimes disagreements about what should be taught and how:

*“At the beginning, [the content teachers] were not really accepting what we were proposing. [...] You as an English teacher had one idea about what you thought the students needed, but the content teachers asked you to do some other things.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:16:43 – 00:17:10

*“Many teachers had many ideas, but we didn't really get to one objective, [...] so that was what got me lost sometimes.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:15:46 – 00:16:07

Furthermore, in one case, Elizabeth recounted that a content teacher had actually told the students that English was not important:

*“I've had an experience with one of the teachers [in one School]. [...] This teacher told the students that when you get to a certain age, you're not able to learn another language. That was a really negative aspect.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:14:14 – 00:14:43

Nevertheless, over time, Elizabeth expressed that the level of support she has received from Schools and content teachers has improved, which has allowed her to implement CLIL more effectively:

*“In my Schools, it hasn’t been too bad, because they’ve accepted English classes; they have tried to make the English class fit into their programs.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:23:31 – 00:23:51

*“In the case of the School of Education, [...] teachers have been supporting us with the material and telling us what they are working with.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:39:59 – 00:40:15

*“[For example,] we have a peer who teaches Physiotherapy. [...] He asks his students to read about the topics he is teaching them, because a lot of information is in English.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:30:42 – 00:31:10

*“[Also,] the volleyball teacher in Physical Education is doing [“hard”] CLIL with us. For example, in 5th semester, the students have volleyball, and this teacher’s classes are in English.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:40:16 – 00:40:51

Indeed, in general, Elizabeth considered that the extent to which she has been able to teach in the way she would like has depended on the level of support that she has received from individual Schools:

*“I wouldn't say it's the whole institution; [...] it depends on which School you are working in, and the people you are working with. [...] Over all these years, I have worked with many different people, and I think the most important thing is when people in higher positions motivate students, as well as your co-workers; not your English co-workers but the other teachers; the content teachers.”*

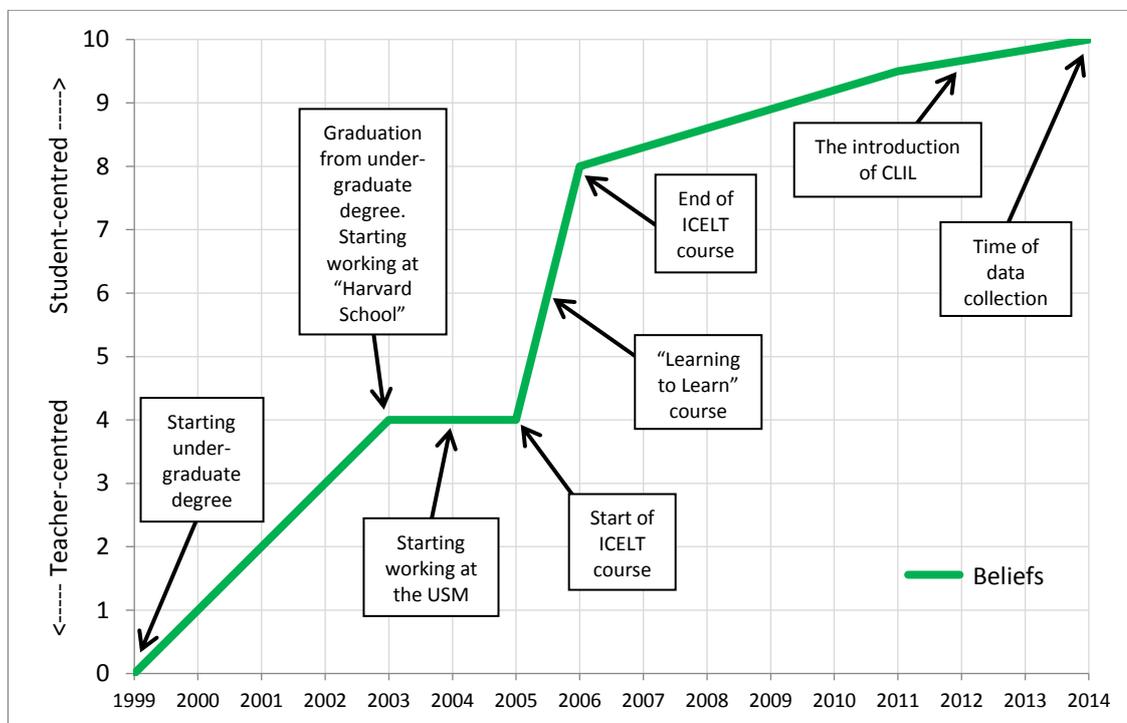
Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:12:10 – 00:13:25

Elizabeth’s views are yet another example of how important authority figures such as Heads of School may be in the success or failure of educational changes. Her story highlights that the degree to which English teachers will actually be able to put their beliefs into practice may be dependent on the extent to which the conditions are provided for them to do so. These issues are explored extensively in the following Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion chapters.

### 8.3. Summary

#### 8.3.1. Summary of the evolution of Elizabeth's beliefs

Fig. 8.3.1(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Elizabeth's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning over the course of her educational life history



The graph above summarises the evolution of Elizabeth's beliefs about student-centred EFL learning between 1999 and 2014. When she started her undergraduate degree in 1999, she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been a '0'. This can be attributed to the extremely teacher-centred model of education that she had been exposed to up to this point, including studying at a traditional private language institute called SMELC. These beliefs would change somewhat during her four years of studying her degree, as she was exposed to a number of different teaching methodologies. By the end of her degree, she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning in 2003 would have been a '4'.

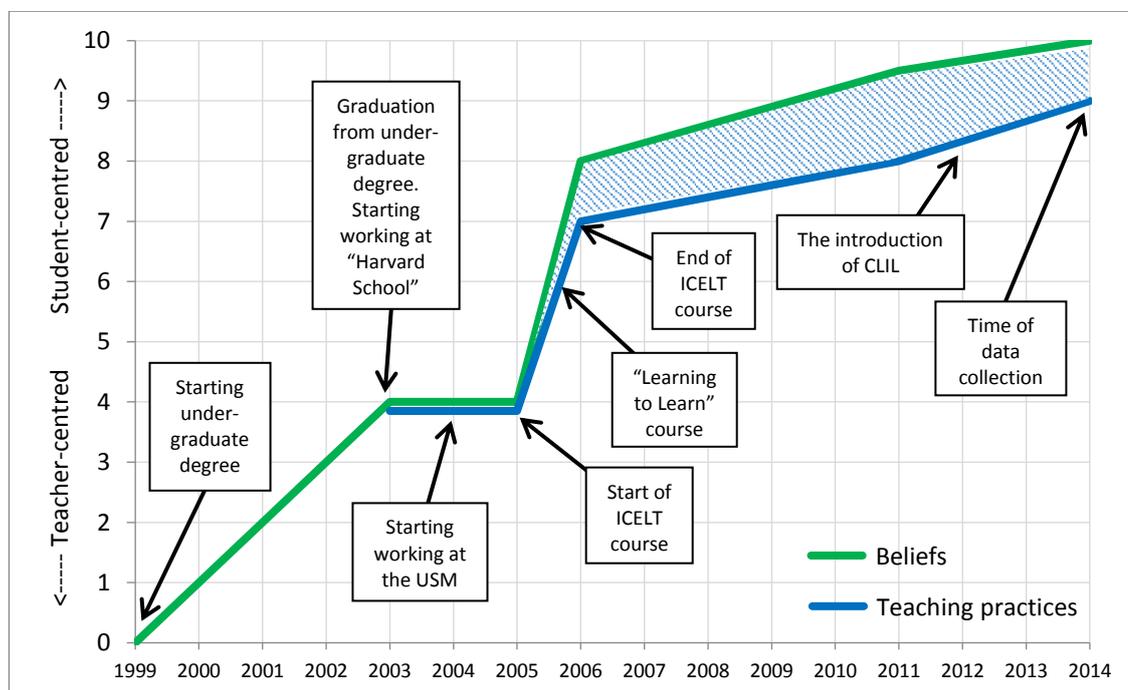
Elizabeth's first experiences of teaching, at Harvard School and later at the USM, did little to change her fundamental beliefs. Indeed, it was not until 2005 when she felt that any significant belief changes occurred. This was due to her attending two courses: firstly, the ICELT course run by the British Council; and secondly, another course called "Learning to Learn" which was taught at the USM. After participating in these two courses, she felt that the extent to which her beliefs were student-centred rose from a '4'

to about an ‘8’. During these courses, she felt that being invited to reflect upon herself and her current teaching practices were especially useful strategies in facilitating a change in her beliefs.

Between 2006 and 2014, Elizabeth had a number of experiences which served to strengthen her beliefs in the value of more student-centred EFL learning. However, she did not feel that these changes were radical, given that she was already largely in favour of more student-centred approaches by this point. At the time of data collection, she felt that the extent to which she believed in student-centred EFL learning would have been a ‘10’, although in a similar way to the other four participants, she was also keen to stress that there is no one “best” way to teach, and that more “hybrid” approaches may be appropriate in certain situations.

### 8.3.2. *Summary of Elizabeth’s teaching practices in relation to her beliefs*

Fig. 8.3.2(i). Graph summarising the evolution of Elizabeth’s beliefs in relation to her teaching practices over the course of her educational life history



The graph above summarises the relationships between Elizabeth’s beliefs and her teaching practices between 1999 and 2014. During her first two years teaching at Harvard School and the USM, Elizabeth felt that there was little difference between what she believed and the way in which she taught. Indeed, she considered that both her beliefs

and practices would have been slightly more teacher-centred than student-centred, with a score of '4'.

However, after attending the ICELT course and "Learning to Learn" course between 2005 and 2006, she felt that her practices became more student-centred. She felt that the extent to which her practices were student-centred would have been about a '7' by 2006, compared to the score of '8' for her beliefs. This slight mismatch may have been due to the somewhat prescriptive nature of the ICELT course, which encouraged Elizabeth to implement all of the four language skills in every single lesson.

After 2006, Elizabeth reported that her practices gradually continued to become more student-centred. There was a slight gap between her beliefs and her practices throughout this period, which she felt was linked to the varying levels of support which she received from authority figures and content teachers at the USM. Fortunately, at the time of data collection, she considered that she was receiving a good level of support from the majority of the people in the Schools where she worked. Therefore, she felt that the extent to which she was able to put her beliefs into practice would have been about a '9' in 2014.

Over the last five chapters, I have presented and analysed the educational life histories of the five teacher participants. In the next chapter, I compare the findings of these five cases, and highlight some of the most prominent themes emerging from them.

## **CHAPTER 9: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS**

In the previous five chapters, I presented the educational life histories of each of the five teacher participants. These cases were presented separately, in order to preserve the individual, unique nature of each participant's educational life history (see Section 3.7 of the Methodology chapter). In this chapter, I identify the main themes which emerged over the five cases, and establish the key issues to be discussed in more detail in the Discussion chapter.

This chapter is divided into two main sections, one for each research question. Section 9.1 focuses on the factors influencing teacher belief change (Research Question 1), whilst Section 9.2 focuses on the relationships between teachers' beliefs and their practices (Research Question 2).

Within this chapter, I have decided to recycle some of the quotations which were used in the previous five chapters. The reason I have done this is to constantly remind the reader that the points I am making are supported by evidence. Furthermore, by placing quotations from different teachers next to each other, I hope to illuminate some of the key similarities and/or differences between their experiences. What this means is that there will inevitably be a certain degree of repetition in this chapter. However, I hope that the benefits of presenting the Cross-Case Analysis in this way will outweigh any potential drawbacks.

### **9.1. Research Question 1: How have the participants' beliefs about student-centred EFL learning evolved over the course of their educational life histories?**

This section brings together and analyses the main findings relevant to Research Question 1. The aim of this research question was to explore the main belief changes that occurred in participants' educational life histories (RQ1a), and the factors which were perceived to have had an influence on them (RQ1b).

When analysing each of the five cases, four main themes of teacher belief change emerged. The first of these was that all five participants felt that their initial beliefs about teaching were predominately teacher-centred. Section 9.1.1 examines the reasons for these early teacher-centred beliefs, as well as some of the main characteristics of courses which did not have a significant impact on participants' beliefs. The second main theme was that all five teachers felt their beliefs became more student-centred at one point or another throughout the course of their educational life histories. Some of the main reasons for these initial changes are explored in Section 9.1.2, and the reasons why these student-centred beliefs were *reinforced* over time is briefly analysed in Section 9.1.3. The final main theme was the tendency for teachers to start believing in a more "hybrid" approach to teaching. This concept is addressed in Section 9.1.4.

Table 9.1(i) below attempts to summarise these four key themes, as well as indicating which of the five participants made reference to them during the data collection. This table should be understood as a general summary which serves to visually highlight the main themes emerging from the data. The ticks (✓) indicate that this particular theme was *explicitly* mentioned by a participant in their interviews or timelines. However, just because a participant does not have a tick in a particular box, this does not necessarily mean that the theme was irrelevant to them.

Table 9.1(i). Summary of key themes emerging from Research Question 1

Theme	Explicitly mentioned by:				
	Rebecca	Antonio	Isabella	Ricardo	Elizabeth
<b>9.1.1. The forming and perpetuation of teacher-centred beliefs</b>					
• Early beliefs about teaching predominately teacher-centred due to largely teacher-centred experiences of education; beliefs often unconscious in nature; generally positive experiences of learning and teaching in a teacher-centred way	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Examples of training courses which were not perceived to have a significant impact on participants' beliefs:	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- <i>Courses too short</i>					✓
- <i>Too prescriptive; disconnected from classroom realities</i>	✓				✓
- <i>Not modelled in a student-centred way themselves</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
• Initial resistance; gradual change	✓		✓	✓	
<b>9.1.2. Initial changes towards more student-centred beliefs</b>					
• Belief changes following a compulsory changes in practices	✓		✓		
• Belief changes after experiencing poor results using teacher-centred approaches		✓			
• Belief changes after attending training courses with the following characteristics:	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- <i>Longer courses</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- <i>Incorporating teaching practices / peer observation</i>			✓		✓
- <i>Taught in a student-centred way themselves</i>	✓			✓	
- <i>Grounded in real classroom realities; opportunities for reflection about current beliefs and practices</i>	✓			✓	✓
<b>9.1.3. The reinforcement of student-centred beliefs</b>					
• Perceived improvement of results; positive student feedback	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Attending other courses which covered similar topics					✓
• Frustration at having to teach for high-stakes English exams			✓		
• Receiving the "green light" to teach student-centred learning			✓		
<b>9.1.4. The movement towards more "hybrid" beliefs</b>					
• Teachers' beliefs become more "hybrid" (i.e. they start believing in the value of certain teacher-centred approaches, if they are considered more appropriate within specific contexts)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

I explore the themes mentioned in the table above in the following four sub-sections.

### 9.1.1. *The forming and perpetuation of teacher-centred beliefs*

The first main theme of teacher belief change was that all five participants felt that their early beliefs were generally teacher-centred. The reasons for this appear to be linked to their early experiences at school and university, which seem to have provided them with few alternatives to a teacher-centred model of education. Moreover, these early beliefs appear to have been mostly *unconscious* in nature, as the participants were simply not aware that there might be any other ways of teaching:

*“My beliefs at the time were very traditional. I was teaching in the way I had been taught. [...] I didn't actually know what I was doing; it was unconscious; I was just doing it because I thought it was the right thing to do at the time.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:01:36 – 00:02:08

*“At the beginning I had this idea that I was supposed to teach grammar, because that was the way I had learnt.”*

Antonio, Interview 1a, 00:02:09 – 00:02:18

*“I was teaching in a teacher-centred way; I didn't know otherwise.”*

Isabella, Extract from timeline

*“I didn't know about any other ways of learning.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:02:29 – 00:02:32

*“I didn't follow a methodology; actually I didn't even know there was a methodology.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:00:39 – 00:00:45

In fact, there seems to have been little reason for these teacher-centred beliefs to change, given that the participants' early experiences of learning and teaching under teacher-centred approaches had been generally positive:

*“Why would I change if I was so comfortable doing it that way, and because I thought that worked, and that was the only way I could do it?”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:03:41 – 00:03:53

*“I thought that I was doing the best I could to help learners, and the students were really thankful because they actually felt they were learning.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:08:34 – 00:08:45

*“Everybody was happy: students, teachers and my boss.”*

Ricardo, Notes produced during Interview 3

With teachers in such a comfortable position, it would appear that something out-of-the-ordinary would have to happen in order for them to consider changing their practices. One of the ways in which this could happen was through teacher training courses. Indeed, there were a number of training courses which the participants felt had an important effect on their beliefs (see Section 9.1.2.3). However, there were also several examples of courses which did not. It is worth highlighting that the main aims of these training courses may not necessarily have been to transform these teachers' beliefs, but I still feel it is relevant to mention them, as they provide a contrast to the courses which *were* thought to have an effect on the participants' beliefs.

The first characteristic of courses that did not lead to meaningful belief change was that they were too short (i.e., only lasting one or a few days). This was especially emphasised by Elizabeth, who recalled attending so many (short) courses that she was not able to remember some of their names:

*"I've taken a lot [of courses]. To tell you the truth, I don't remember all of their names."*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:36:19 – 00:36:27

Another characteristic of courses which were not perceived to have had a significant impact on teachers' beliefs was that they were disconnected from classroom realities. An example of this was Rebecca's experiences of the ICELT course run by the British Council. It seems that, despite promoting certain aspects of student-centred EFL learning such as Communicative Language Teaching, the ICELT course seems to have been rather prescriptive in nature, as the participants were encouraged to implement this one "correct" method:

*"We were involved and we did a lot of things, but there was no thinking behind the doing; we were just doing it because they told us it worked."*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:06:34 – 00:06:52

Rebecca's perception of the ICELT course was similar to that of Elizabeth, who seemed especially frustrated at being obliged to cover all of the four language skills in every single class:

*“Looking back, even though they asked me on the course to work and plan my classes depending on what the students needed, it wasn't really like that, because I was planning with the timings and everything, and kind of pushing the students to complete the activities in that amount of time. That's why, looking back, I don't think I was really doing what my students needed.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:07:10 – 00:07:46

This lack of willingness to adapt to local classroom realities was seen by Rebecca as the key reason that there was little long-lasting belief change in the aftermath of the ICELT course:

*“Now I understand why the [ICELT course] didn't work: because there was no connection with the classroom. Teachers go on courses and they leave the experience there, and then they forget about everything and go back to the classroom.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 01:10:51 – 01:11:12

In light of the opinions expressed by Rebecca and Elizabeth, it could be argued that the ICELT course was actually more *teacher-centred* than student-centred. Indeed, another theme which emerged throughout the study was that courses that were supposed to introduce student-centred approaches were often not modelled in a student-centred way themselves. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the USM's own undergraduate degree at the School of Languages. Here, although the participants may have been taught *about* student-centred learning, they rarely “lived” any student-centred experiences as learners. Rebecca, Isabella and Ricardo all emphasised this point, but it was Antonio who expressed it most strongly:

*“They told me to read about [approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching], but the School was a mess. [...] I learnt a lot from two or three teachers, who actually practised what they preached, [but] the teacher who was supposed to be teaching "teaching" [...] was very bad. He made us learn all the history of English Language Teaching, and the different approaches, methodologies, all those things, but he didn't use any of them [in his own classes].”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:13:15 – 00:14:15

A final aspect to consider within this sub-section is that of teacher resistance. Even when teachers did report changes to their beliefs, these changes did not always happen immediately. For example, Rebecca initially resisted some of the reflective activities she was asked to do on her Master's course, and it was only during one of her modules that she eventually started to do them. Isabella also expressed that it was initially difficult for her to change her beliefs during the process of the Readers and Writers reform in the United States. Finally, Ricardo made it extremely clear that his transition from teacher-centred to student-centred beliefs has been a gradual one:

*“It was a little bit strange at the beginning [to do the reflective tasks], because it was not something I was used to doing. [...] And actually I refused to do it at the beginning.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:12:12 – 00:12:27

*“It was hard at first to make the transition, because I wanted to continue doing it the way I had done it before, for me to talk for like 50 minutes and the students 10.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:10:50 – 00:11:02

*“The change hasn't been easy, but I have been thinking about all these changes, and I have been trying to use what I have learnt from the different training [courses] that the University has provided. [...] And I think that we learnt something new on each course.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:10:16 – 00:10:39

Indeed, it is worth highlighting that although the summary graphs tend to show sharp changes in teachers' beliefs, the reality seems to have been much more of a gradual transition towards more student-centred beliefs. Here, it must be reiterated that these graphs have been included to show the main trends of teacher belief change, and do not attempt to address how complex these belief changes may be.

### *9.1.2. Initial changes towards more student-centred beliefs*

Although all five participants felt that their early beliefs were largely teacher-centred, they all reported that they started to believe in more student-centred approaches at one

point or another during their educational life histories. Three main reasons for this emerged over the five cases: 1) Belief changes following *compulsory changes* to practices; 2) Belief changes after experiencing *poor results* with teacher-centred approaches; and 3) Belief changes resulting from *training courses*. I examine these three reasons separately in the following three sub-sections.

#### 9.1.2.1. Belief changes following compulsory changes to practices

The first reason for a change in teachers' beliefs was following a compulsory change to their practices. The clearest example of this was when Isabella experienced the Readers and Writers reform whilst living in the United States. When this change was introduced, she did not particularly believe in it, as it represented a considerable change to what she had been used to doing up to that point. However, she had little choice but to change her practices, given that the change was compulsory. And, as she got used to putting the changes into practice, she became increasingly in favour of them.

Isabella's story is an example of a "top-down" reform which eventually did lead to long-term changes in a teacher's beliefs. However, it is worth noting that certain characteristics of the way the reform was implemented seem to have facilitated such a change. Indeed, the United States government appears to have invested a great deal of time and resources in order to maximise the possibility of successful implementation. One example of this was when Isabella and her colleagues were invited to observe more experienced teachers:

*"We observed other schools where they already had this approach, so that opened our eyes."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:47:45 – 00:47:55

*"I saw how they were doing these activities, and I started slowly putting them into practice into my class, and I realised that it worked, and that the students were learning, they were producing; it worked."*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:02:05 – 00:02:27

Another example of belief change occurring after a somewhat compulsory behaviour change was that of Rebecca during her Master's degree in the UK. On this course, she

was asked to carry out reflective exercises, which she initially refused to do, as she did not feel they would be useful. However, as she began to force herself to do them, she started to see how useful they were, and she now sees these reflective tasks as some of the most important experiences in terms of changing her beliefs.

The two cases above show that changes to teachers' practices may precede changes to their beliefs. However, as I have stressed at regular intervals throughout this thesis, the relationships between belief and practice change are far from straightforward. I explore these complex relationships in more detail when analysing the second research question, and specifically in Section 9.2.2.

#### 9.1.2.2. Belief changes after experiencing poor results with previous approaches

The next main reason for belief change was after becoming frustrated with the lack of results with teacher-centred approaches, which was demonstrated in the case of Antonio. During his first few years teaching at the USM, Antonio saw that although his students had a solid knowledge of the grammatical structures, they were often unable to use this knowledge to communicate in real situations:

*“It was around my second year as a teacher when I started to see that grammar probably wasn't the best option, because the students couldn't communicate.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:05:45 – 00:05:56

The “final straw” for Antonio was when he was asked to design an English exam for high school students in a neighbouring state. He used his own group as a pilot, but results were so poor on all sections except the grammar, that he realised he would have to start to do things differently:

*“We created an exam, [...] and they used my group [as a pilot], and when I was grading the test, I had a breakthrough. I discovered that grammar wasn't the best option.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:06:22 – 00:06:57

Fortunately, Antonio's frustrations with traditional teacher-centred approaches coincided with him being invited to participate in the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) project. This experience, as well as him beginning to study his Master's degree, allowed him to address these frustrations and explore some more student-centred alternatives.

Antonio was the only participant in the study who explicitly cited a "lack of results" as a factor in him starting to question more teacher-centred approaches. In fact, as mentioned in Section 9.1.1, all four of the other participants seemed quite comfortable teaching in a largely teacher-centred way before they experienced the main "belief-changing" events in their educational life histories. It is of course impossible to judge whether or not these teachers would have eventually come to the same conclusions as Antonio, if they had not had these experiences.

#### 9.1.2.3. Belief changes resulting from training courses

The final and most prominent reason for teacher belief change was changes resulting from training courses. In this sub-section, I explore some of the most common characteristics of these courses. It is worth highlighting that there is a certain degree of overlap between this sub-section and Section 9.1.1, which examined some of the main characteristics of courses which were *not* seen to have a significant impact on participants' beliefs.

The first key characteristic of these training courses was their length. In general, longer courses seemed more likely to lead to teacher belief change. For example, the key event in Rebecca's educational life history was her Master's degree in the UK; Antonio and Ricardo both cited their Master's degrees as important factors in influencing their beliefs; the key event in Isabella's educational life history was the Readers and Writers reform in the United States which lasted several months; and the two most important experiences for Elizabeth, the ICELT course and the "Learning to Learn" course, also lasted a number of months.

Of course, it is not the length of time in itself that automatically makes these courses more likely to have an effect on the teachers' beliefs; it is what is done during this time. For example, as mentioned in Section 9.1.2.1, during the Readers and Writers reform in the

United States, Isabella was invited to observe experienced teachers in order to familiarise herself with the new practices, and she also took part in observed teaching practices with feedback from mentors. Moreover, Elizabeth also stressed the importance of observed teaching practices and peer observation schemes during the ICELT course and the “Learning to Learn” course. What these types of courses seem to have had in common was that they did not just talk *about* new teaching approaches, but rather demonstrated to the participants *how* they could be put into practice by real teachers in real classroom settings.

Another characteristic of courses which were seen to have an effect on teachers’ beliefs were those that were modelled in a student-centred way themselves. When courses were taught in a more student-centred way, it appears that the teachers were able to use these first-hand experiences in order to experiment with similar approaches in their own classes. Rebecca and Ricardo especially emphasised the importance of “living” student-centred learning whilst studying their Master’s degrees:

*“After taking these courses and working at the University of San Martín, I experienced in person this authentic student-centred approach.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:16:33 – 00:16:42

*“These kinds of experiences, of being students and teachers at the same time, have given me a different perspective; they help me to think and to see beyond; they give me more options about what I could do.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:25:00 – 00:25:20

*“We actually lived, and experienced, student-centred learning.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:00:49 – 00:00:53

A final characteristic of courses which led to changes in the teachers’ beliefs were those that allowed participants to reflect about themselves, their own teaching situations, and how the general aims of the changes might be adapted within their own classrooms. A key example of this was Rebecca’s experiences of her Master’s degree. On this course, she was asked to reflect about her own teaching practices, and it was only then that she came to the realisation that she was teaching in a teacher-centred way:

*“That was when I realised how I was teaching, because never before had I actually consciously thought about what I was doing. [...] It was this reflective approach to the practice which really got into me through that.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:03:52 – 00:04:12

*“There was a lot of discussion, and a lot of reading, and talking about the things that we were reading. And I would say that discussion and reflection were the most important tools for actually understanding and making meaning of the things that we were doing.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:15:55 – 00:16:18

Ricardo also appears to have had similar positive experiences of reflection whilst studying his Master’s:

*“The Master’s degree in Education was the most significant student-centred learning experience, since the learning process was mainly reflective.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

*“I had to reflect about the theory, my teaching, and my conclusions about whether or not it was possible to apply that theory into practice.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:16:07 – 00:16:20

A further example of the importance of reflection came from Elizabeth, who felt that the reflective tasks she had to do on the ICELT and “Learning to Learn” courses were the main factors in her starting to believe in more student-centred approaches:

*“We had to do a lot of reflection, a lot of reading, a lot of practice. So I think in that moment, my way of teaching started to change.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:29:17 – 00:29:36

This sub-section has highlighted some of the main reasons why the participants’ beliefs began to change from predominately teacher-centred beliefs to more student-centred beliefs. The next sub-section considers some of the factors which appear to have contributed towards *reinforcing* these beliefs.

### 9.1.3. The reinforcement of student-centred beliefs

This section briefly considers some of the factors which appear to have influenced the reinforcement of teachers' beliefs in student-centred EFL learning. A few main reasons for this emerged from the data, which I mention below.

The first reason was experiencing improved results and/or positive student feedback. Indeed, with a few exceptions, all of the teachers expressed that they received a generally positive student response after implementing more student-centred learning approaches. This feedback appears to have helped consolidate their beliefs:

*"I knew this was the way to do things when students evaluated the course. The comments that they made were like "this is a different English class from the ones that we have been to"."*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:22:29 – 00:22:47

*"When I have received feedback at the end of the semester, it's been good. They actually feel they are learning; they like this style."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:41:57 – 00:42:11

*"[The students' response has] been really positive."*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:30:25 – 00:30:27

Another factor which appears to have helped to reaffirm student-centred beliefs was taking additional training courses which covered similar topics to previous courses. Elizabeth was a prime example of this, as she took several courses which served to confirm that she "was not doing anything wrong":

*"[The "Student-centred learning" course] wasn't really a big change, but it made me think more about the way I was teaching; to analyse the way I was doing things. And I think I discovered that I was not doing anything wrong. [...] I reaffirmed my beliefs, and I added some more, depending on what my students needed."*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:37:32 – 00:38:22

Finally, Isabella identified two experiences which she felt helped reinforce her beliefs in student-centred EFL learning. The first was her having to teach for standardised English language exams such as TOEFL, which she did not feel assessed the more communicative approaches she was beginning to teach in a more student-centred way. The second was receiving the “green light” from the School of Modern Art to teach in a student-centred way, which made her feel even more confident that she was “doing the right thing.”

#### 9.1.4. The movement towards more “hybrid” beliefs

The final theme relevant to Research Question 1 was the tendency for the teachers’ beliefs to become more “hybrid” towards the ends of their educational life histories. The concept of “hybrid” teaching, which first emerged during the first interview with Rebecca, refers to the belief in the value of a combination of teacher-centred and student-centred approaches, depending on how appropriate they might be within particular contexts. A more “hybrid” approach may be especially necessary when there are contextual constraints which prevent teachers from putting their beliefs into practice (see Section 9.2.3.2 and Section 10.3 of the Discussion chapter).

*“Some acceptance of a “hybrid approach” [...] Refinement of [student-centred] approach [...] Adaptation of approach to context”*

Rebecca, Extracts from timeline

*“[CLIL is] a good approach, but [...] we have to evaluate it, just to see if it's appropriate for this context, I think.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:08:06 – 00:08:18

*“Sometimes the classes are “hybrid”; some students don't need so much teacher guidance, but others do; they're more shy and they need more grammatical structures to feel confident.”*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:02:42 – 00:03:05

*“In my case, I am doing a lot of traditional things, but I am aware of that; well, at least I think I am aware, because I know that I have to do those kinds of practices because this is the situation.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:29:21 – 00:29:41

*“I think there's no best way, because you have to think about your students; what is good for some of them may not be good for the others.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:09:18 – 00:09:38

All five participants in the study alluded to “hybrid” teaching in one way or another throughout the interviews, although they seem to have interpreted the concept in slightly different ways. For example, when considering how student-centred their beliefs were at the time of data collection, both Rebecca and Antonio decided to lower their scores to an ‘8’ and a ‘9’ respectively, whereas Isabella, Ricardo and Elizabeth decided to keep their score as a ‘10’. What this suggests is that Isabella, Ricardo and Elizabeth’s interpretation of the term “student-centred (EFL) learning” actually implies a built-in acceptance that they may have to teach in a more flexible, “hybrid” fashion. In other words, they do not feel that they are teaching in any less of a “student-centred” way when they choose to use teacher-centred approaches at certain times if they feel it is in the best interests of the students. This raises an interesting debate about how student-centred (EFL) learning may be conceptualised; I consider this issue in more detail in Section 10.4 of the Discussion chapter.

## **9.2. Research Question 2: What relationships emerge between the participants’ beliefs about student-centred EFL learning and their teaching practices?**

This section brings together the main findings of the study which are relevant to Research Question 2. The aims of this research question were to identify some of the most prominent matches and/or mismatches between the participants’ beliefs and their practices (RQ2a), as well as some of the main reasons why these matches or mismatches may have occurred (RQ2b).

As with the previous Research Question 1, this section has been divided into four sub-sections. These sub-sections relate to the four “Paths” of belief and behaviour change which I proposed in the Literature Review chapter (see Section 2.3.3). I reintroduce these four “Paths” in the table below:

*Table 9.2(i). The four “Paths” of belief and behaviour change in terms of the change from teacher-centred to student-centred learning*

Path 1:	Both beliefs and practices mostly <i>teacher-centred</i>	(Section 9.2.1)
Path 2:	Practices more <i>student-centred</i> than beliefs	(Section 9.2.2)
Path 3:	Practices more <i>teacher-centred</i> than beliefs	(Section 9.2.3)
Path 4:	Both beliefs and practices mostly <i>student-centred</i>	(Section 9.2.4)

The reason I have chosen to divide this section into the four sub-sections above is that all five teachers followed each of the four “Paths” to different degrees at different points in their educational life histories. However, it must be recognised that the “Paths” are only very simplified representations of how “student-centred” and/or “teacher-centred” the participants’ beliefs and practices must have been at certain points. Indeed, as I hope to have made clear throughout this thesis, the relationships between beliefs and practices are often considerably more complex than the four “Paths” make them appear. Having said that, in order to present this section in a manageable way for the reader, it was necessary to create these somewhat artificial boundaries.

In the same way as the previous research question, I have attempted to present the main themes which emerged over the five cases in a summary table (see Table 9.2(ii) below). Again, it is important to point out that the aim of this table is to provide a quick summary of the main themes relevant to this research question. However, as mentioned previously, just because a participant does not have a tick in a particular box, this does not necessarily imply that the theme was totally inapplicable to them.

Table 9.2(ii). Summary of key themes emerging from Research Question 2

Theme	Explicitly mentioned by:				
<b>9.2.1. PATH 1: Both beliefs and practices predominately teacher-centred</b>	Rebecca	Antonio	Isabella	Ricardo	Elizabeth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both beliefs and practices are generally teacher-centred, as teachers have had a largely teacher-centred education up to this point. Both beliefs and practices are unconscious, as teachers are not aware of any other teaching approaches (see Section 9.1.1)</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early experiences on training courses did not lead to significant changes in beliefs or practices (see Section 9.1.1)</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>9.2.2. PATH 2: Practices more student-centred than beliefs</b>	Rebecca	Antonio	Isabella	Ricardo	Elizabeth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the context of compulsory changes, practices initially become more student-centred, as teachers feel obliged to change. (However, belief change eventually does occur after teachers put the changes into practice)</li> </ul>	✓		✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Within a relatively flexible environment, teacher tries to put new approaches into practice despite not believing in them. (However, belief change eventually does occur after the teacher puts the changes into practice)</li> </ul>				✓	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In retrospect, teacher feels their practices were actually fairly student-centred, although they were not explicitly aware of this at the time (i.e. beliefs were unconscious)</li> </ul>			✓		
<b>9.2.3. PATH 3: Practices more teacher-centred than beliefs</b>	Rebecca	Antonio	Isabella	Ricardo	Elizabeth
Because of a lack of understanding and/or experience implementing more student-centred approaches	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Because of contextual constraints:	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- <i>Inconsistent textbooks or syllabi</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
- <i>A lack of time to "cover" the syllabus</i>	✓			✓	
- <i>The pressure of examinations</i>		✓	✓	✓	
- <i>Overpopulated classrooms</i>	✓				
- <i>Overly heterogeneous groups</i>		✓	✓		
- <i>Inappropriate classroom facilities</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
- <i>Lack of learning resources</i>			✓	✓	✓
- <i>Students as obstacles</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
- <i>Authority figures as obstacles</i>	✓	✓		✓	
- <i>Other teachers as obstacles</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
<b>9.2.4. PATH 4: Both beliefs and practices predominately student-centred</b>	Rebecca	Antonio	Isabella	Ricardo	Elizabeth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants are able to <i>fully</i> put their student-centred beliefs into practice;</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants are able to reach a realistic compromise between teacher-centred and student-centred learning, i.e., they try to teach in a student-centred way as much as the contextual constraints allow ("hybrid teaching")</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### 9.2.1. Path 1: Both beliefs and practices teacher-centred

The first combination of beliefs and practices which emerged over the five cases was “Path 1”, which refers to when both beliefs and practices were generally teacher-centred. This was the case for all five participants during their early years of teaching.

In Section 9.1.1 of this chapter, I explored some of the reasons for the *forming and perpetuation of teacher-centred beliefs*. Given the great potential for overlap between this section and Section 9.1.1, I will not explore these issues in detail again. However, I briefly summarise the main points below.

Firstly, participants’ beliefs and practices were often seen to be teacher-centred at the beginning of their teaching careers due to their immersion in a predominately teacher-centred educational culture. Secondly, both beliefs and practices tended to be unconscious in nature, as participants were often unaware that there were any other ways of teaching. Thirdly, everyone seemed happy working in a teacher-centred way (teachers, students and authorities), meaning that there was little incentive for teachers to change. Fourthly, when teachers did attend training courses, these did not seem to have a significant effect on their beliefs. Some of the main reasons for this were that courses were too short, were disconnected from classroom realities, and were not modelled in a student-centred way themselves. Finally, participants were often so used to working in a teacher-centred way that they (at least initially) resisted the new approaches. This meant that early changes in beliefs and practices tended to be gradual, if they happened at all.

### 9.2.2. Path 2: Practices more student-centred than beliefs

The next combination of beliefs and practices was “Path 2”, which was when participants’ teaching practices were perceived to be more student-centred than their beliefs. Again, there may be a certain degree of overlap between this sub-section and Section 9.1.2 of this chapter.

The main example of “Path 2” which emerged from this study was Isabella’s experience in the United States, when she was asked to change her teaching practices during the Readers and Writers reform. Given the compulsory nature of the reform, Isabella had

little choice but to try and implement the new practices. However, when she began putting the changes into practice, she started to see positive results with her students, and she soon started to believe in them.

Another example of “Path 2” came from Rebecca while she was studying her Master’s in the UK. Rebecca recalled that she did not see any point in carrying out the reflective activities she was asked to do on some of her modules, and even refused to take part in them initially. However, through the encouragement of some of her tutors (and presumably because the reflective activities were a compulsory component of the course), she eventually ended up doing them. In retrospect, she feels that these reflective activities were some of the most important experiences in leading to a change in her beliefs (and eventually practices). As was the case with Isabella, perhaps if these activities had not been compulsory, she may not have been motivated to do them.

A slightly different example of “Path 2” came from the educational life history of Ricardo. Prior to 2003, Ricardo had been working at a very rigid, traditional private school called SMELC, which had not provided him with very many opportunities to make changes to his practices. However, when he started working at the USM in 2003, he began to experience a working environment which afforded him much more flexibility to adapt his teaching. Over the next few years, he attended numerous training courses which exposed him to new teaching approaches, many of which he considered to be more “student-centred”. Some of these new approaches represented a considerable change to the teacher-centred approaches he had been used to. However, he endeavoured to keep an open mind and try them out in his classrooms to see if they worked. Only then would he be in a position to consider the extent to which he “believed” in them:

*“There are a lot of things that I don't believe, but when I learn something new, even though I might not believe in those options, I try to use them [...] with my students, and then I come to my own conclusions: "well, it is in fact possible", or "it is possible, but in different conditions", or "I can adapt that idea, to try and make it viable".”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:23:23 – 00:23:57

The example of Ricardo is somewhat different to that of Isabella and Rebecca, given that in the two former cases there was more of an “obligation” for the teachers to change their

practices. However, there are also similarities between the three examples, given that in all three cases, practice change seems to have come before belief change.

Of course, it must be reiterated that the way beliefs may have interacted with practices will have almost definitely been more complex than simply “practice change followed by belief change”. As highlighted several times already, the relationships between beliefs and practices are often extremely complex, as both may impact upon each other at different times for different reasons. Indeed, although in the cases above practices seem to have “changed first”, the reality will have probably been complex intermingling of practice and belief change over time. I revisit these complexities in Section 10.2 of the Discussion chapter.

A final, rather different, example of “Path 2” again came from the educational life history of Isabella, but this time during her first few years of teaching. In this case, she considered that, in retrospect, she was teaching in a somewhat student-centred way, *but without being consciously aware of it at the time*. This example further demonstrates that teachers’ beliefs may be both conscious and unconscious in nature.

### 9.2.3. Path 3: Practices more teacher-centred than beliefs

This sub-section addresses by far the most common “Path” in the study; that is, when participants’ practices were perceived to be more teacher-centred than their beliefs. Two main reasons for this mismatch emerged over the five cases. The first was a lack of understanding and/or experience implementing student-centred approaches. The second and most prominent category was that of contextual constraints; that is to say, obstacles which prevented teachers from (at least fully) putting their beliefs into practice.

#### 9.2.3.1. Lack of understanding; lack of experience

The first reason why the teachers’ practices may have been less student-centred than their beliefs was that they needed time to get used to putting these new approaches into practice. Antonio, for example, stressed how challenging it was for him to change from

the teacher-centred approaches that he had been exposed to throughout his whole life towards more student-centred approaches:

*“You have to change your cassette. You have to take out everything you know about teaching and you have to discover your own way of doing it.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:17:42 – 00:17:53

As time passed and participants had more time to consolidate their understandings and become more confident putting the new approaches into practice, this initial mismatch between beliefs and practices seemed to lessen. However, even when participants felt they had become reasonably experienced “doing” more student-centred approaches, their perceived practices were still consistently less student-centred than beliefs. As mentioned above, this may be attributed to the various contextual constraints which participants encountered throughout their educational life histories. I examine these contextual constraints below.

#### 9.2.3.2. Contextual constraints

One of the most common themes which emerged from the study was that participants’ beliefs *had* become more student-centred, but they were unable to (fully) put these beliefs into practice because of the obstacles they encountered in their working contexts. Below, I outline ten of the most frequently mentioned of these obstacles.

##### *Inconsistent textbooks or syllabi*

The first contextual constraint which emerged over the five cases was that teachers were sometimes asked to follow a program or textbook which was inconsistent with the aims of student-centred EFL learning. This issue was highlighted by all five participants at different points in their educational life histories:

*“The approach that was used at the University, and I'm quoting, was "Communicative Language Teaching", and also with a mixture of student-centredness, that we shouldn't be using grammar or things like that.”*

Antonio, Interview 1a, 00:01:00 – 00:01:17

*“[However,] I had to communicate with the coordinators of each School, and I asked them what the teaching was like in those Schools, and they just told me "just follow this book, and just do this and that"; it was mainly teaching grammar.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:15:44 – 00:16:01

*“When I came back [to Mexico from the United States], I was given a program. [The University authorities told me] “you need to teach these grammar topics”.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:33:26 – 00:33:34

*“I had to follow a grammar program [provided by] the University English Department, in which there were a lot of grammar topics to cover per semester, and it was an obstacle to me applying what I was learning on my training courses.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:25:59 – 00:26:15

*“When I started, the University gave me a program. [...] The English program was based on a book called "Matters". I started with "Intermediate Matters", and all the grammar points had to be followed with the grammar of the book.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1a, 00:25:44 – 00:26:47

In fact, Rebecca stated that being forced to use (grammar-based) textbooks was the biggest obstacle to her implementing more student-centred approaches at the USM's School of Languages:

*“I do not like textbooks. I haven't found a way of working with them. I don't think that I'm doing it well [...] and I don't think the students like it either. And that makes me feel like I'm failing, because I don't think a textbook matches the principles of student-centred learning. I would say that's the biggest constraint of all.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:41:46 – 00:42:31

*A lack of time to “cover” the syllabus*

A related obstacle was that teachers sometimes felt pressured to “cover” every unit of the textbook or syllabus. Ricardo, for example, expressed the following:

*“When there is a program to follow, you fall back again to traditional teaching, since you know that you have to cover all the program and its grammar [...] instead of really helping learners to communicate or to use English in real situations.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:26:16 – 00:26:34

This pressure to “cover” the textbook seems especially relevant given the relatively few hours which are dedicated to English at the USM, as highlighted by Rebecca:

*“The struggle is time, because we have to cover a certain number of units and if I bring new things and videos and stuff like that, we might not have time.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:45:25 – 00:45:45

Linked to the issue of a lack of time was that of teacher overload. As authors such as Schweisfurth (2013) have highlighted, working in a more student-centred way demands much more from teachers than working in a solely teacher-centred way, especially in terms of planning to meet the individual needs of students. Finding the time to do this for several groups at a time may be unfeasible for many teachers. Again, Rebecca provided a good example of this. Before she went away to study her Master’s, she was teaching up to 40 contact hours a week, meaning she was physically and mentally exhausted. However, when he returned to Mexico, she was given considerably fewer teaching hours in order to make time for her new teacher training responsibilities. It seems no coincidence that she found it easier to implement student-centred EFL learning when she was only teaching one group:

*“Working in this way demands a lot of time from you as a teacher. You need to plan your lessons; you need to mark the students' work; you need to do a lot of things. If I were teaching the same number of hours as I was before, I probably wouldn't be able to do that. I only have one class now, and of course it's a lot easier.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:49:17 – 00:49:48

*Having to teach for examinations*

The next contextual constraint was that the teachers often felt under pressure to prepare students for examinations. Many of these examinations (including the high-stakes language proficiency exams such as TOEFL and IELTS) were perceived to contradict the aims of student-centred EFL learning, as they were only able to focus on quantifiable aspects of English (e.g. its grammar), and not on the more communicative skills which are tend to be taught under more student-centred approaches. Given the pressures for students to pass these examinations, it was inevitable that participants often had to adapt their classes to “teach to the test”. Isabella was a prime example of this, as she felt the need to dedicate part of one of her classes to the TOEFL test. She seemed particularly frustrated at having to teach such classes:

*“The tests don’t test [communication skills]. I’ve had many students who were great at talking, great at expressing their feelings and ideas, but when they took the exam they didn’t necessarily pass it because they didn’t know the grammar off by heart.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:30:55 – 00:31:12

*“For test-taking, I think we need a more traditional way. I don’t particularly like tests, so I don’t give tests to my students; I grade them as we go. [...] But I have had classes where I prepare them to take the TOEFL exam, for example. I feel I have to teach them the grammar, and I feel I have to teach them, explicitly, how to take tests.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:29:00 – 00:29:42

Antonio and Ricardo were also especially critical of what they perceived as an excessive focus on exams and standardisation at the USM:

*“They always want exams: “you have to give an exam, because that’s proof, for us, that you’re doing things!””*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:09:29 – 00:09:39

*“They want to standardise teaching for all the teachers; they want to have exactly the same program with the same procedures and the same classes; the same bunch of photocopies with the same readings. And I don’t think this is for the best.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 01:00:50 – 01:01:11

*Overpopulated classrooms*

The next obstacle which emerged from the study was overpopulated classrooms. There were various group sizes in the classes I observed at the USM. For example, Elizabeth's group at the School of Education and one of Ricardo's groups at the School of Nursing had only around 10 participants, which seemed a very manageable number. However, some of the other groups I encountered were considerably larger. For example, Antonio had 25 students in one of his groups at the School of Tourism; Elizabeth had 28 in her Physical Education group at the School of Education, whilst Ricardo had 33 students in one of his groups at the School of Social Work.

Moreover, although Rebecca's groups at the School of Languages were limited to 25 students, she recalled having up to 55 students during her first few years working at the USM. In fact, she identified such large groups as one of the main reasons why it was difficult to teach in any other way than a typical teacher-centred style at this time. Whilst these sizes may not be unusual in many contexts in the world, they nevertheless make it more challenging for teachers to introduce more "student-centred" approaches.

*Overly heterogeneous groups*

Perhaps a more significant issue than the *number* of students in the class was the wide range of *different language levels* in the same group. Nowhere was this more apparent than with Isabella's group at the School of Modern Art, where near-native speakers were placed in the same group as beginners:

*"The fact that I have many different levels in one group is a little bit hard to teach. For example, I want them to talk to each other, but one of them is advanced and the other one is beginner level. So that huge difference affects the results."*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:36:16 – 00:36:41

Under these conditions, it seemed difficult for Isabella to make much meaningful progress, given that the beginners found most of the activities too difficult and the more advanced ones found them far too easy. Similar issues were also identified by Antonio within his groups at the School of Tourism:

*“It was really difficult to do Communicative Language Teaching. I tried [...] but it was really difficult because of the students' levels.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:16:15 – 00:16:26

*“They need a certain level of English, so that they can defend themselves. [...] I have the advanced students, I have no problem with them, but I understand the other group, the pre-intermediate students, have a lot of problems.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:03:37 – 00:04:49

### *Inappropriate classroom facilities*

The next contextual constraint was the physical classroom setting in which English was taught. Most of the classrooms I observed at the USM were arranged in the typical traditional style: the teacher was positioned at the front of the class, with the students in rows facing him or her. In the case of Antonio's group at the School of Computing, the English class took place in a lecture theatre; one of Isabella's classes at the School of Modern Art took place in an arts workshop, whilst part of one of Ricardo's classes at the School of Social Work had to be moved to some picnic tables outside. These classroom conditions clearly made it more difficult for the teachers to implement more interactive, student-centred activities.

In some cases, it was possible to move some of the tables and chairs around. However, as these classrooms were also used by teachers of other subjects, it was not particularly easy for the teachers to do so. Rebecca, for example, expressed how she might have liked to have made changes to the physical classroom setup, but did not feel comfortable doing so:

*“The facilities are sometimes not the most appropriate for working this way. [...] The arrangement of the tables in the classroom doesn't really allow me to move students around. I really don't want to disturb the arrangement of the classroom, so I decide not to move them that much.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:36:47 - 00:37:26

*Lack of learning resources*

Another factor which the teachers identified as preventing them from putting their beliefs into practice was a lack of learning resources. Traditional teacher-centred approaches may only need a board and a marker; more student-centred approaches on the other hand may require a far more sophisticated array of teaching materials (Schweisfurth 2013). However, some participants in the study indicated that these resources were often lacking. Isabella, for example, expressed her frustration at not being able to use the projector for listening activities at the School of Modern Art, as it was often being used by other teachers:

*“Even though I'm trying to do a good job, it's not possible at all times. We have many issues like today, [...] we don't have technology, we didn't have the projector; they were using it for other art projects, so we didn't do listening.”*

Isabella, Interview 2, 00:10:50 – 00:11:14

Ricardo also mentioned several issues related to a lack of supporting materials, such as a lack of quality computer facilities, limited internet access, and having to pay for his own photocopies:

*“The University gave us these training courses, but when we wanted to use them in the computer rooms, the computers were very, very, very, slow.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:44:31 – 00:44:40

*“A student-centred approach implies more reading and a lot of thinking about what students are learning, but I do not think that students, teachers or the school authorities are willing to pay for all the photocopies that the students would need in a face-to-face course.”*

Ricardo, Extract from timeline

A final difficulty relating to insufficient resources was a lack of materials to help teachers deliver English for Specific Purposes. This was often particularly challenging, given that English teachers are usually not specialists in the areas in which they are asked to work. These issues were highlighted by Elizabeth at the School of Education and Ricardo at the Schools of Nursing and Social Work:

*“In [the School of] Administration we had some books related to business, but in the other Schools where I was teaching, like in Physical Education or Special Education, we didn't have a book to work with [...] So it was a lot of work because you had to investigate those topics.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:14:19 – 00:15:12

*“They want English teachers to focus their teaching on the specific subject area, but we aren't really nurses; we aren't really social workers. [...] They tell us to [teach ESP], but we don't have lot of [ESP] materials.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:48:29 – 00:50:20

### *Students as obstacles*

One of the most common contextual constraints identified by the participants was the students themselves:

*“Sometimes it's the students themselves; it's their rejection towards working in new ways.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:36:15 – 00:36:27

*“This kind of teaching involves having the students with an open mind for challenges. [...] [But] they always try and go for the easy way.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:03:28 – 00:05:45

*“Some students are so shaped into the old-fashioned way that when they receive this new approach they don't know how to react to it; they're so used to having to write and copy things down, but not to create, and not to speak freely. Some of them are not ready for this yet, so I have to do something in class for them to participate.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:22:14 – 00:22:46

*“At the beginning the students got really stressed. [...] It was a kind of rejection from the students.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:17:42 – 00:18:05

This kind of “student resistance” meant that the teachers would often have to teach in a more teacher-centred way in order to meet their students’ needs. For example, both Rebecca and Isabella gave examples of students explicitly asking for more teacher-centred approaches:

*“The other day one of my students here at the School of Languages [...] said that he didn't like group work. [...] "Why don't you like it?" "I don't know, I don't see the point of working in groups. I don't find it useful. [...] I prefer it when the teacher explains everything. I prefer the more teacher-centred approach”.*”

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:31:12 – 00:31:56

*“Some students actually ask me for more grammar. And I say "it's coming, it's going to be embedded in what we read, in what we talk about; the more you read and the more you talk, you're going to acquire these structures". But some of them actually want to know the formulas for sentences, like the structure, the verb, the object, the complement.”*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:23:41 – 00:24:08

Another example of a teacher feeling the need to adapt their practices was Antonio’s decision to use a “stamp system”. In this case, although he does not necessarily “believe” that this approach is an ideal way to teach, he feels that the stamps are “*a must*” in order to motivate his students to participate in class:

*“[The stamps are] a must, because otherwise, you saw it yourself, they don't do it. [...] That was the reason so many people were writing, otherwise they would have been doing other things, or just chatting.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:35:32 – 00:36:59

A further example of “students as obstacles” was when Ricardo tried to introduce peer and self-evaluation strategies with his students at the Schools of Nursing and Social Work. He found this to be extremely difficult, given that most of the students would give themselves high grades regardless of the effort that they had put in. In a similar way, Antonio and Isabella also experienced difficulties when they left students to carry out autonomous learning activities, as many of them would simply stop working when they were not under the direct control of the teacher.

The examples above emphasise how difficult it is for teachers to implement teaching approaches which are far-removed from what their students have been exposed to. Indeed, in order for students to become used to working in a more student-centred way, Ricardo suggested that they would need to receive some kind of prior “learning training” to help them adapt to these new approaches:

*“[The students] aren't prepared. I think it's a training process, and it's not only about consciousness or awareness about their own learning, but also skills; they need the skills to know how to use the [online] platform; they need skills to be more independent.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 00:33:26 – 00:33:45

*“These courses [will] only [be] successful if they have previous training.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 01:08:15 – 01:08:20

#### *Authority figures as obstacles*

Another key theme which emerged from the data was that authority figures were not always supportive of teachers as they tried to implement more student-centred approaches. For example, Rebecca expressed that she sometimes refrained from implementing teaching strategies because of certain pressures imposed on her from those in positions of power:

*“Sometimes [authority figures] don't want you to make a lot of noise, or they want students to be in the exact room at the exact time that you are supposed to be teaching them. For example, sometimes I ask my students to work on their own; I give them like an hour of class to do some research, or to prepare for a presentation or something like that, and suddenly the Head of School or the coordinator or whoever is in charge is asking you why the students are not in their classroom.”*

Rebecca, Interview 1, 00:38:12 – 00:38:46

Another example of this came from Ricardo, who recalls receiving a distinct lack of support from School authorities after one case of student resistance:

*“If you make very fast changes, the students might begin to feel uncomfortable and complain. Then the Head of School becomes aware of that, and they begin to question your teaching.”*

Ricardo, Interview 2, 00:40:26 – 00:40:31

*“The management [...] listens to [the students] a lot, and sometimes they believe them more than us, so that's something that has to change.”*

Ricardo, Interview 1, 01:00:22 - 01:00:37

A final example of authority figures being far from supportive came from the case of Antonio. He recalled having an extremely difficult group of students who resisted working, despite him trying to motivate them through a variety of more interactive activities. Unfortunately, he felt that these students had *“the support of the Head Teacher”*, who wanted to give them *“a grade for free”*. Like the example of Ricardo above, this represents a worrying tendency. Indeed, Antonio cited the *“Administration”* as that the main contextual constraint to him implementing more student-centred approaches to EFL learning:

*“I always thought the main obstacle [...] for doing things differently was the University. Well, not the University, the "Administration". I could have written the "Ministry of Education", because it's the same thing there [...] The Ministry of Education, the Directorate of Higher Education, you can call it whatever you want, but it's the "Administration".”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:08:23 – 00:08:48

*“They gave us training on different perspectives [...] they are changing and changing, but things are still the same [...]. This is the main problem. [...] So nothing changes really, because of them. For me, that's the biggest problem.”*

Antonio, Interview 2, 00:09:04 – 00:10:03

The experiences cited by the three participants above demonstrate that teachers will be fighting a losing battle if those in positions of authority do not support them in implementing the changes. I address these issues in more detail in the following Discussion chapter.

*Other teachers as obstacles*

The final obstacle which emerged from the study was that of other teachers. The first group of these were the “content teachers”; that is to say, teachers of other subjects. This issue was especially prominent for the participants who were beginning to teach ESP and/or CLIL. For example, both Antonio and Elizabeth mentioned that there have been certain disagreements between what the English teacher and the content teacher would like to teach:

*“Sometimes I don't agree with a task, but [we have to follow] what the content teacher says, more or less.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:04:00 – 00:04:08

*“You as an English teacher had one idea about what you thought the students needed, but the content teachers asked you to do some other things.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 2, 00:16:56 – 00:17:10

Moreover, in some instances, these content teachers have actually directly undermined the English teacher’s work:

*“In some Schools [...] they still believe English is not important, and you have to fight against that, because the English teacher is the only advocate of English; [...] sometimes [it's] not even your colleagues; I mean they're telling students "don't learn English, because it's not useful". I think that's also a very important obstacle.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:44:02 – 00:44:57

*“I've had an experience with one of the teachers [in one School]. [...] This teacher told the students that when you get to a certain age, you're not able to learn another language. That was a really negative aspect.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:14:14 – 00:14:43

Finally, in some cases, it has actually been the participants’ own EFL teaching colleagues who have sought to undermine their teaching approaches. Antonio, for example, recounted that many of his EFL teaching co-workers have expressed to him that they do

not actually believe in CLIL, whilst Isabella explained that many of her co-workers see her more student-centred classes as “crazy”:

*“When you asked me about what was hard for me [...], I think the rest of my co-workers view my class as crazy. [They say things like] “why are the students doing all the work, not the teacher?””*

Isabella, Interview 1, 00:52:18 – 00:52:44

The numerous contextual constraints identified in this sub-section demonstrate that there are a wide range of factors which seem to be working against the teachers as they attempt to put their more student-centred beliefs into practice. I discuss these again, and consider what might be done about them, in Section 10.3 of the Discussion chapter.

#### *9.2.4. Path 4: Both beliefs and practices student-centred*

The final theoretical combination of beliefs and practices was “Path 4”, which refers to when both beliefs and practices are predominately student-centred. As suggested in Section 2.3.3 of the Literature Review, this “Path” may be seen as the desirable “end goal” of this educational change, as it would indicate that both beliefs and practices had become student-centred. However, as may have become apparent from the previous sub-section, there were relatively few examples of teachers *fully* being able to put their student-centred beliefs into practice.

Having said that, the instances in which participants were able to more closely align their beliefs with their practices seems to have been when there were fewer of the previously mentioned contextual constraints. I provide some examples of this in the following sub-section.

##### *9.2.4.1. Reducing the contextual constraints*

Without doubt, the contextual constraints the teachers have experienced whilst working at the USM have had a significant impact on the extent to which they have been able to put student-centred EFL learning into practice. Conversely, when these contextual

constraints were reduced, there generally seems to have been more of a possibility of coherence between beliefs and their practices.

In particular, it seems that the level of support teachers received from individual Schools has affected the extent to which they could teach in a more student-centred way. For example, Rebecca and Elizabeth both stressed how important it was for them to receive support from their Schools:

*“In the School of Languages [...] we have the same mind-set, because we're working towards the same aim, we're training student teachers, so we're more or less aware of what we should be doing.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:43:38 – 00:44:01

*“I wouldn't say it's the whole institution; [...] it depends on which School you are working in, and the people you are working with. [...] Over all these years, I have worked with many different people, and I think the most important thing is when people in higher positions motivate students, as well as your co-workers; not your English co-workers but the other teachers; the content teachers.”*

Elizabeth, Interview 1b, 00:12:10 – 00:13:25

Another good example of this different degree of support was Isabella's experiences of working at different schools in the United States. For example, when she moved to “Hammersdon Academy” between 2004 and 2005, she felt that her practices became slightly more student-centred. She attributed this to the fact that Hammersdon had more experience teaching in a student-centred way, and therefore provided her with better conditions to support her to do so. However, when she started working at another school called the “Parkland Academy”, she felt that her practices became less student-centred, as the school was not so geared towards teaching in a more student-centred way.

A final point to make is that some participants suggested that this increased “support” might actually indicate *a lack of intervention* on the part of certain Schools. Rebecca, for example, felt that one of the few times in which she was able to truly implement student-centred learning was when she worked as a teacher trainer at the USM. During these

teacher training sessions, there was much less intervention from USM authorities, meaning that she had much more of an influence on the way the learning was organised:

*“When I was doing the teacher training, I was able to design my own programs and my own materials. That's when I think real student-centred learning is implemented. I implement student-centred learning when I have the chance to design the whole thing, select all the materials, and make decisions on how many participants I will have in my lesson and what I will be doing with them. That's the ideal situation, for student-centred learning to happen.”*

Rebecca, Interview 2, 00:38:06 – 00:38:46

In fact, Antonio expressed a very similar opinion to Rebecca regarding the importance of him being “left alone” to teach:

*“When I'm on my own, like if I design my own program and all that, like for example here in [the School of] Computing [...], it's the easiest thing in the world, because I already know my stuff, I already know my materials, I know what works.”*

Antonio, Interview 1b, 00:34:02 – 00:34:18

#### 9.2.4.2. Few examples of “full coherence”; many examples of “hybrid teaching”

The fact that there were very few instances of participants being able to *fully* put student-centred EFL learning into practice may paint a rather negative picture in terms of the implementation of this educational change at the USM. However, on a more positive note, it must be recognised that all five participants did report that their teaching practices had become *more student-centred than teacher-centred* by the time of data collection.

Indeed, all five participants seem to have reached a point in which they were teaching in *as much of a student-centred way as was realistically possible given the contextual constraints* they were facing. This brings us back to the idea of “hybrid teaching”: a compromise between what teachers would *ideally like to do* and what they feel they are *realistically able to do* within their specific contexts.

In fact, given the relatively few examples of participants being able to fully teach in a student-centred way, perhaps it would be more realistic *not* to aim for “full coherence” between beliefs and practices, but rather to promote a more principled form of “hybrid teaching”. This is one of the key themes which I explore in more detail in the following Discussion chapter.

### **9.3. Summary of main themes emerging from the cross-case analysis**

The previous two sections brought together the main themes which emerged throughout the five participants’ educational life histories. Each of these sections focused on a separate research question, and four main themes emerged for each research question. However, as it may have become apparent, there was a certain degree of overlap between these themes. Indeed, upon reflection, there appears to have been four main tendencies or “patterns” which each teacher experienced over the course of their educational life histories. These four “patterns” were as follows:

- *Pattern 1: All five teachers began their teaching careers with predominately teacher-centred beliefs and practices.*
- *Pattern 2: While it was not always easy to identify whether beliefs or practices “changed first”, all five teachers eventually started to believe in more student-centred approaches to EFL learning. These belief changes seem to have been linked to various experiences they had over the course of their educational life histories.*
- *Pattern 3: All five teachers felt that their practices generally became more student-centred over time. However, they also reported that they were rarely able to fully put these beliefs into practice. This mismatch between beliefs and practices was mainly attributed to the contextual constraints which they encountered in their working environments.*

- *Pattern 4: By the time of data collection, all five teachers made reference to a more flexible, pragmatic attitude towards teaching: a “hybrid” approach in which a mixture of teacher- and student-centred approaches may be used, depending on their perceived appropriateness within given situations.*

In the following chapter, I discuss these four main “patterns” in more detail, and consider what they might mean in terms of our current understandings of student-centred learning and educational change.

## **CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

At the end of the previous chapter, I identified four main themes or “patterns” which emerged from the five teachers’ educational life histories. In this chapter, I discuss these themes in more detail, and consider how they might contribute to our current understandings of student-centred learning and educational change.

The four main “patterns” were summarised at the end of the previous chapter, so I will not list them again at this stage. I will therefore proceed to examine them separately within the following four sections.

### **10.1. Pattern 1: Early teacher-centred beliefs and practices**

The first common theme which emerged over the five cases was that all five participants felt that they began their teaching careers with predominately teacher-centred beliefs and practices, many of which were unconscious in nature. This appears to have been linked to the fact that they had spent the majority of their lives as learners immersed in the Mexican educational culture, which is generally considered to be very teacher-centred (Ramírez Romero, 2010; Sayer, 2012; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014). Being exposed to mainly teacher-centred practices for the vast majority of their lives as students seems to have left them with few alternatives other than to replicate these approaches in their own teaching.

These findings are consistent with the literature on beliefs and belief change. As mentioned in the Literature Review chapter, the idea that early beliefs about teaching are often unconscious in nature is supported by the general consensus of the belief change literature (Pajares, 1992; Borg, 2001; Baştürkmen, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Moreover, Lortie’s (1975) concept of the “apprenticeship of observation”, which suggests that people’s initial beliefs about teaching are formed based on their early experiences as learners, has rarely been challenged (Pajares, 1992; Borg, 2005; Phipps and Borg, 2009).

This idea also seems to have been consistent over a wide range of different countries and cultures. For example, similar tendencies to those encountered in my study were found in case studies from China (Ouyang, 2000; Tsui, 2007; Liu and Xu, 2011), England

(Cabaroğlu and Roberts, 2000; Borg, 2005), Egypt (Mansour, 2013), and Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009; Phipps and Borg, 2009). The findings of this study therefore reinforce the argument that teachers' early beliefs tend to be significantly influenced by the contexts and cultures in which they are brought up.

## **10.2. Pattern 2: Changes towards more student-centred beliefs**

The second main tendency emerging from the study was that all five teachers reported that they eventually started to believe in more student-centred approaches to EFL learning at one point or another in their educational life histories. Although the relationships between belief and behaviour change proved to be extremely complex (as argued by Wilcox-Herzog, 2002, Phipps and Borg 2009, and Baştürkmen 2012, among others), there appear to have been key moments in the participants' educational life histories which they felt contributed towards their beliefs becoming more student-centred. In particular, there seemed to be a number of characteristics of training courses which made the participants think differently about their teaching. As outlined in the Cross-Case Analysis chapter, these courses were those that:

- Were longer (i.e. lasted more than just one or a few days);
- Were clearly linked to practice (e.g. through observed teaching practices or peer observation schemes);
- Were modelled in a student-centred way themselves;
- Were situated in the real contexts in which the changes were expected to be implemented; and
- Incorporated opportunities for teachers to reflect about themselves, their practices, and how they might be able to put the contents of the change into practice within their own contexts.

A quick recap of Section 2.3.2 of the Literature Review suggests that the experiences of the five teacher participants seem to have been fairly similar to teachers in other contexts:

*Table 10.2(i). Summary of case studies cited in the Literature Review relating to the characteristics of training courses which were considered more likely to have an impact on teachers' beliefs*

<b>Characteristic of training courses</b>	<b>Emphasised in the study by</b>	<b>As highlighted in case studies from the following countries</b>
<i>Longer courses</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rebecca</li> <li>● Antonio</li> <li>● Isabella</li> <li>● Ricardo</li> <li>● Elizabeth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mexico (Pamplón Irigoyen and Ramírez Romero, 2013; Quezada, 2013; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014)</li> <li>● China (Liu and Xu, 2011)</li> <li>● Greece (Mattheoudakis, 2007)</li> <li>● Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009)</li> <li>● Uganda (Altinyelken, 2010)</li> </ul>
<i>Incorporating teaching practices / peer observation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Isabella</li> <li>● Elizabeth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009)</li> <li>● The USA (Busch, 2010)</li> </ul>
<i>Modelled in a student-centred way themselves</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rebecca</li> <li>● Ricardo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● China (Dello-Iacovo, 2009)</li> <li>● India (Dyer et al., 2004)</li> <li>● Greece (Mattheoudakis, 2007)</li> <li>● Pakistan (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008)</li> </ul>
<i>Grounded in the participants' real contexts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rebecca</li> <li>● Ricardo</li> <li>● Elizabeth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Argentina (Zappa-Hollman, 2007)</li> <li>● Pakistan (Westbrook et al., 2009)</li> <li>● Tanzania (Vavrus, 2009)</li> <li>● Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009)</li> </ul>
<i>Incorporating opportunities for reflection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rebecca</li> <li>● Ricardo</li> <li>● Elizabeth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Egypt (Mansour, 2013)</li> <li>● The Netherlands (Geijsel and Meijers, 2005)</li> <li>● The UK (Cabaroglu and Roberts, 2000; Borg, 2011)</li> </ul>

The fact that the characteristics above have also been cited in a wide range of case studies from other countries suggests that decision-makers might bear them in mind when planning and/or choosing training courses that aim to have an impact on teachers' beliefs as well as their practices.

An issue worth contemplating within this section was the degree of "obligation" involved in these training courses. As I explained in the Contextual Background chapter, the USM has a policy of "academic freedom", which grants teachers a certain degree of flexibility to make changes to their teaching practices. This was especially relevant in the cases of Antonio, Ricardo and Elizabeth, who all began to consider more student-centred practices whilst experimenting with new practices at the USM. However, the cases of Isabella in the United States (and to a certain extent, Rebecca on her Master's in the UK), involved more of a *compulsory* change in practices. For example, the main "belief-changing" event in Isabella's educational life history was her experience of the Readers and Writers Workshop in the United States. Here, although she did not initially believe in the changes advocated by the reform, she had little choice to put the changes into practice. However,

as she experienced the process of actually putting the changes into practice, she began to see positive results, and eventually became very much in favour of them. Examples like this reinforce the idea that teachers may need to put changes into practice and evaluate their effectiveness, before they start to “believe” in them (Markee, 1997; Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009).

What I found most interesting about the case of Isabella was that the Readers and Writers reform was very much a “top-down” educational change. Under these circumstances, we might have expected the reform to fail, as have so many which have been implemented in such a way (Markee, 1997; Díaz Maggioli, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). However, the key factor in the success of the reform seems to have been the degree of support provided for Isabella over a sustained period of time. For example, she was invited to participate in observed teaching practices and peer observation schemes, and was assigned a mentor, who she kept in contact with over a number of months. Although the case of Isabella only provides us with one example of this phenomenon, it nevertheless suggests that “top-down” reforms may not necessarily be doomed to failure, as long as they provide an appropriate level of support for teachers *over time* as they attempt to implement the changes (Wideen et al., 1998; Fullan, 2007; Cross and Hong, 2011; Schweisfurth, 2013).

A final important point to recognise is that the final two characteristics in Table 10.2(i) above (being “grounded in the participants’ real contexts” and “incorporating opportunities for reflection” seem to imply the acceptance of a more “hybrid” approach towards teaching. This is because these kinds of courses provided the teachers with a certain degree of flexibility to adapt the contents of the changes within their own contexts. This raises very important questions about how educational changes such as student-centred learning are introduced and conceptualised within teacher training sessions. I consider these questions in more detail in Section 10.4, and especially in Section 10.4.3.

To conclude this section, the examples of teacher belief change highlighted in the study, coupled with similar experiences from several other case studies in the literature, may give hope to those who are interested in implementing “complex” educational changes at the USM or similar contexts. This is because they demonstrate that teacher belief change *may* be facilitated by training courses with certain key characteristics. However, it is important to point out that these types of training courses imply a significant investment

of time and resources, which is often missing in developing countries like Mexico. Furthermore, even if change planners *are* able to provide the conditions to facilitate teacher belief change, this does not necessarily mean that the teachers will be able to transfer these beliefs into their practices. I explore the challenges the teachers faced in putting their beliefs into practice in the following section.

### **10.3. Pattern 3: A lack of “full coherence” between beliefs and practices**

As highlighted in the previous section, all five participants felt that their beliefs started to become more student-centred at one point or another during their educational life histories. However, the next key “pattern” which emerged over the five cases was that the participants’ teaching practices were perceived to be consistently less student-centred than their beliefs.

Early mismatches between beliefs and practices may have been due to the teachers needing time to fully understand or get used to implementing the changes. This seems fairly normal; indeed, as highlighted in the Literature Review, a number of studies suggest that teachers’ practices are likely to become more aligned with their beliefs as they acquire more practical experience in the classroom (Borg, 2006; Isikoglu et al., 2009; Baştürkmen, 2012).

However, later mismatches appear to have been linked to the contextual constraints which the teachers encountered at the USM. I discuss these constraints in more detail in the following sub-sections.

#### *10.3.1. Contextual constraints as major obstacles to teachers putting their beliefs into practice*

There were numerous examples over the five cases in which the participants would have liked to have taught in a more student-centred way, but could not fully do so because of the obstacles they encountered at the USM. In the Cross-Case Analysis chapter, I identified ten of these, which were as follows:

- Textbooks or syllabi that were not consistent with the aims of the change;
- A lack of time to “cover” the syllabus;
- Having to teach for examinations;
- Overpopulated classrooms;
- Overly heterogeneous groups;
- Inappropriate classroom facilities;
- A lack of learning resources;
- Students not being used to more student-centred approaches;
- Being undermined by authority figures; and
- Being undermined by other teachers.

The contextual constraints listed above do not appear to have been unique to the five teachers at the USM. Indeed, as mentioned in the Literature Review, many similar issues have been reported from a wide range of case studies, both from Mexico and other countries. A range of examples of these case studies are provided in the table below:

*Table 10.3(i). Summary of case studies cited in the Literature Review relating to contextual constraints which were seen to prevent teachers from putting their beliefs into practice*

(continued on next page)

<b>Contextual constraint</b>	<b>Emphasised in the study by</b>	<b>As highlighted in case studies from the following countries</b>
<i>Inconsistent textbooks and/or syllabi</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebecca</li> <li>• Antonio</li> <li>• Isabella</li> <li>• Ricardo</li> <li>• Elizabeth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Castro Juárez, 2013; Lengeling et al., 2013; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014)</li> <li>• Egypt (Mansour, 2013)</li> <li>• Greece (Mattheoudakis, 2007)</li> <li>• Japan (Kurihara and Samimy, 2007)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009; Phipps and Borg, 2009)</li> <li>• South Africa (Stoffels, 2005)</li> </ul>
<i>Not enough time to “cover” the syllabus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebecca</li> <li>• Ricardo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Sayer, 2012; Alcántar Díaz and Montes Reyes, 2013; Collins and Pérez, 2013)</li> <li>• Argentina (Zappa-Hollman, 2007)</li> <li>• Colombia (Herazo Rivera et al., 2012)</li> <li>• Jordan (Mustafa and Cullingford, 2008)</li> <li>• Pakistan (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008; Westbrook et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009; Phipps and Borg, 2009)</li> </ul>
<i>Having to teach for examinations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antonio</li> <li>• Isabella</li> <li>• Ricardo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico (Griffith and Lim, 2010)</li> <li>• China (Ouyang, 2000; Dello-Iacovo, 2009)</li> <li>• Egypt (Mansour, 2013)</li> <li>• Hong Kong (Pennington and Urmston, 1998)</li> <li>• Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009; Phipps and Borg, 2009)</li> </ul>

<i>Overpopulated classrooms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rebecca</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mexico (Davies, 2009; Alcántar Díaz and Montes Reyes, 2013; Mendoza Valladares and Puón Castro, 2013)</li> <li>● Argentina (Zappa-Hollman, 2007)</li> <li>● Cambodia (Song, 2015)</li> <li>● Colombia (Cadavid et al., 2004)</li> <li>● Tanzania (Barrett, 2007)</li> <li>● Uganda (Altinyelken, 2010)</li> <li>● Ukraine (Smotrova, 2009)</li> </ul>
<i>Overly heterogeneous groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Antonio</li> <li>● Isabella</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mexico (Davies, 2009)</li> <li>● Cambodia (Song, 2015)</li> <li>● Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009)</li> <li>● Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009)</li> <li>● Uganda (Altinyelken, 2010)</li> </ul>
<i>Inappropriate classroom facilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rebecca</li> <li>● Antonio</li> <li>● Isabella</li> <li>● Ricardo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mexico (Pamplón Irigoyen and Ramírez Romero, 2013)</li> <li>● Malawi (Croft, 2002)</li> <li>● Pakistan (Westbrook et al., 2009)</li> <li>● South Africa (Brodie et al., 2002)</li> </ul>
<i>A lack of learning resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Isabella</li> <li>● Ricardo</li> <li>● Elizabeth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mexico (Lengeling et al., 2013; Mendoza Valladares and Puón Castro, 2013; Pamplón Irigoyen and Ramírez Romero, 2013)</li> <li>● Bangladesh (Obaidul Hamid, 2010)</li> <li>● China (Dello-Iacovo, 2009)</li> <li>● India (Dyer et al., 2004)</li> <li>● Jordan (Mustafa and Cullingford, 2008)</li> <li>● Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009)</li> <li>● Uganda (Altinyelken, 2010)</li> </ul>
<i>A lack of support from students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rebecca</li> <li>● Antonio</li> <li>● Isabella</li> <li>● Ricardo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mexico (Quezada, 2013; Ramírez Romero, 2013)</li> <li>● Argentina (Zappa-Hollman, 2007)</li> <li>● China (Ouyang, 2000)</li> <li>● Japan (Kurihara and Samimy, 2007)</li> <li>● Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009)</li> <li>● Ukraine (Smotrova, 2009)</li> </ul>
<i>A lack of support from authority figures and/or other teachers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rebecca</li> <li>● Antonio</li> <li>● Isabella</li> <li>● Ricardo</li> <li>● Elizabeth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mexico (López de Anda, 2013; Mendoza Valladares and Puón Castro, 2013; Ramírez Romero et al., 2014)</li> <li>● China (Ouyang, 2000; Tsui, 2007)</li> <li>● Egypt (Mansour, 2013)</li> <li>● Japan (Kurihara and Samimy, 2007)</li> <li>● Pakistan (Mohammad and Harlech-Jones, 2008; Westbrook et al., 2009)</li> <li>● Thailand (de Segovia and Hardison, 2009)</li> </ul>

These contextual constraints were discussed separately in the Cross-Case Analysis chapter, and I will therefore not revisit them individually at this point. However, I do feel it is relevant to focus on what is arguably the most important contextual constraint: the pressure to teach for examinations.

*10.3.1.1. Teaching for examinations: the most significant contextual constraint?*

One of the key obstacles which emerged from the study was that the teachers felt under pressure to teach for examinations which were seen to contradict the aims of student-centred EFL learning. As I explained in the Literature Review chapter, more student-centred approaches to EFL learning tend to imply a greater degree of flexibility regarding assessment; a movement away from the notion that every student can be assessed in the same, objective, quantifiable fashion. At the very least, they imply testing students in the same way as they have been taught; for example if the emphasis in class has been on communication over grammar, then it would be contradictory to assess only grammar in examinations.

However, the tendency in Mexico and further afield has been to move increasingly towards examinations and standardisation (Jacobs and Farrell, 2001; Deboer, 2002; Elkind, 2004; Griffith and Lim, 2010). For example, as mentioned in the Contextual Background chapter, one of the goals of the USM is to have as many of its students as possible pass the TOEFL test. Therefore, it is understandable that teachers would see the need to dedicate some of their class time towards preparing students for these tests. Isabella provided a good example of this from the study, as she emphasised that she would ideally not like to teach “exam classes”, but has felt the obligation to do so because of the pressures put on her by the USM. Furthermore, Antonio and Ricardo both highlighted that they felt under pressure to set internal examinations and to provide the Schools with regular, quantifiable grades.

One of the main reasons I believe that examinations represent an important, if not the most important, contextual constraint, is that they seem to be linked to a number of the other contextual constraints. For example, one of the reasons Schools at the USM may encourage its teachers to “cover” all the units of a particular (grammar-based) textbook is that this might help the students pass their (grammar-based) exams. In addition, large classes and/or traditional classroom layouts may not be too much of a problem, as long as the main focus of the English class is for students to memorise grammar for the exam. Furthermore, the phenomenon of “students as obstacles” may be somewhat caused by the pressure of examinations, as students are obviously interested in passing exams, whether these be internal exams or high-stakes language tests such as TOEFL. Finally, authority figures such as Heads of School may also be affected by the tendency towards

examinations, as they are often evaluated based on students' grades and/or the number of students who pass the TOEFL exam.

In a recent paper (Bremner, 2015), I examined some of the reasons why high-stakes examinations such as the TOEFL exam continue to have such a significant impact on EFL learning in Mexico. I began to envisage a sort of "chain of causation". At the very end of the chain, I found some of the main "consumers" of these tests: universities and employers. Given that these organisations often require their students or staff to have acquired certain scores on high-stakes exams like the TOEFL, it seems inevitable that governments would put pressure on their education systems to have as many students as possible pass them, and that authorities within these institutions put pressure on their teachers to "teach to the test". Moreover, as I have just mentioned, many students (often encouraged by their parents) are acutely aware that they will need to pass these exams in order to improve their study or employment prospects. Therefore, again it would seem inevitable that they would expect (and sometimes even put pressure on) their teachers to prepare them for these elusive exams. Under these conditions, it is no wonder that so much time is spent "teaching for the test".

### *10.3.2. What might be done about the contextual constraints?*

It is clear that the contextual constraints above, and in particular the pressure to teach for examinations, have a significant impact on the participants' abilities to put their student-centred beliefs into practice. Furthermore, the numerous case studies cited in Table 10.3.1(i) above demonstrate that these obstacles are present in a wide variety of educational contexts, not only in Mexico but all over the world. In this sub-section, I consider what might be done in order to address these constraints.

#### *10.3.2.1. Teachers as just one aspect of the educational change process*

Across educational policy documents, and also within some areas of the educational change literature, the teacher is often seen as the decisive factor in whether or not educational changes are implemented successfully. For example, Isikoglu and her colleagues stress the following:

[...] teachers are the critical components of the curriculum change as they are the deciding factors as to whether or not student-centred education will be used in their classrooms. [...] The success of such curriculum reform, whatever the intention is, depends mostly on the teacher, who is the key person in enacting it.

(Isikoglu et al., 2009: 350-351; emphasis mine)

Statements like this are understandable; after all, teachers are ultimately the people who will provide the “end product” of educational changes. However, in my opinion, the way these sentences are phrased (or perhaps, how they are *interpreted* by educational decision-makers) tends to put far too much pressure, and sometimes even a certain degree of blame, on the teachers. Most importantly, they do little to recognise how teaching may be affected by a wide range of factors which are out of the teachers’ control. In fact, given the numerous contextual constraints identified by the teachers at the USM, it is clear that they are far from the *only* reasons why student-centred approaches might not be visible in EFL classrooms. Wideen et al. (1998) summarise the situation well when they state the following:

[Studies tend to] portray the beginning teacher as the central problem in teacher education. The solution proposed by most researchers is to have preservice teachers reflect more on their practice, to employ teaching approaches more consistent with constructivism, or to recruit a different population of prospective teachers. The list goes on. We believe that these approaches, however important, will do little to improve teacher education within its current structure. We argue that other features of a larger system must be recognized as equally significant, and addressed, if research and practice in teacher education are to be improved.

(Wideen et al., 1998: 168)

Very similar points to those above have been argued by Wedell (2009; 2013). Wedell has stressed that training teachers is only one “part” of the educational change process, and that adjustments to other “parts” of educational systems may be needed in order to support teachers in putting educational changes into practice. In the case of this study, some of the “parts” which seemed to undermine the implementation of student-centred EFL learning at the USM were:

- *Textbooks and syllabi* (which were not always consistent with more student-centred approaches to EFL learning);
- *The number of hours dedicated to English* (which were often seen as insufficient in order to teach in a more student-centred way);
- *Examinations* (which were not always consistent with more student-centred approaches to EFL learning, and often forced teachers to teach “exam classes”);
- *The number of students in each group* (which were often seen as too many in order to introduce more student-centred activities);
- *The levels of students in each group* (which were often seen to be too heterogeneous, as students at the USM are not always divided into levels);
- *Classroom facilities* (which were not always seen as appropriate in order to facilitate more student-centred activities); and
- *Learning resources* (which were sometimes seen as insufficient and/or inappropriate for more student-centred activities).

As Wedell argues, recognising that the implementation of educational changes may be affected by the numerous “parts” of education systems may be an important step in reducing the potential mismatches between teachers’ beliefs and their practices. However, arguably more important than these “parts” is Wedell’s concept of the “partners”. This term refers to all those people who are involved within various levels of education systems, for example:

- School leaders;
- Teacher trainers;
- Teachers of other subjects;
- Students; and
- Parents.

Ideally, these “partners” would be able to make certain changes to some of the “parts” in order to better support teachers as they try to implement educational changes like student-centred EFL learning.

In addition to Wedell's concepts of the "parts" and "partners", the idea that successful educational changes will need to involve a wide range of people from different areas of education systems has been mentioned by several other authors in the literature. For example, in Mexico, Mendoza Valladares and Puón Castro (2013), Ramírez Romero et al. (2014) and Rodríguez-Ramírez (2014) have all stressed the importance of different stakeholders making changes in order to help the implementation of the Mexican National English Program in Basic Education. Furthermore, Wideen et al. (1998) call for an "ecological" approach to educational change, Jacobs and Farrell (2001) advocate a more "holistic" perspective to change management, whilst Schweisfurth (2013) stresses the importance of "joined-up support" between the various components of education systems.

#### *10.3.2.2. "Reculturing" the "partners"*

The findings of my study support the previously mentioned argument that many different people may have a role to play in helping teachers implement student-centred EFL learning in contexts such as the USM. This is because at least some of these "partners" might be able to make certain adjustments (to the "parts" above) in order to better support teachers as they attempt to put these new approaches into practice.

However, in order for this to happen, it would seem that the "partners" might need to go through at least some degree of belief and behaviour change ("reculturing") themselves. As I suggested in a recent paper, these people would ideally need to:

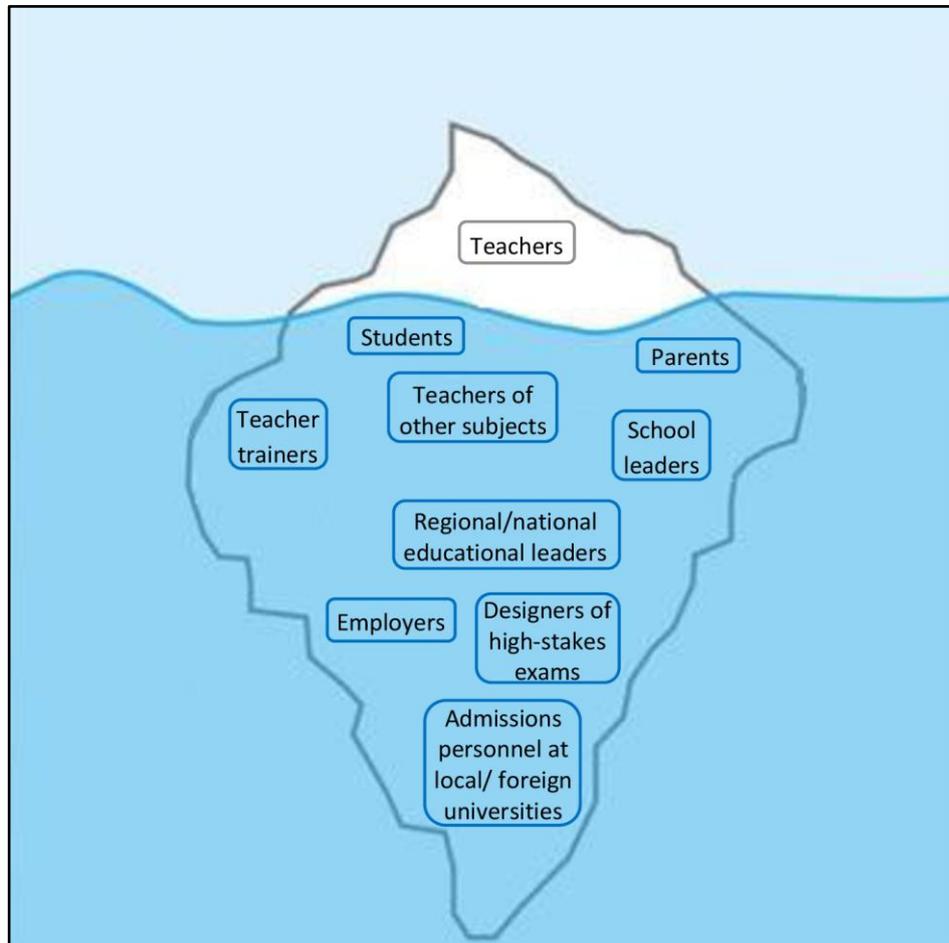
- 1) understand how the term "student-centred (EFL) learning" might be interpreted within their contexts, recognising that there may be a wide range of definitions of the same concept;
- 2) understand how challenging it might be for teachers to implement "complex" changes such as student-centred (EFL) learning, and that support from various parts of the system may be needed in order to facilitate its implementation;
- 3) begin to consider what adjustments could (realistically) be made at their end in order to support teachers in putting the new approaches into practice.

(adapted from Bremner, 2015: 8)

In the diagram on the following page, I have attempted to provide a visual representation of some of the main people who might need to make these adjustments. Below it, I offer some tentative suggestions regarding what these people might do in order to better support the implementation of student-centred EFL learning in contexts such as the USM in Mexico.

Before continuing, it should be recognised that the “iceberg model” is very idealistic in nature. Indeed, it is not my expectation that all of the “partners” will seamlessly make the changes in order to better facilitate the implementation of student-centred EFL learning. However, I still think that the model is useful on a theoretical level, as it is a good visual indicator of the wide range of people who could have an impact on the success or failure of this educational change. Most importantly, it demonstrates that teachers represent only a very small aspect of what might need to change in order for “complex” changes (like the introduction of student-centred EFL learning) to be implemented successfully.

*Fig. 10.3.2.2(i). Diagram suggesting some of the people who might need to change in order to facilitate the implementation of student-centred EFL learning in Mexico (Bremner, 2015: 8)*



Working from the top to the bottom of the diagram, firstly, it is clear that *teachers* will have to adapt their beliefs and practices, if there is any hope of student-centred EFL learning being visible in Mexican classrooms. However, *students* may also need to go through a process of “reculturing”, in order for them to become accustomed to working in a more student-centred way (Felder and Brent, 1996; Wideen et al., 1998; Schweisfurth, 2013). As suggested by Ricardo, this might be achieved through some sort of “learner training”, in which students could be explicitly introduced to student-centred EFL learning and begin to understand how their roles as learners might have to change under these new approaches. At the USM, this could be carried out by the teachers themselves, or preferably as “extra” sessions provided (and paid for) by the University.

Next, depending on the students’ ages, *parents* might need to experience at least some degree of “reculturing”, so that they are aware of the reasons why their sons and daughters are working under a different approach (Elkind, 2004; Ramírez Romero, 2013; Schweisfurth, 2013). For example, parents could be explained that it is perfectly acceptable for their children not to have filled in every page of a textbook, as more time in class would be dedicated to more communicative activities.

It would also seem logical for *teacher trainers* to go through some degree of “reculturing”. As mentioned earlier, it might be worth them bearing in mind the characteristics of the training courses which were seen to be more likely to lead to teacher belief change (see Section 10.2). In particular, they could try to implement courses which allow teachers to reflect about how they might be able to adapt the changes within their individual contexts. (I address these kinds of courses again in Section 10.4.3, which explores how teacher training might respond to the concept of “hybrid” teaching).

Moreover, *teachers of other subjects* (“content teachers”) would ideally need to be aware of student-centred EFL learning, in order to support (or at the very least not disrupt) the EFL teacher’s interpretation of it (Wideen et al., 1998; López de Anda, 2013; Ramírez Romero, 2013). This might help avoid some of the situations reported by some of the teacher participants in which they reported a distinct lack of support from other teachers at the USM.

Without doubt, *school leaders* (such as the Heads of School at the USM) have a great responsibility when it comes to the successful implementation of educational changes

(Tatto, 1997; Westbrook et al., 2009; Altinyelken, 2010; López de Anda, 2013). For instance, at the USM, they could allow the EFL teacher to use a more student-centred textbook; they could allow English classes to be divided into language levels; they could allocate an appropriate classroom for the English subject, to name but three examples.

Furthermore, *regional/national educational leaders* could help the implementation of student-centred EFL learning if they were to make some adjustments to help support EFL teachers (Markee, 1997; Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009). For example, educational leaders could do something to help reduce the number of students in English classes; they could provide more resources for EFL teachers; they could put less pressure on English teachers to provide them with quantifiable exam results, again to give just three examples.

Finally, ideally, the *designers of high-stakes English exams* would create language tests that were actually consistent with the core values of student-centred EFL learning (for example, by assessing the communication skills that student-centred EFL learning is said to promote). Additionally, *employers and admissions personnel at local/foreign universities* could stop demanding these standardised exams, and assess the language levels of their students in a more personalised fashion.

#### 10.3.2.3. *Is eliminating the contextual constraints feasible?*

As recognised in the previous sub-section, the suggestions above have been proposed rather more in hope than in expectation. Indeed, the likelihood of these “parts” and “partners” suddenly “falling into line” is virtually non-existent, at least in the short or medium term.

Of course, some of the contextual constraints may be easier to resolve than others. For example, I am sure that the USM could provide Ricardo with a real classroom instead of having to teach parts of his Social Work classes outside on picnic tables. I am also fairly sure that, given the large number of students at the USM, it would not be too difficult to divide groups into language levels. Moreover, if students at the USM were provided with some degree of “learner training”, perhaps this would help them get used to working in a more student-centred way, and thus reduce the possibility of “student resistance”.

However, some of the other contextual constraints seem less likely to change, at least in the near future. The most obvious example of this is the tendency towards standardisation and examinations, which as I emphasised in Section 10.3.1.1, is linked to a number of the other contextual constraints. Perhaps most significantly, as long as high-stakes English exams such as the TOEFL and IELTS continue to be demanded by so many people, it would seem inevitable that teachers will continue to feel the pressure to “teach to the test”.

Indeed, bearing in mind the considerable obstacles identified in this section, it is perhaps no surprise that all five teacher participants eventually realised that they would have little choice but to adopt a more “hybrid” approach to EFL teaching. I explore this tendency in the next section.

#### **10.4. Pattern 4: The movement towards “hybrid” teaching**

The final main “pattern” which emerged from my analysis of the data was that all five teachers eventually recognised the importance of a more flexible, “hybrid” approach to teaching by the ends of their educational life histories. As highlighted in the previous section, this does not seem particularly surprising, given the numerous contextual constraints which prevented them from (fully) putting their beliefs into practice.

For example, Rebecca commented that, after several years of teaching, she had realised that teaching explicit grammar was sometimes the fastest and most efficient way of teaching. Antonio stated that he wanted to keep an open mind to new approaches, and was prepared to use more teacher-centred methods if necessary, for example through his “stamp system”. Isabella was clear of the need to adapt her classes to students’ needs, for example by explicitly explaining grammar points or dedicating parts of her classes to the TOEFL test. Ricardo expressed very clearly that he did not see student-centred learning as the “perfect” approach, and was willing to experiment with a wide range of strategies in his different teaching contexts. Finally, Elizabeth also stated that she did not think there was “one best way” of learning English, and that her classes would depend on what she felt was best for her students.

The examples above suggest that all five participants seem to have reached a balance between the *ideals* of their student-centred beliefs and the *realities* of their individual classroom contexts. It was clear that all of them were trying to implement a lot of what they considered “student-centred”, but they were also willing to revert back to more teacher-centred approaches when they felt these were more appropriate in their contexts.

When revisiting the educational change literature, it is clear that the participants of my study were not alone in reverting to a more “hybrid” approach. I explore some examples of this in the following sub-section.

#### *10.4.1. “Hybrid” teaching as a global phenomenon*

As I have just mentioned, a number of case studies from around the world show examples of teachers adopting a mixture of student- and teacher-centred approaches, for example in India (Sripakash, 2010), Malawi (Croft, 2002), Namibia (O’Sullivan, 2004), Pakistan (Westbrook et al., 2009), South Africa (Brodie et al., 2002), Tanzania (Barrett, 2007), Turkey (Haser and Star, 2009), Ukraine (Smotrova, 2009) and the UK (Gipps et al., 1999). In fact, there are few, if any, examples of student-centred beliefs being “fully” converted into practice, especially in developing countries (Elkind, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011).

The idea that teachers would have to reach a balance between student-centred and teacher-centred practices is outlined quite clearly in the work of Vavrus (2009). This case study is particularly interesting, because it documents Vavrus’s own experiences of working in Tanzania as a visiting professor from the United States. She had been invited to teach a course on student-centred learning to Tanzanian teachers, and was strongly in favour of these kinds of approaches when she arrived. However, her opinions about the feasibility of student-centred learning began to change over time, as she started to doubt how realistic these approaches were in the Tanzanian context.

Perhaps the most illuminating example from Vavrus’s study was the comparison she made between two of the student teachers that she observed. The first of these made a conscious effort to include student-centred activities such as group work and personalised questioning in her class. However, Vavrus found that, in such a large group, it was very

difficult for the students to remain focused; there was a lot of noise moving the tables around for the group work, and the students soon became very rowdy. The second teacher, on the other hand, taught in a much more teacher-centred way, but this seemed understandable given the vast number of students in the class. This left Vavrus with a dilemma. Technically, the first teacher had shown the “internationally recognised standard” of student-centred learning, and the second teacher had not. But how could she judge the first class to be “better” or more appropriate than the second?

This experience, among others, led Vavrus to seriously doubt the extent to which student-centred learning, at least in its more idealised form, could be implemented in Tanzanian schools, given that it was clearly dependent on the material circumstances and contextual constraints in which the teachers had to work. Her conclusion was that a more sensible approach would be to adopt a policy of “contingent constructivism”, in which the teachers could choose to use student-centred approaches, but only if they were seen to be appropriate in their individual contexts. This concept of “contingent constructivism” seems to have a lot in common with the idea of “hybrid” teaching which emerged from my study.

Very similar conclusions to those above were found in the works of Croft (2002) in Malawi and O’Sullivan (2004) in Namibia. Given the significant contextual constraints encountered by the teachers in these two countries, both authors concluded that student-centred learning in its “pure” form was impossible. However, they noted that teachers *had* managed to introduce certain student-centred activities, whilst still operating in a largely teacher-centred, “whole-class teaching” approach.

Although the main points O’Sullivan and Croft make in their articles are very similar, an interesting distinction emerges between the ways in which they conceptualised the term “student-centred learning”. For example, O’Sullivan suggested that the approaches used by her Namibian teachers should *not* be defined as “student”-centred. She felt that a more suitable term would be “learning”-centred, given that they were choosing the most appropriate methods in order to facilitate students’ *learning* (see also, Barr and Tagg, 1995). Croft, on the other hand, argued that her Malawian teachers were, in fact, the epitome of “student-centredness”, as they were doing everything they could to adapt their classes to their students’ needs.

These two examples seem to mirror the different ways in which the participants of my study interpreted the term “student-centred learning”. For example, Rebecca and Antonio both considered that their beliefs were less “student”-centred after adopting a more “hybrid” approach. This suggests that they would support the views of O’Sullivan in viewing themselves as more “learning”-centred teachers. Conversely, Isabella, Ricardo and Elizabeth all continued to rate the student-centredness of their beliefs as a ‘10’, despite recognising that they believed in using teacher-centred approaches at certain times. This suggests that their interpretations of student-centred learning would be closer to that of Croft and her Malawian teachers. That is to say, Isabella, Ricardo and Elizabeth do not feel they are being any less “student-centred” if they choose to adopt certain teacher-centred approaches at certain times if they are felt to be in the best interests of their students.

From a personal perspective, I would tend to agree with the views of Rebecca and Antonio, who felt that they were being less “student-centred” when making their classes more teacher-centred in certain situations. In my opinion, a much more appropriate term to describe these practices would be “learnING”-centred education (O’Sullivan, 2004; Barr and Tagg, 1995). This does not mean that I am rejecting “student-centred learning” as one possible teaching approach (or set of approaches). However, a “learnING”-centred approach would seem to me to be a far more accurate way of describing this “hybrid” mix of both teacher- and student-centred practices.

There is of course no right answer to the debate regarding whether these teachers should be defined as “student-centred”, “learning-centred”, “contingent constructivists”, “hybrid practitioners”, or other similar terms. However, the fact that these conceptual debates continue to emerge in the literature must surely call into question the extent to which “student-centred learning”, at least in its more idealised form, should continue to be seen as a kind of “gold standard” of education. I explore this idea in more detail in the next sub-section.

#### *10.4.2. Is student-centred learning really “the answer”?*

As I have alluded to above, the many examples of “hybrid” teaching cited in the literature suggest that it may be unwise to continue to view student-centred learning as the

undisputed “ideal” way of teaching. Indeed, in contexts such as the USM in which there so many obstacles to its implementation, it would seem that attempting to introduce student-centred learning in its such an idealistic fashion is unrealistic (Stoffels, 2005; Zappa-Hollman, 2007; Davies, 2009; Sripakash, 2010). From a more radical perspective, some authors have argued these kinds of approaches are *always* likely to be inappropriate in some contexts, given that they are based on “Western ideals” which are far removed from the cultural values of non-Western societies (O’Sullivan, 2004; Vavrus, 2009; Westbrook et al., 2009). In fact, some authors have suggested that *improving the effectiveness of teacher-centred approaches* might be a more effective long-term strategy than replacing them with unrealistic student-centred ones (O’Neill, 1991; Brodie et al., 2002; Guthrie, 2003).

In response to these suggestions, I would argue that, at least in Mexico, the “ideals” of student-centred learning are not completely incompatible with the Mexican educational culture. However, I would agree with those who are wary about seeing student-centred learning as the “perfect” approach which must be implemented at all times regardless of context. As authors such as Barrett (2007) highlight, it would seem that we need to move away from overly simplistic “polarisations of pedagogy” which seek to distinguish between “correct” and “incorrect” teaching approaches. This reflects the arguments of O’Neill (1991), who offered one of the rare early critiques of student-centred learning:

There is good teaching and there is bad teaching. Good teaching is characterized by a *variety of styles* to promote learning. Bad teaching can just as easily be of the “student-centred” type, favouring group work and no teacher intervention, as it can be rooted in “chalk and talk” (or “drone and groan”) traditions. “Learner-centred” techniques – in their narrow, jargonistic definition – may be a suitable approach in some circumstances, but it should never be assumed that they are automatically superior or even more suitable than [more teacher-centred] styles of teaching.

(O’Neill, 1991:303-304; italics in original)

As O’Neill highlights, the idea here is not to attack the aims of student-centred learning per se, but rather to acknowledge that a teaching methodology based on *fitness for purpose* is surely more sensible than blindly following student-centred approaches in absolutely every teaching situation.

I must reiterate at this point that I am not advocating that we should abandon the term “student-centred learning”. Student-centred approaches can and should be a potential alternative for teachers who are interested in moving away from traditional teacher-centred approaches. However, I feel that it is important for student-centred learning to be presented as an *option*, as opposed to the *only* approach which must be implemented at all times and regardless of context. In this sense, although the introduction of student-centred learning within teacher training courses may be useful, a much more relevant concept is that of “hybrid” teaching (or similar terms, such as O’Sullivan’s “learnING”-centred education which I emphasised in the previous sub-section).

#### *10.4.3. Incorporating “hybrid” approaches into teacher training*

I must admit that this more flexible attitude to the implementation of student-centred learning has “grown on me” during the process of collecting and analysing my data. Indeed, in the early stages of writing this thesis, I perhaps naïvely assumed that student-centred learning is, or should be, the “gold standard” which all educational systems should aim for. In fact, until relatively recently, I continued to envisage the “end goal” of the introduction of student-centred EFL learning as “full coherence” between teachers’ (student-centred) beliefs and their practices. When thinking in this way, the only real solution was to try and reduce the obstacles which prevent teachers from fully putting their beliefs into practice (see my “iceberg model” in Section 10.3.2.2).

However, in light of the overwhelming contextual constraints identified in the study and the participants’ subsequent acceptance of a more “hybrid” approach to teaching, it seems that a more useful goal at the USM might be to *help teachers to become more effective “hybrid” practitioners*. That is to say, instead of encouraging them to “master” approaches such as student-centred EFL learning, perhaps courses would better serve teachers if they helped them balance the ideals from theory into the realities of their own teaching situations. This would imply ceasing to view teacher-centred practices, or the “incoherence” between teachers’ beliefs and their practices, as some kind of “failure”. On the contrary, teachers who were able to balance their ideals within the practical constraints of their individual contexts would be highly valued as skilled “hybrid practitioners”.

As mentioned in the previous sub-section, this would not necessarily mean that educational policymakers or institutions such as the USM would have to stop encouraging teachers to adopt different teaching approaches such as student-centred learning. However, an acceptance of “hybrid” teaching would imply introducing these approaches in more flexible terms. For example, something along the lines of Schweisfurth’s “minimum standards” for student-centred learning (Schweisfurth, 2013; 2015) could be used as general guidelines for teachers at the USM to follow, but there would be significant allowances for flexibility within individual contexts (Deboer, 2002; O’Sullivan, 2004; Wedell, 2009). Moreover, in the context of EFL teaching, the USM could introduce some very general guidelines for teachers to follow to teach English in a more student-centred way, but again with the flexibility to adapt their classes to their own contexts.

Crucially, if teachers are to become skilled “hybrid practitioners”, they will need to be supported by more flexible approaches to teacher training. As suggested in Section 10.2 above, courses with certain characteristics may have a higher chance of providing this kind of support. It seems no coincidence that some of the more successful training courses experienced by the participants of this study were those that were firmly grounded in their contextual realities, and that allowed them to reflect upon their current teaching situations before considering how they might implement (an adapted version of) the new approaches within their classrooms. In other words, these courses seem to have promoted a more “hybrid” approach towards change implementation.

These kinds of attitudes towards teacher training are by no means new, and have been mentioned in a number of texts from the language teacher education literature. For example, for a number of years, Kumaravadivelu (2003; 2012) has advocated a move away from traditional “transmission” approaches to teacher training. He has been particularly critical of “one-size-fits-all” approaches to teaching, proposing instead a “post-transmission” or “post-method” approach, in which teachers are encouraged to decide upon the most appropriate approaches to use within their own contexts. Another author in this field, Diaz Maggioli, has been similarly critical of traditional teacher training approaches. In his 2012 book, he proposes the term “visionary professional development”, suggesting a number of practical ways of “scaffolding” teachers’ decision-making as they choose which approaches might be more appropriate in their contexts. Finally, Malderez and Wedell (2007) have proposed an interesting approach to teacher

training called the “pendulum model”. This approach involves inviting participants to reflect upon their own beliefs about and experiences of certain teaching issues *before* they are exposed to any external theories. Only when they have been given the chance think about themselves and their practices, are they introduced to new approaches such as student-centred (EFL) learning. At this point, they are in a position to judge for themselves the extent to which they could put these theories into practice within their own specific contexts.

The final point which I feel is worth mentioning is that there may be a place for the life history approach, and especially the use of the timeline methodology I used in this study, within the more flexible types of training courses I have just proposed. As I pointed out in Section 3.2.8 of the Methodology chapter, some have argued that life history approaches may be beneficial for teachers’ professional development, given that they encourage teachers to reflect about themselves, their beliefs, their practices, and how and why these might have evolved over time (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Although I must reiterate that contributing towards the participants’ professional development was *not* the primary intention of this research, informal discussions I have had with the teachers indicate that the process did seem to be a positive experience for them.

With this in mind, I would tentatively propose that teacher training courses (especially in-service courses) might benefit from including activities which encourage teachers to reflect, in collaboration with colleagues and trainers, upon how their beliefs and practices have evolved over time. In particular, if teachers were invited to produce their own timelines, this might help them to externalise some of their thought processes on paper (or as was the case in this project, in digital form). This would seem especially relevant given the current suggestion that reflective practices should be more evidence-based and data-led (see, for example, Walsh and Mann, 2015).

These kinds of activities might be useful for both teachers and teacher trainers. For teachers, reflecting upon how their beliefs and practices have evolved over time might help them better understand some of the main challenges they are likely to face, and particularly how they might be able to reach more realistic compromises between their ideals and what might be feasible in their classrooms. For teacher trainers, these kinds of timeline activities might be useful as a sort of “needs analysis” tool for trainers when trying to implement more flexible and relevant training sessions. Indeed, if trainers were

able to familiarise themselves with some of the key challenges faced by teachers and some of the main reasons for potential mismatches between their beliefs and practices, it might help them to respond more flexibly to their participants' needs.

#### 10.4.4. The “reculturing” of educational decision-makers: Towards a more widespread acceptance of “hybrid” teaching?

The findings of this study have suggested that even if teachers' beliefs are able to become more student-centred, they will struggle to (fully) put these beliefs into practice because of the numerous constraints they encounter in their working contexts. This led the five participants of this study to adopt a more “hybrid” approach, in which they combined a mixture of student- and teacher-centred methods depending on how appropriate they were perceived within their specific contexts. With this in mind, the previous sub-section made the case that encouraging teachers to be more effective “hybrid” practitioners might be a more sensible direction to follow than continuing to expect teachers to “fully” put student-centred approaches into practice.

However, a significant stumbling block is that “hybrid teaching” is generally *not* seen as an acceptable “end goal” of educational changes. Indeed, the focus in Mexico and other countries continues to be to seek fool-proof, “one-size-fits-all” solutions which are expected to be implemented quickly and easily across all contexts (Wedell, 2009; 2013; Díaz Maggioli, 2012; Schweisfurth, 2015). In order for this tendency to change, it would seem that a change in attitude is needed from the leaders who are responsible for introducing such educational changes. Here, it would seem that a certain degree of belief and behaviour change (“reculturing”) may need to occur at the very top of educational power structures before it is applied to other people at different levels of the system (Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009).

Fullan (2007) has suggested that one way of achieving this “reculturing” of educational leaders would be for them “to arm themselves with knowledge of the change process” (p. xii). Fullan argues that if more people were aware of the complexities of educational change processes, they might be in a better position to make more realistic decisions regarding the implementation of their desired changes. From a personal point of view, I can see the value in this suggestion, given that studying a module on educational change

during my Master's opened my eyes to some of the reasons why educational changes tend to be so unsuccessful.

Having said that, I am now in the fourth year of a PhD in educational change and I still have a lot to learn about how we best might go about implementing educational changes. If I have spent the best part of four years investigating these issues and still find them extremely challenging, then it must also be challenging for those policymakers who are busily trying to introduce educational changes in Mexico and elsewhere.

Still, the acceptance of a more "hybrid" approach may offer a certain amount of hope to those teachers who have continued to struggle to implement "ideal" approaches within extremely challenging contexts. Moreover, ceasing to view educational changes from such a one-dimensional perspective must surely be seen as a positive step, as we search for a more nuanced perspective towards the implementation of educational changes.

In the next and final chapter, I summarise the main findings and contributions of this thesis, outline some of the study's limitations, and make some recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION**

In this short final chapter, I summarise the main findings of the study and how they might contribute to existing knowledge in the field of educational change. I also briefly acknowledge some of the limitations of the study, and make some recommendations for future research. I conclude the thesis by making a brief comment about the contribution this study has made to my own development.

### **11.1. Summary of main contributions**

This study provides another case study which will add to the “mosaic” of knowledge about student-centred learning, beliefs and educational change. Moreover, the findings may have important contributions to the way we implement “complex” educational changes such as the implementation of student-centred (EFL) learning. Below, I summarise what I feel are the main contributions of the study.

Firstly, the findings suggest that teacher belief change (in this case, starting to believe in more student-centred approaches to EFL learning) *may*, indeed, be facilitated by training courses with particular characteristics. For example, the courses which were seen as most successful in having an impact on the participants’ beliefs were those that:

- Were longer;
- Were clearly linked to practice;
- Were modelled in a student-centred way themselves;
- Were situated in the real contexts in which the changes are expected to be implemented; and
- Incorporated opportunities for teachers to reflect about themselves, their practices, and how they might be able to put the contents of the change into practice within their own contexts.

It was therefore argued that educational decision-makers might bear these characteristics in mind when planning and/or choosing training courses which aim not only to change teachers’ practices but also their beliefs.

Secondly, this thesis demonstrates that even if teachers *do* start to believe in more student-centred approaches, they may not be able to put these beliefs into practice because of the numerous contextual constraints they encounter within their working contexts. The study therefore supports the idea that teachers only represent *one* (albeit critical) aspect of what will need to change in order for educational changes such as student-centred learning to be implemented in real classrooms. In fact, it emerged that a wide range of different *people* would ideally need to make certain adjustments to different areas of the education system in order to help teachers put their beliefs into practice. It was argued that educational decision-makers will have to address these issues if they are to reduce the regular “mismatches” between teachers’ beliefs and their practices.

The final main finding of the study was the tendency for all the five teachers to start teaching in a more “hybrid” way towards the ends of their educational life histories. This movement towards more “hybrid” teaching has arguably the most far-reaching implications in terms of the implementation of educational changes like student-centred (EFL) learning. As I argued in Section 10.3.2.3, the likelihood of all the contextual constraints being “eliminated” is extremely unlikely. With this in mind, recognising (and, indeed, embracing) “hybrid” teaching would surely be a more realistic way forward than continuing to expect teachers to implement “ideal” versions of educational changes regardless of how appropriate in real classroom contexts.

However, accepting a more “hybrid” approach would imply a significant change in the way many people currently view educational change. It would imply ceasing to view teacher-centred practices (or a lack of “full coherence” between teachers’ beliefs and their practices) as some sort of “failure”. It would imply an official acknowledgement that “fitness for purpose” may be a more desirable option than simply using student-centred approaches “to the letter”. It would imply that these more “hybrid” approaches be officially recognised and integrated into curriculum documents and programs of study. It would imply the introduction of training courses which would allow teachers to reflect upon their current teaching situations and decide how they might apply the ideals of theory within their own classrooms (which was one of the key characteristics of the most successful “belief-changing” training courses mentioned above). Moreover, as I suggested in Section 10.4.3, life history approaches, and in particular timeline activities, may be an interesting way of promoting this reflection, as part of a more evidence-based and data-led approach to teacher reflective practice.

However, perhaps most importantly, accepting these more “hybrid” approaches would imply a change of attitude on the part of educational decision-makers. It would signal a movement away from quick, “one-size-fits-all” solutions, towards more nuanced understandings of the challenges and complexities of educational change processes. Without these fundamental changes at the top of educational power structures, real change may continue to elude those who truly wish to make meaningful improvements to their countries’ teaching and learning.

## **11.2. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research**

There were a number of positives to take from this project. For example:

- The choice to employ the life history approach, which allowed me to explore in detail how the participants’ beliefs and practices had evolved over time;
- The interest and enthusiasm shown by the five participants;
- The timeline activity, which seemed to work particularly well in order for the participants to visually represent the main belief and practices changes that they felt had occurred over the course of their lives; and
- The summary graphs, which I felt were an excellent way of summarising the main tendencies of belief and practice change for each participant.

Having said that, it must be recognised that there are certain limitations of the study. In this section, I briefly acknowledge some of these limitations, and suggest some recommendations for further research.

Firstly, one of the main limitations of the study was its small sample size. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, this was not necessarily a problem in terms of the “trustworthiness” of the findings (see Section 3.4.2). However, I still think that it would have been interesting to gather data from a wider range of teachers, in order to see whether their stories were similar to the five participants. Therefore, my first recommendation would be for researchers to carry out similar studies with other teachers at the USM.

Secondly, it must be recognised that the research took place at only one, public university in Mexico. With this in mind, my second recommendation would be for researchers to carry out similar studies:

- At *different* public universities in Mexico;
- At *private* universities in Mexico;
- At *different educational levels* in Mexico (e.g. primary, secondary school);
- At *private language institutes* in Mexico;
- At similar educational contexts in *Latin America*;
- At similar educational contexts *worldwide*.

If researchers were to carry out similar studies in broadly similar educational contexts, this might help broaden our “mosaic” of case studies relating to the challenges faced by teachers as they experience these kinds of educational changes.

Thirdly, another limitation of the study was that it focused primarily on the experiences of *teachers* (with the students’ experiences included only to offer some degree of triangulation). Therefore, it may be interesting to focus on the experiences of some of the other “partners” involved in the implementation of this educational change (students, Heads of School, other teachers, teacher trainers, educational leaders). By focusing on some of these people, we might be able to shed light on some of the pressures they are under and the reasons why they may or may not be able to support teachers in implementing student-centred EFL learning.

A final potential criticism of the study was that it may be seen to over-simplify the concept of beliefs and the relationships between beliefs and practices. A number of studies have emerged since I finished carrying out the research (see, for example, Kubanyiova and Feryok, 2015; Burns et al., 2015; Li, 2017). These studies have criticised research which focuses solely on beliefs as an isolated construct, arguing that more encompassing terms (such as “intentionality”) should be employed in order to embrace the complexity of teachers’ mental lives (Kubanyiova and Feryok, 2015). Moreover, they advocate a move away from overly reductionist “cognitive” approaches, towards more “interactionist” or “discursive psychological” perspectives (Li, 2017). They emphasise that teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, emotions and practices are complexly intertwined and that changes to these mental constructs may emerge through the “moment-to-moment” interactions they co-

construct through their experiences both in and out of the classroom (Golombek, 2015; Johnson, 2015; Li, 2017). For this reason, the terms “emergent sense making in action” and “cognition-in-action” have been suggested as the a possible “next generation” of teacher cognition research (Burns et al., 2015; Kubanyiova and Feryok, 2015; Li, 2017).

In the case of this particular study, I have consistently and openly recognised that the relationships between beliefs and practices are far more complex than the categories I created may make them seem. Moreover, it was important for me to limit the study to “beliefs” as opposed to more all-encompassing terms (such as “cognitions” or “intentionality”), in order to focus the study in a way that would be clear and comprehensible to the reader. Nevertheless, given the clear shift towards more complex approaches to the study of teachers’ beliefs and practices, my final recommendation would be for future research to attempt to study these phenomena through more interactionist and discursive psychological perspectives. As researchers such as Li (2017) propose, one way of doing this may be to employ Conversation Analysis (CA). Li argues that CA allows the researcher to systematically focus on the way beliefs and practices are co-constructed by teachers and researchers through their moment-to-moment interactions in the classroom.

It must be recognised that this new “generation” of research on teacher beliefs and practices represents a complex set of new challenges for those who are interested in doing research in this area (Burns et al., 2015). However, it certainly seems to have opened up an interesting avenue of inquiry which may provide further insights into the complex set of interdependent factors which may influence the evolution of and relationships between teachers’ beliefs and their practices.

### **11.3. Concluding remarks**

The final point that I will make is that this study has contributed enormously to my own professional growth as an EFL teacher, trainer, and researcher. I am sure that the skills I have developed over the last four years will prove invaluable when returning to work in educational settings.

In particular, observing the five participants' classes has given me some great ideas for introducing more "student-centred" (or "hybrid"!) activities within my own EFL classes. Moreover, listening to the ways in which the teachers' beliefs and practices evolved over time was not only fascinating, but also made me reflect on my own journey as a teacher and how I could personally improve my practices.

Finally, on a personal level, this thesis has proved a psychological and emotional challenge which has taught me a lot about myself and what I am capable of.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **A.1. Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms**

#### *A.1.1. Teacher Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form*

### **Participant Information Sheet**

Date: (        /        /        )



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

You are being invited to take part in a research study called “*The evolution of Mexican EFL teachers’ beliefs about student-centred learning in relation to their teaching practices*”. Before you decide whether you would like to participate in the study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If anything is not clear or you would like further information, please contact the researcher (contact details below).

#### **Who is the researcher?**

The researcher is Nicky Bremner, a PhD student from the University of Leeds in England.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

This study seeks to increase our understanding of how EFL teachers experience educational changes, and in particular the introduction of more “student-centred” approaches to EFL learning. Enhancing our knowledge of how teachers experience these processes of educational change might help educational planners support teachers to implement them.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are a teacher of EFL who has experienced, or is in the process of experiencing, a change from a predominately “teacher-centred” approach to a more “student-centred” approach to EFL learning.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this Information Sheet to keep, and you will be asked to sign a consent form.

#### **Can I withdraw from the study?**

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time until **30 December 2015** (the earliest possible date of publication) by contacting the researcher. You do not have to give a reason. If you decide to withdraw, all data collected about you will be removed from the study.

#### **What will it involve?**

- *Observations.* You will be asked if the researcher can observe a maximum of 8 of your English classes. These will help the researcher gain a better understanding of how you act in the classroom, which will help him to decide which specific topics might be most interesting to explore in the interviews. The observations will take place between August and September 2014. These observations will NOT be video or audio recorded.

- *Interviews.* You will be asked to take part in a maximum of three interviews of approximately two hours in total. These will focus on how your beliefs about “student-centred learning” have evolved over time, how your practices have evolved over time, and why you think these changes might have occurred. The interviews will take place between August and December 2014. These interviews WILL be audio recorded. You may speak in English or Spanish. You do not have to mention any topics which may be sensitive, upsetting or embarrassing.
- *Timeline activity.* You will be asked to produce a timeline showing how your beliefs about “student-centred learning” have evolved over time in relation to your teaching practices. Instructions will be provided to you regarding what to include on these timelines. The timeline activities will take place between October and December 2014. The second interview will take place after you have completed your timeline.

### **What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?**

There are no material benefits to the study, although participating in it may give you the opportunity reflect on your beliefs and teaching practices, which may have a positive effect on your academic and/or professional development. However, there is a possibility that talking about your life experiences may be an unpleasant experience. If this is the case, you are free to withdraw from the study (at any time before 30 December 2015) or discuss any issues you might have with the researcher.

### **Will the information I provide be kept confidential?**

All the information that is collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications, because your name will be replaced with a pseudonym, as will any other information which could be used to identify you (e.g. the name of the University, the specific courses you teach). The only person who will have access to the data will be the researcher and his two doctoral supervisors. The data will be stored on an encrypted hard drive, or on the secure University of Leeds network.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

The findings of the study will form part of the researcher’s PhD thesis at the University of Leeds. The research may also be used in presentations at local and international educational conferences, as well as publications in international educational journals. You will be consulted at various stages of the study in order to verify the researcher’s interpretations of the data, and suggest changes, if necessary.

### **Contacting the researcher**

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to email the researcher, Nicky Bremner at [nicky.bremner2@gmail.com](mailto:nicky.bremner2@gmail.com).

*Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you would like to participate in the study, please read and sign the following Consent Form.*

**Consent Form****UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS****Title of research project:**

*“The evolution of Mexican EFL teachers’ beliefs about student-centred learning in relation to their teaching practices”.*

**Name of researcher:**

Nicky Bremner

	Please write your initials next to the statements you agree with
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated (    /    /    ) explaining the above research study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time (until 30 December 2015) without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	
3. I give permission for the interviews to be audio recorded.	
4. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
5. I agree for the data collected to be used in the researcher’s PhD thesis, as well as in future publications and/or presentations.	
6. I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of researcher

Date

Signature

A.2.2. Student Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

## Participant Information Sheet

Date: (        /        /        )



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

You are being invited to take part in a research study called “*The evolution of Mexican EFL teachers’ beliefs about student-centred learning in relation to their teaching practices*”. Before you decide whether you would like to participate in the study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If anything is not clear or you would like further information, please contact the researcher (contact details below).

### Who is the researcher?

The researcher is Nicky Bremner, a PhD student from the University of Leeds in England.

### What is the purpose of the study?

This study seeks to increase our understanding of how EFL teachers experience educational changes, and in particular the introduction of more “student-centred” approaches to EFL learning. Enhancing our knowledge of how teachers experience these processes of educational change might help educational planners support teachers to implement them.

### Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a student of EFL at a university which is currently in the process of introducing new teaching approaches such as “student-centred” EFL learning.

### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this Information Sheet to keep, and you will be asked to sign a consent form.

### Can I withdraw from the study?

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time until **30 December 2015** (the earliest possible date of publication) by contacting the researcher. You do not have to give a reason. If you decide to withdraw, all data collected about you will be removed from the study.

### What will it involve?

You will be asked to take part in one **group interview** of approximately 1-2 hours, which will take place between October and December 2014. In groups of approximately 4-8 people, you will be asked to reflect and discuss various issues relating to your experiences of learning English. You may speak in Spanish. You do not have to mention any topics which are sensitive, upsetting or embarrassing. The interview will be **video recorded**, but the only person that will have access to the video recordings will be the researcher.

**What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?**

There are no material benefits to the study, although participating in it may give you the opportunity to reflect on yourself and your learning, which may have a positive effect on your academic development. However, there is a possibility that talking about your life experiences may be an unpleasant experience. If this is the case, you are free to withdraw from the study (at any time before 30 December 2015) or discuss any issues you might have with the researcher.

**Will the information I provide be kept confidential?**

All the information that is collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications, because your name will be replaced with a pseudonym, as will any other information which could be used to identify you (e.g. the name of the University, the specific courses you teach). The only person who will have access to the data will be the researcher and his two doctoral supervisors. The data will be stored on an encrypted hard drive, or on the secure University of Leeds network.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The findings of the study will form part of the researcher's PhD thesis at the University of Leeds. The research may also be used in presentations at local and international educational conferences, as well as publications in international educational journals. You will be consulted at various stages of the study in order to verify the researcher's interpretations of the data, and suggest changes, if necessary.

**Contacting the researcher**

If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to email the researcher, Nicky Bremner at [nicky.bremner2@gmail.com](mailto:nicky.bremner2@gmail.com).

*Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you would like to participate in the study, please read and sign the following Consent Form.*

## Consent Form

**Title of research project:**

*“The evolution of Mexican EFL teachers’ beliefs about student-centred learning in relation to their teaching practices”.*

**Name of researcher:**

Nicky Bremner

	Please write your initials next to the statements you agree with
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated ( ___ / ___ / ___ ) explaining the above research study and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time (until 30 December 2015) without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	
3. I give permission for the group interviews to be video recorded.	
4. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
5. I agree for the data collected to be used in the researcher’s PhD thesis, as well as in future publications and/or presentations.	
6. I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Name of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

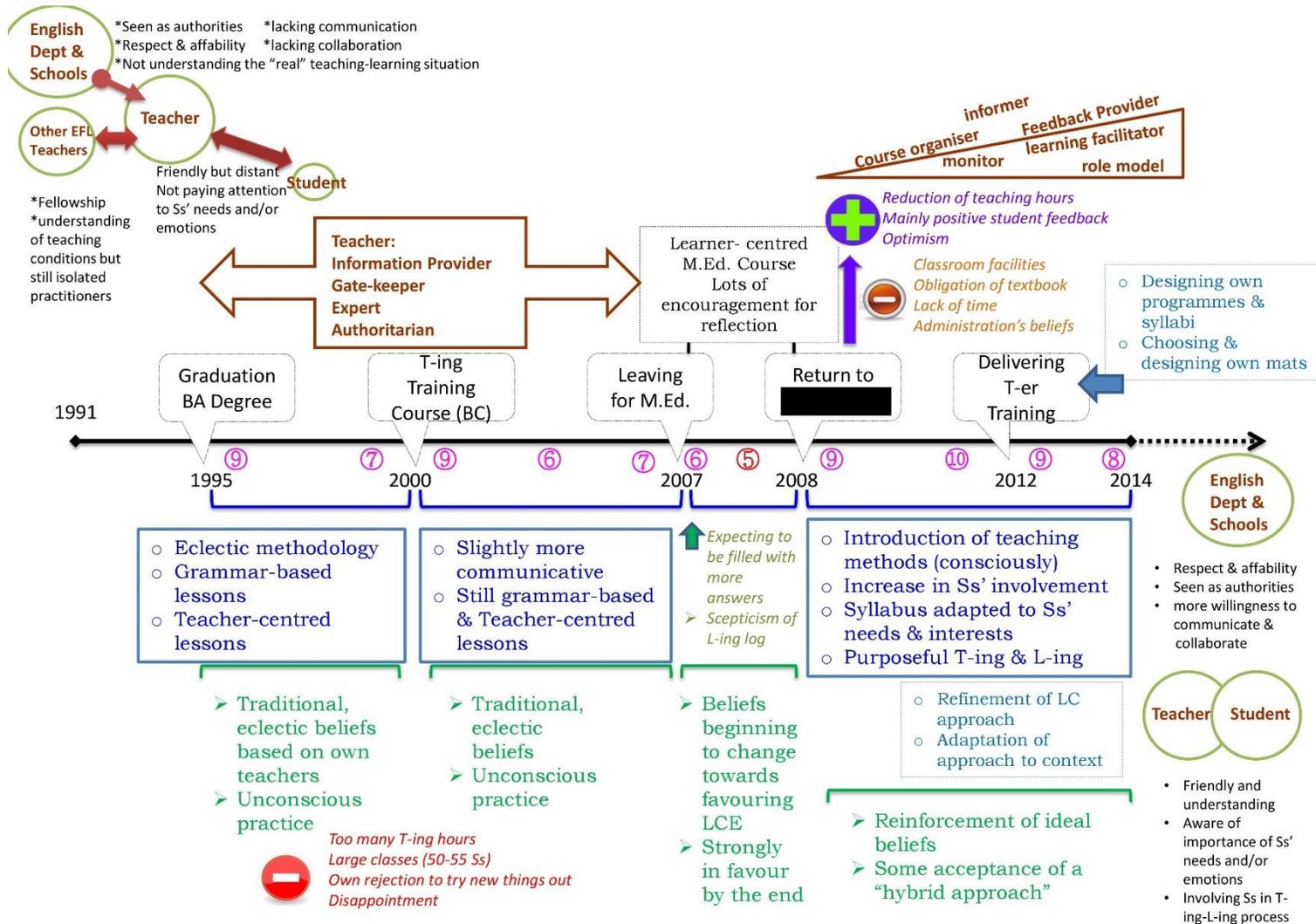
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

## A.2. Teacher timelines

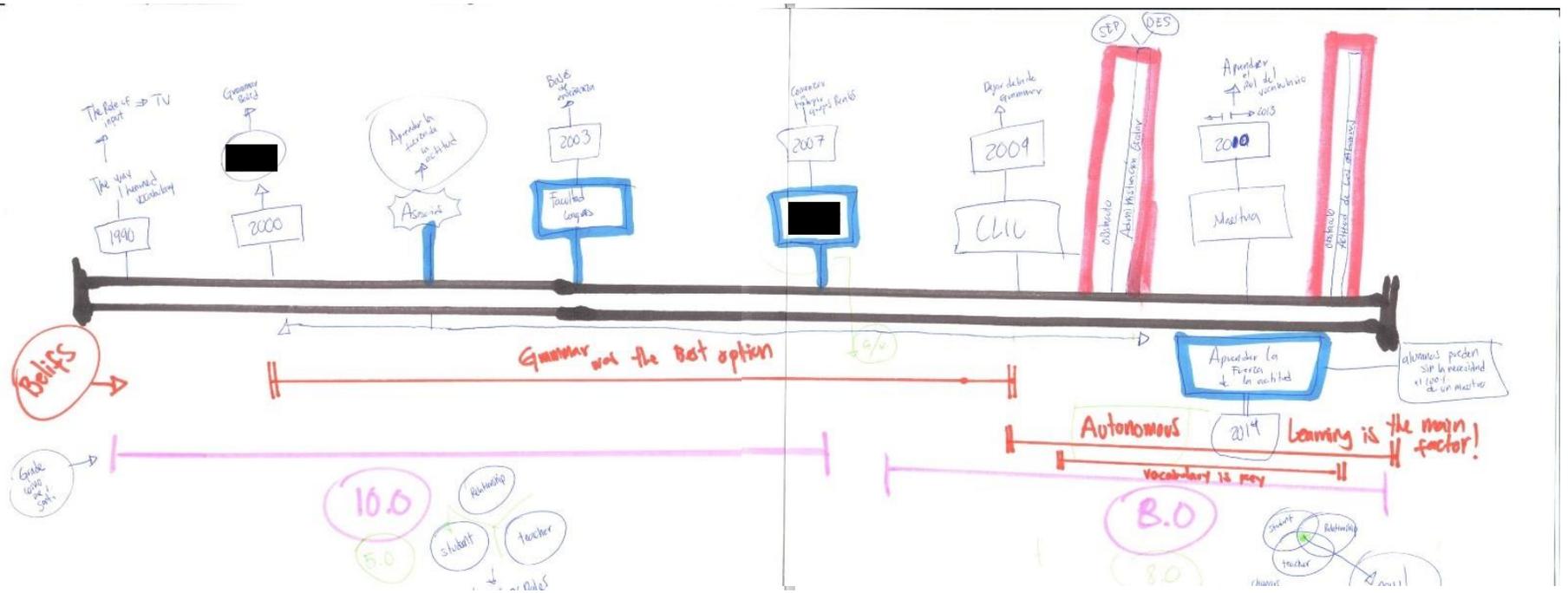
N.B. Some words have been blackened out of the timelines for reasons of confidentiality.

### A.2.1. Rebecca's timeline

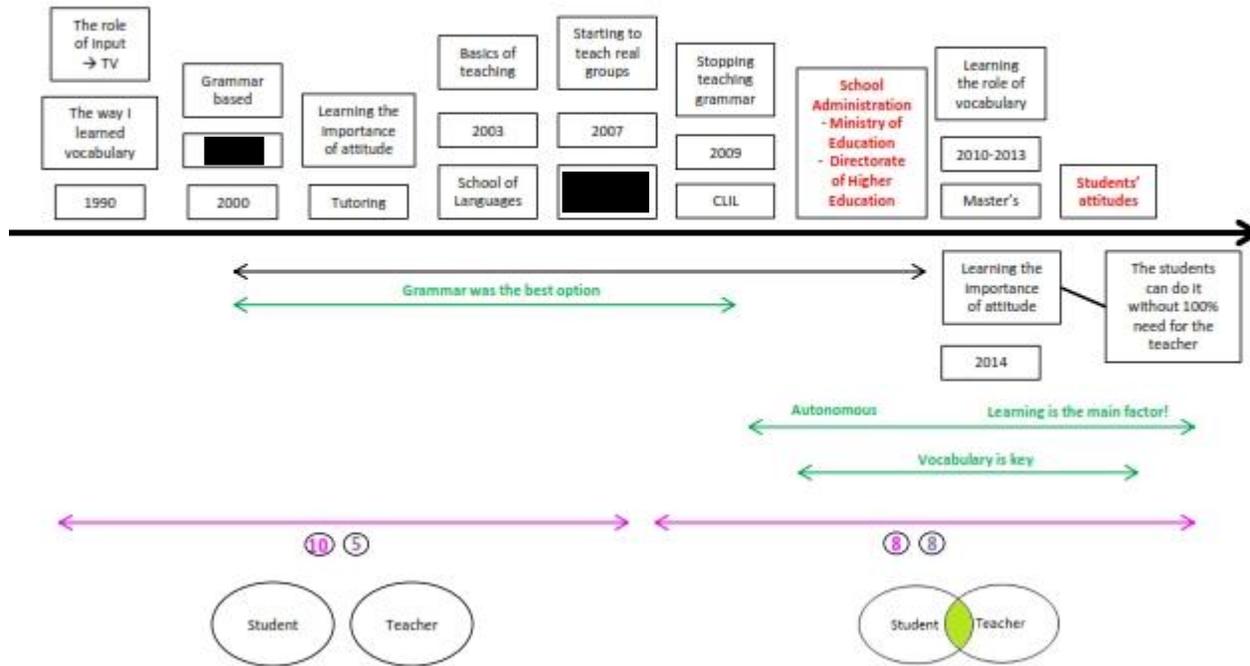


A.2.2. Antonio's timeline

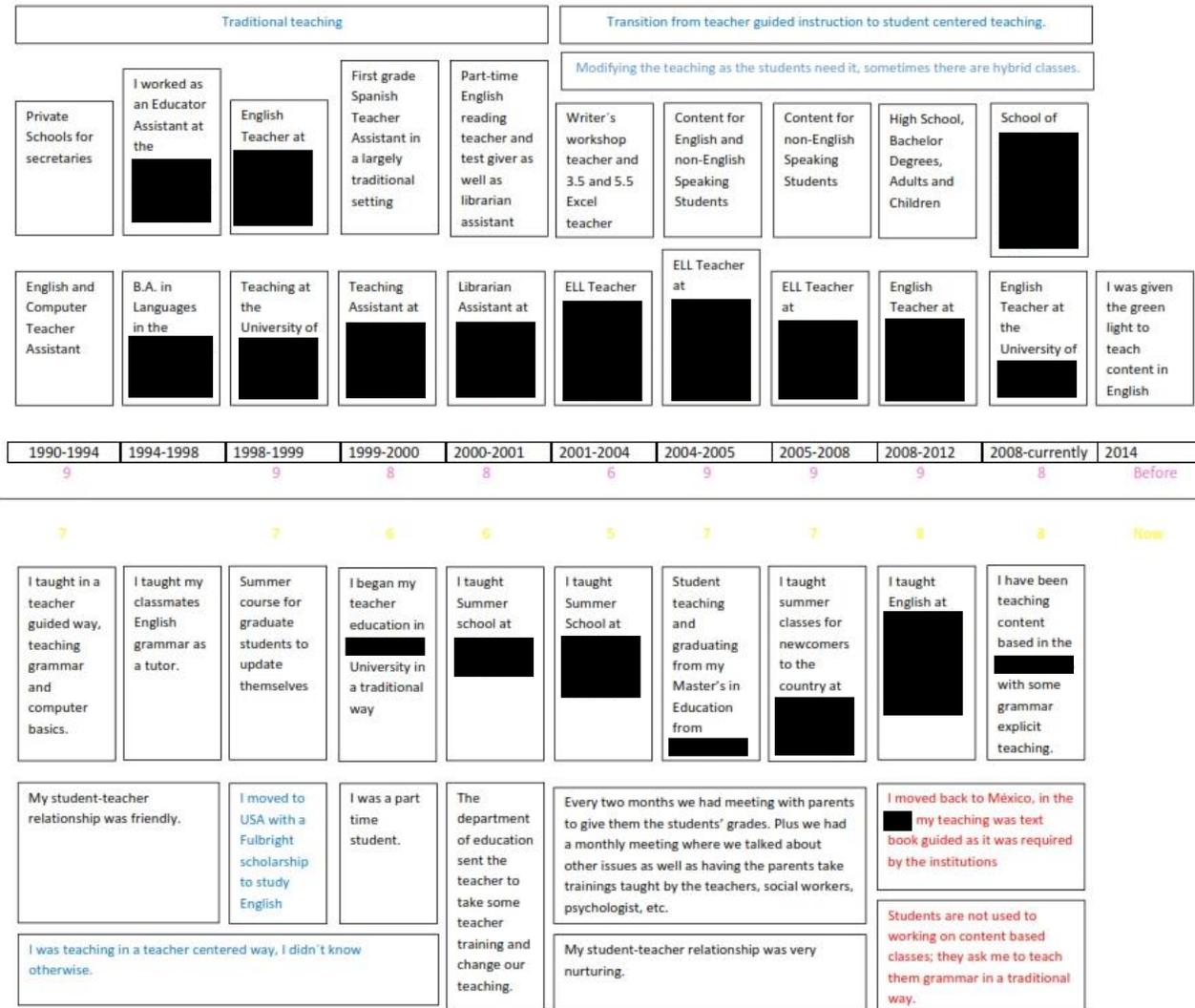
A.2.2.1. Antonio's timeline (original version)



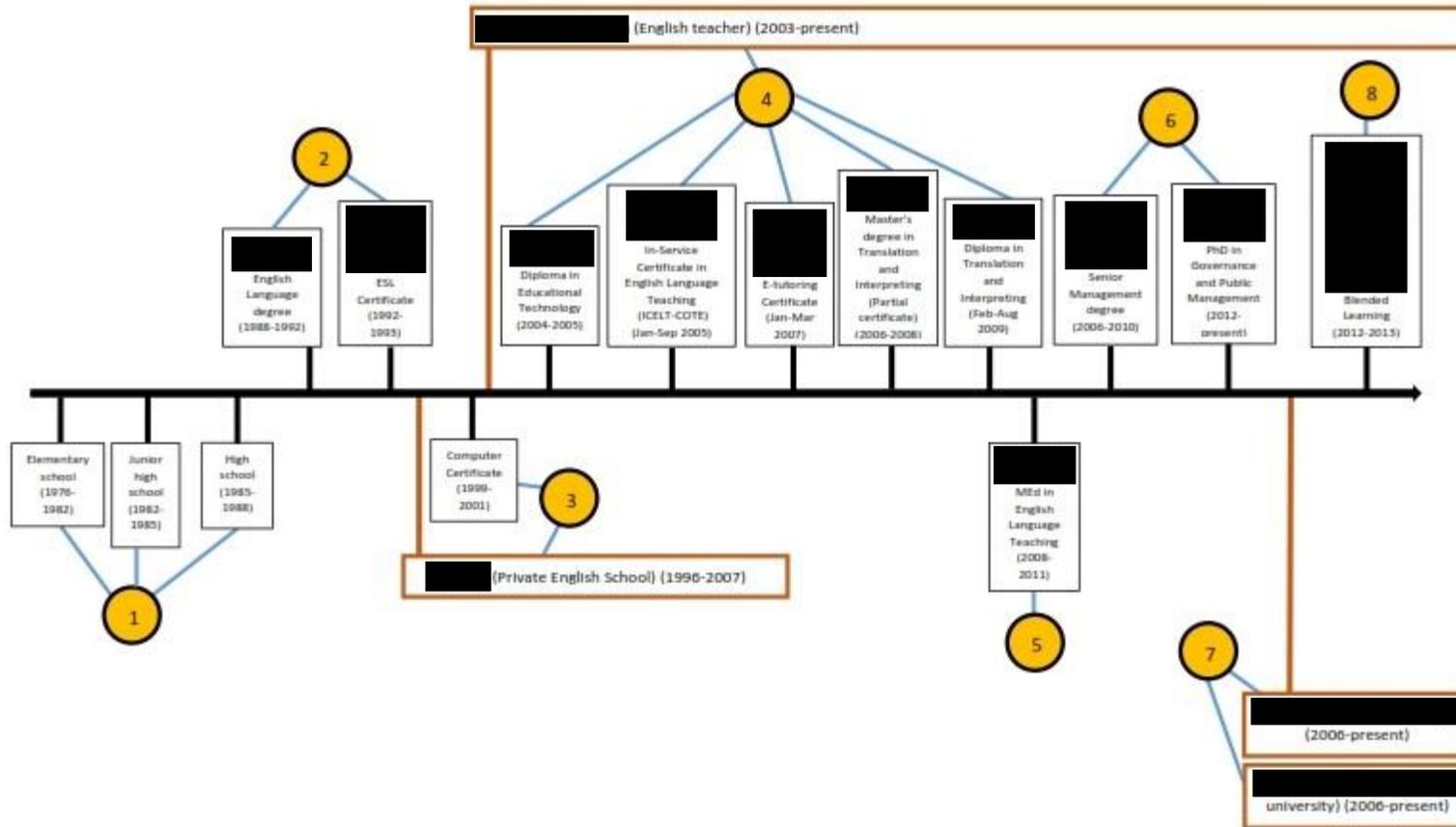
A.2.2.1. Antonio's timeline (digitalised version)



A.2.3. *Isabella's timeline*



A.2.4. *Ricardo's timeline*



## Colour code:

Black line (→): the timeline itself

Black rectangles: educational background

Brown rectangles: working experience

Orange circles and rectangles: (1) events that have had an impact on my development

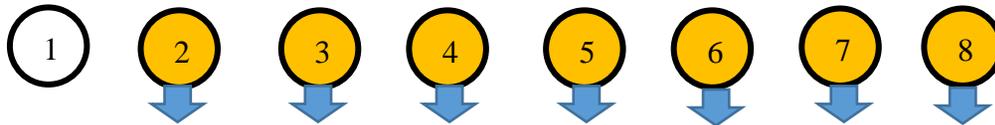
Blue rectangles: changes in what I have DONE (behaviours, practice)

Green rectangles: changes in BELIEFS about teaching

Red rectangles: obstacles preventing beliefs being converted into practice.

Purple rectangles: description of myself as a teacher

Grey rectangles: self-efficacy score

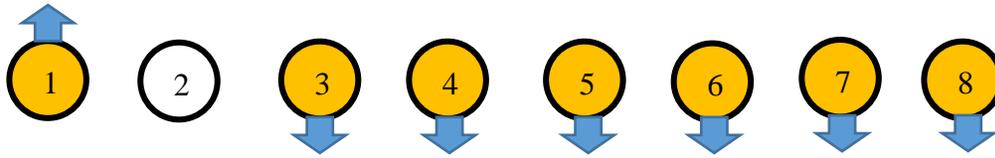


EVENTS:	IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT:
<p>1. Elementary school Junior high school High school</p> <p>Self-efficacy score : 9 (with my old belief) 5 (with my new belief)</p>	<p>I had the opportunity to watch liaison interpreting on TV. I was interested in developing this skill, but unfortunately I began to learn the English language when I was in junior high school and high school. In this period of time, I experienced mainly traditional teaching (teacher-centered learning). We were using books and doing translations.</p>

## CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE:

I was not working during this period of time, therefore, I did not have any significant change in my practice as a student, but I think my behaviour was mainly passive from elementary school to high school because most of my education was traditional. For example:

- Graded learning
- Trust in teacher's grades only
- Too much memorization
- Written exams
- Teachers, authors and books are the unique source of truth



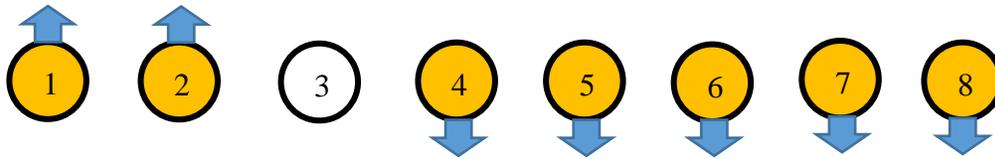
EVENTS:	IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT:
<p>2. English language degree ESL certificate</p> <p>Self-efficacy score : 9 (with my old belief) 5 (with my new belief)</p>	<p>At the School of Foreign Languages, I had the opportunity to experience student-centred learning through some team projects, but most of the teaching was still traditional. I realized that I needed to develop my language skills to become an English teacher so I studied in a private school (ESL Certificate). We also had to do some online research on the English language degree, and fortunately the School of Foreign Languages at the [redacted] had just opened a computer room to provide students with access to the internet.</p>

#### CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE:

- I learnt about the different methods and techniques for teaching a language (grammar-translation, direct, audio-lingual, reading, communicative, structural, total physical response, immersion, humanistic, task-based, etc.). In that moment, I thought that there wouldn't be a unique and best way of teaching since there were different personal purposes for studying a language, different school goals, personal learning styles, heterogeneous groups, English as a second and foreign language, short term and long term courses, etc.
- I realized that the internet would be an importance source of information about different topics and an important tool for learning languages.
- I knew that knowledge about the English language would not be enough in order to become a good teacher. I knew that I had to develop my English language proficiency, so after my English language degree I continued taking some courses to develop my English language skills (ESL certificate).

#### CHANGES IN BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING:

During this time I was not teaching but I was thinking about the pros, cons, viability and risks of inductive learning (second language acquisition) and deductive learning (foreign language learning).



EVENTS:	IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT:
<p><b>3.</b> (English teacher) Computer certificate</p> <p>Self-efficacy score: 10 (with my old belief) 6 (with my new belief)</p>	<p>My first experience as an English teacher was in 1996 in a private school which was called [REDACTED]. In this school, the language skills were taught separately: conversation, listening (TV lab), structure (grammar), vocabulary (reading and writing). I taught all the four subjects, mainly structure and vocabulary (Reading and writing). There, I realized how important computers would be for preparing teaching materials. For that reason, I studied a Computer certificate. During this time, I was convinced it was the best way of teaching a language since in this private school all the English course was organized into levels which helped the students feel comfortable, they were learning step-by-step in a safe environment.</p>

#### CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE:

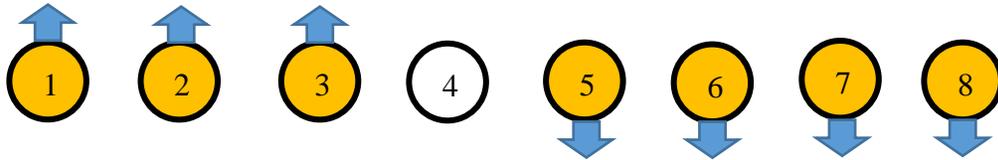
- I noticed that I was developing my English language skills faster by being a teacher than by being a student. In that moment, I thought about how important the student-centred learning approach would be by transferring the teacher's role to my students for more effective learning. However, it still did not form part of my belief.
- I knew that basic computer skills would complement my profession as an English teacher, in order to be more competent.

#### CHANGES IN BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING:

In this first job experience, I observed that students DID learn the language but in a systematic way since all the skills were taught with graded material (books). Moreover, all the students seemed confident for their exams since these were objective. For that reason, I would say that the teaching was humanistic because they were able to succeed most of the time from not very challenging activities and exams, but they were very much teacher-dependent. I also felt happy because most of the time the students were very thankful for giving them so much support. Working for 10 years in this school made me think that I was really helping my students as a good teacher.

#### Obstacles preventing beliefs being converted into practice:

- My belief in the teacher-centred approach was an obstacle since my unique purpose as an English teacher was to help learners to learn the language.
- There was a lot of control on what we were teaching: the material, content and language skill (the subject we had to teach).
- The exams were already designed so our main goal was to help learners succeed in their exams.
- We did not have the choice to practice Classroom Action Research (CAR) because there was no time for it or to make teaching changes.



EVENTS:	IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT:
<p><b>4.</b> (English teacher)  Diploma in Educational Technology  ICELT-COTE  E-tutoring Certificate  Master's degree in Translation and Interpreting  Diploma in Translation and Interpreting</p> <p>Self-efficacy score : 9 (with my old belief)  7 (with my new belief)</p>	<p>In 2003, I began to work at the [redacted] where I had the opportunity to improve my English skills by attending some language development courses like the First Certificate in English and the Certificate in Advanced English, as well as some teaching courses like the Diploma in Educational Technology, the ICELT-COTE, the E-tutoring Certificate, the Master's degree in Translation and Interpreting and the Diploma in Translation and Interpreting. All of these courses helped me not only to develop my language skills, but to experience a new way of learning (student-centred learning), because most of the instructions were given in written form like tasks or projects using new technologies, and the material that we were using came from different books, and most importantly it was mainly authentic material.</p>

#### CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE:

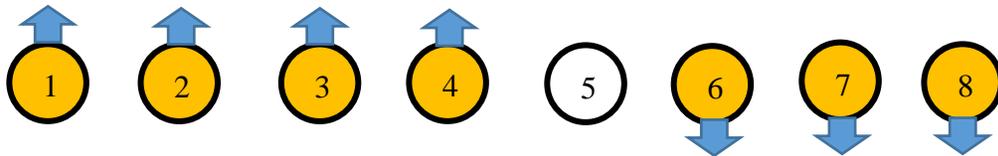
After taking these courses and working at the [redacted], I experienced in person a more authentic student-centered approach as a student and as a teacher since I became aware of new ways of teaching and learning. For example, at the [redacted], I had the chance to be more creative and reflective as a teacher about my own practice (at the private English school [redacted] I could not do so since we had to use a book step-by-step and we had to follow some outlines for each class without any opportunity to be creative or do Classroom Action Research). On the Diploma in Educational Technology, I realized that technology could be used not only for preparing teaching material but also as a tool for learning. For that reason, I began to teach less grammar in the classroom since some online grammar webpages could give the students the same practice and learning. In fact, they could practice as many times as they needed with appropriate scores and recording of progress. On the ICELT-COTE, there was a lot of self-reflection about my own teaching practice which helped me to make better decisions and changes. In that moment, I thought how important and useful it would be for students to develop this practice of thinking about their own learning processes for future decisions and changes as students and professional thinkers in society. On the E-tutoring Certificate, I saw in the electronic activities (e-tivities) an opportunity to make the student-centred approach a reality since e-learners work with projects out of the classroom and they follow written instructions instead of the teachers' direct oral explanations that made the students more teacher-dependent. These e-tivities provide learners with the following: goals of the task, a brief warm-up with questions to think about the topic, clear instructions about the project, and how the project would be presented in the classroom, as well as the evaluation criteria for each task. On the Master's degree in Translation and Interpreting, I realized that school would just provide the basic language skills but the real learning would be out of school, in our own independent work where there is a real need to succeed in life. Later, as part of my own training objectives, I took the Diploma in Translation and Interpreting, in which I proved to myself that everything is discipline more than intelligence since I felt much more comfortable in simultaneous interpreting practices.

**CHANGES IN BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING:**

These training courses and the new job experience at the [REDACTED] allowed me to see some advantages of student-centred learning, and so, new beliefs. For example: metacognitive ability to see the whole learning program as a challenge, to overcome weaknesses and improve strengths by being more reflective of my own practice, eclectic attitude to awake new insights or perspicacity, development of critical thinking to see the new learning more constructively (constructivism), creativity and lateral thinking to resolve social problems, competences for overcoming job challenges, without teacher-dependence and self-motivation to go on learning after graduating from school, instead of memorizing theory to succeed in an exam.

**Obstacles preventing beliefs being converted into practice:**

- I received a lot of teacher training but I did not have time to apply what I was learning.
- Although I had the chance to be more creative and reflective as a teacher about my own practice, I had to follow a grammar program on the [REDACTED] in which there were a lot of grammar topics to cover per semester, so it was difficult to apply what I was really learning on my training.
- The assessment weighting was 60% summative (high-stakes) assessment and 40% formative (low-stakes) assessment.
- My English level was also an obstacle. I did not want to take too much of a risk by using authentic material that I would not be able to use and help learners work with.

**EVENTS:****5. MEd in English Language Teaching**

Self-efficacy score: 8 (with my old belief)  
8 (with my new belief)

**IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT:**

The Master's degree in Education was the most significant student-centred learning experience since the learning process was mainly reflective, there was a lot of independent work and immersion in the language through authentic material. In this program, I understood that autonomous learning did not necessarily mean individual work since we were working on team projects. We chose the topic of our own interest, read around the topic and applied theory in a practical context and in a reflective way to promote the development of our own critical thinking. In fact, we did not have to memorize all the information from our readings and we did not have any written test. The quantitative results in knowledge were not as important as the qualitative results of our own reflection on skills and attitudes. We wrote some essays in which we expressed our own opinions about what authors said on specific topics and how we could apply them to our real teaching contexts.

**CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE:**

After the Master's degree, I realised that it would be more important to let students choose specific topics of their own interests in their areas of study, instead of getting them to work with too many topics without applying what they were learning in their communities or working contexts. This way we would be training better professional thinkers who have not only the knowledge but the skills and attitudes to make better decisions.

**CHANGES IN BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING:**

I believe that immersion in the language (listening and reading) through the use of authentic material (TICs) can help learners acquire the language faster, since they can have a lot of language input (vocabulary and structure), and so, the possibility of developing a more natural language output (speaking and writing). However, it has some implications: students might not notice how fast they are improving at the beginning of this immersion. In fact, there is a risk of feeling frustration, but if they insist on the language immersion, sooner or later they will notice their new language skills.

Now I believe that giving students alternative topics to choose from would be more motivating and meaningful as opposed to getting them to read compulsory topics with little or no reflection.

I also believe that languages can be taught indirectly, that is, by using them instead of teaching about them. This is made possible by giving students plenty of preparation time out of the classroom (school projects), in which they can read about a specific topic or problem and focus on resolving it using the English language, instead of focusing so much on the language itself.

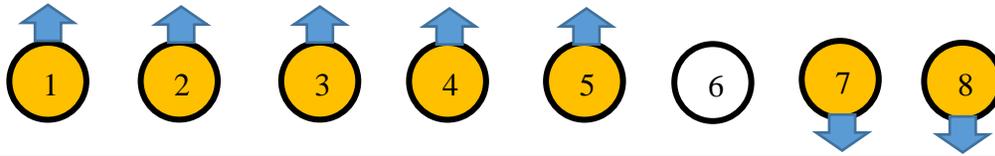
**Obstacles preventing beliefs being converted into practice:**

- Computer room: slow internet, lack of software and hardware, limited computer room access for English as a subject, lack of computer availability for all students, a lot of viruses (USBs becoming damaged), banned web pages (facebook, chats, messengers, etc.), restriction of internet, no computers and internet at students' homes.

- It seemed that the training courses had been prepared for future use since the technology at that moment was not appropriate to achieve immersion in the language.

- In fact, I had to carry my own tape recorder to all the Schools. Fortunately, everything is changing, every year we have better working conditions.

- Because of the vertical organization of the [REDACTED] we were working in several schools. At the present time, we are in one or two places, which makes it easier to prepare material as we focus our efforts.



EVENTS:	IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT:
<p><b>6. Senior Management degree PhD in Governance and Public Management</b></p> <p>Self-efficacy score : 7 (with my old belief) 8 (with my new belief)</p>	<p>The [redacted] has had a lot of changes in their methodologies, through new approaches in which learning has been one of the main goals instead of teaching. Some of these changes imply student-centred learning, Task-Based Learning, skills-based learning and at the present time we are moving beyond the classroom by using virtual platforms like EDUC, Moodle and Classroom. It also meant that instead of teaching General English, students would be learning English for Specific Purposes or English focused on their areas of study. Therefore, I realised that it would be necessary to specialise myself in a specific area to do a better job as an English teacher on professional degree programs, so I decided to study the Senior Management degree and the PhD in Governance and Public Management which I am still studying at the present time. Moreover, I learnt about lateral and parallel thinking (Edward de Bono's method) and how important financial education is to overcome poverty.</p>

#### CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE:

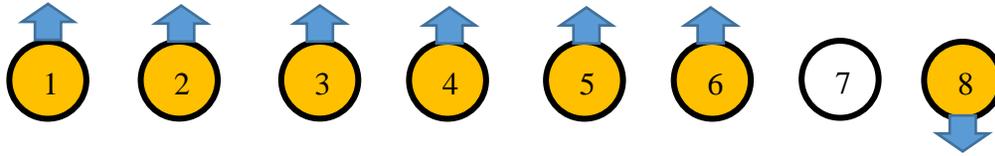
Before taking these degrees, I thought that being an English teacher would be enough to succeed in my job. Now I know it was not a bad decision to receive specialized training in senior and public management since I feel more self-assured and self-confident to move from the general English classes to a more significant class with students from Social Work and Nursing.

#### CHANGES IN BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING:

Classroom Action Research (CAR) should be a practice implemented by the same teachers in order to measure students' readiness and willingness to adopt new changes and attitudes. This way the student-centered approach would be implemented smoothly. It seems that students need time to get used to reading (we are not a culture that is used to reading a lot), to enjoy what they are studying (not all the students have their chosen degree as a first choice) and to be convinced that the new competences will prepare them for their new life as successful professionals (they might have a short insight of what professional graduates would need to learn). When they are aware that graduating from school is not the end of professional preparation but the beginning of lifelong learning, they will enjoy hard work both in and out of school because the student-centered approach implies a more active role for both students and teachers and it also implies making more responsible citizens in a society that needs a lot of changes in its cultural way of thinking.

#### Obstacles preventing beliefs being converted into practice:

- Lack of knowledge and expertise in nursing, marketing, social work, law, basic sciences, tourism and commerce was an obstacle to preparing reliable material in order to make the English class more meaningful to their areas of study. In fact, it was necessary to achieve the students' immersion in the language by involving the teachers in the area of study to teach their subjects in English. The obstacle I found was that not all of them spoke English so the [redacted] has been teaching the language to all the teachers of the degrees who want to participate in this project.



EVENTS:	IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT:
<p><b>7. Private Universities:</b>  <span style="background-color: black; color: black;">[REDACTED]</span></p> <p>Self-efficacy score : 6 (with my old belief) 8 (with my new belief)</p>	<p>I have also worked in two private universities. In both cases they have tried to change the program from General English to English for Specific Purposes, but they noticed that the students' English level was too low so that they decided to go back to General English but complemented by some ESP.</p>

#### CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE:

I have observed that the English level of students who enroll at the university has been improving every year. Moreover, the infrastructure (computer and internet) is faster than it was before. Furthermore, the authorities are more open to listen to the teachers' proposals (continuous assessment, access to the computer rooms for the English classes, training courses for teachers, etc.). These changes have helped to move towards the student-centered approach.

#### CHANGES IN BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING:

The programs should move step-by-step from General English towards English for Specific Purposes. I have noticed that changes towards more student-centred learning are more viable if they are gradual and integral. They will only be possible if students, teachers and authorities are aware of their implications, benefits and impacts in society which needs more responsible citizens, better thinkers to resolve their own problems and financially healthy families.

#### Obstacles preventing beliefs being converted into practice:

- Radical changes create conflict with some students and authorities. Students are used to learning with graded materials and they expect objective exams and gradual learning. The authorities expect the teacher to show evidence of students' progress and fair grades. I think this is an obstacle since the students would have a better performance in the student-centred approach by having more formative than summative weighting, because making mistakes and thinking about them is part of learning. Fortunately, the assessment weighting at the present time is 30% summative (high-stakes) assessment and 70% formative (low-stakes) assessment, which gives the students the chance to make mistakes without worrying too much. At the present time, we have had the support of the authorities (heads of school and coordinators) to make these changes and they have trust in our own assessment procedures.



EVENTS:	IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT:
<p><b>8. Diploma in Blended Learning</b></p> <p>Self-efficacy score: 6 (with my old belief) 9 (with my new belief)</p>	<p>This course was very important in my development since I learnt that blended learning would be better to help learners to move smoothly from face-to-face classes to more virtual environments. I also learnt that the skills-based learning implied more responsibility and awareness from the same students about the progress of their learning.</p>

#### CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE:

In this course I learnt how to help learners become more responsible and aware of their learning progress through self-, peer- and co-assessment. This practice has some implications for the design of the online e-tivities. For example, they should contain clear task objectives, thinking questions to help learners accept the new changes, detailed instructions to promote independent work, and evaluation criteria to get used to using more objective self-, peer- and co-assessment practices.

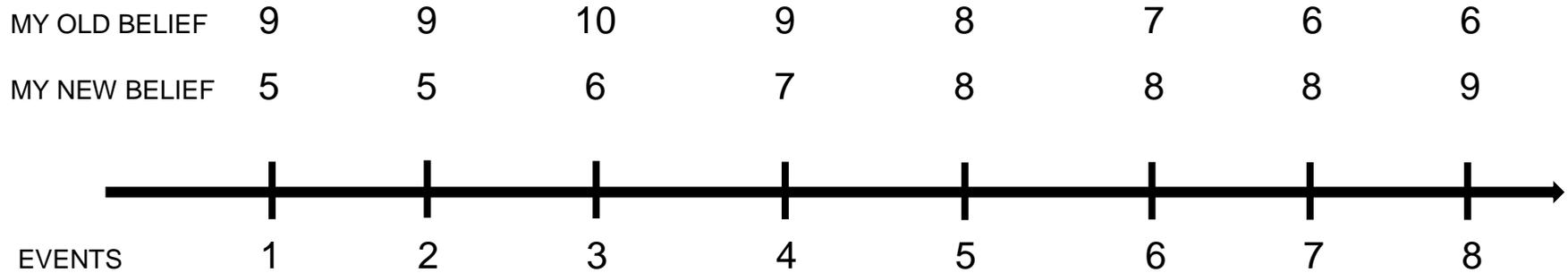
#### CHANGES IN BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING:

Having learners experience an e-learning course without previous training is very frustrating because they need to develop computer skills, habits of organizing files and folders, autonomous learning skills, self-discipline, computer and internet access and a lot of patience to learn how to overcome the online obstacles. For that reason, my new belief is that learners should be helped with a face-to-face introductory course and blended or mixed learning in order to learn how to use the virtual platform. This way they will be ready to focus on developing their specific skills (in social work or nursing) and generic skills (how to work in teams, distributed leadership, lateral thinking, practice of self-, peer- and co-assessment) instead of being distracted because of their lack of basic competences (basic communication in the English language itself).

#### Obstacles preventing beliefs being converted into practice:

- An obstacle would be that the University authorities try to implement a unique way of teaching when all the teachers have different educational backgrounds and beliefs about teaching. Since we are in a public university, there should be a kind of freedom to do our best with our own knowledge, skills and attitudes but with constant training for a future standardization of goals and expectations of our future professional graduates so that they can make positive changes in our societies. For example, only some teachers know how to use [redacted] and not all of them have had the chance to receive e-tutoring courses and computer training. Nonetheless, a student-centred approach implies more reading and a lot of thinking about what students are learning, but I do not think that students, teachers or the school authorities are willing to pay for all the photocopies that the students would need in a face-to-face course. I estimate that if I was not working online, I would be spending at least 3,200 sheets of paper per year in my three Social Work groups.
- The practice of student self-assessment is a touchy subject that not all teachers or authorities would agree to implement, because students give themselves their own grades. Therefore, it is necessary to create rubrics or evaluation criteria in order to help learning to be more objective. It is a practice that we need to implement to achieve positive changes in our communities.

SELF-EFFICACY SCORE



**DESCRIPTION OF MYSELF AS A TEACHER:**

At the present time my new role has been as a tutor since my main goal is not only to teach the English language but to help learners to succeed in life by teaching them not only knowledge in their area of study but also competences, job skills and new attitudes to be better professional citizens in society.

### A.2.5. Elizabeth's timeline

Elizabeth chose not to share her timeline in the appendices.

## **A.3. Sample notes from classroom observations**

**Teacher:** Ricardo

**Date:** 03/09/14

**Time:** 5pm

**Class:** Nursing

**Students:** 10

**Level:** Beginners/Lower Intermediate. Varied level – one or two better than others

### **Notes:**

- Students coming in late, seem pretty unprepared, no books, no dictionary. One student came in late in with his little daughter! No one seemed to bat an eyelid.
- Small boardroom-style room. Air conditioning. Whiteboard and large screen to be hooked up to laptop. Very comfortable.
- Whole class repetitions of medical vocab.
- Asking them to describe in English medical terms.
- English used throughout with a few exceptions. Ts' English generally pretty good.
- Teacher questioning Ss.
- Explanations for things in English. T seems to be reluctant to directly translate.
- Activity to be planned next week? Topic: to encourage them to use dictionaries out of class.
- Thinking of which medical objects will be the most important to survive on a desert island. Groups of 3 or 4. Choosing objects from a list.
- Most of the Ss are trying to speak in English.
- Groups have to convince other groups why certain items would be more important.
- Looking at a computer program. Starting with presentation of new vocab. Choosing another two important items from a list.
- Students becoming more animated and encouraged. Slightly rowdy.
- More vocab. Maybe T could have invited them to come up with the vocab?
- Sometimes resorting to Spanish. Most trying to speak some English, despite some quite low levels.
- Continuous T to S spontaneous questioning based on what they are saying. Again invitation for Ss to convince other teams that their decisions are better.
- Perhaps T was a bit eager in answering his own Qs, not giving Ss the chance to think and answer.
- Students seem to be enjoying the activity.
- Break

- Spending quite a few minutes discussing how Ss can be awarded their grade, extra points, etc. Ss still quite immature, worrying a lot about the grade as opposed to meaningful learning.
- Independent activity for Ss to research about the pros and cons of smoking.
- Now a whole class activity.
- Introducing the topic of taxi drivers. Asking quite spontaneous questions. About whether taxi drivers should have to carry first aid kits.
- Reading activity. Introductory questioning e.g. what do you see in the picture? Lots of questioning. T encouraging responses and correcting.
- S reading text to whole group. T correcting and modelling pronunciation. Again perhaps a little bit eager to answer quickly.
- Stopping at regular points to analyse and ask questions
- Are all the Ss participating to the same extent? Some more dominant ones.
- Working in pairs, discussing communicative questions.
- Ss generally seem to be participating.
- Now Ss reading individually in silence. For them to report back to the group.
- Now reporting back. T asking Qs to whole group. Most Ss participating.
- Next activity: answering personal questions about themselves. Preparing questions to ask others those same personal questions.
- T writing example on board, asking for input from Ss, but T taking the lead to write correct sentences.
- Now invitation to stand up and mingle. T encouraged Ss to use the language and try to have a natural conversation.
- Example by T. Making two lines, standing face to face. 1 minute then rotating.
- T monitoring, writing some emergent vocabulary on the board. Ss seem to be doing their best to communicate.
- Light-hearted and fun atmosphere. Slightly rowdy.
- After a while returning to seats. Reporting back what Ss had answered. Personalised questioning.
- Those who responded were given extra “participation” points.
- Final activity: a final reading.
- Introducing the activity. Asking Qs about paramedics.
- Reading out loud.
- Asking meaningful, personalised Qs.
- Reading and checking new vocab.
- HW to answer Qs about the two reading activities, and preparing smoking activity.

## A.4. Examples of transcription

### A.4.1. *Rebecca*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project named 'phdNvivo69.nvp'. The 'Media Tools' ribbon is active, showing various playback and selection options. The 'Sources' tree on the left is expanded to '1. Teacher 1st interviews', listing several sources including '0. Observat', '1. Teacher', '2. Teacher t', '3. Teacher', '4. Teacher', '5. Student f', '6. Student', '7. Student ti', '8. Student', and 'Discussion'. The main transcript area shows a list of nodes with their corresponding timespans and content. The status bar at the bottom indicates 8 items, 44 nodes, and 361 references, with a current time of 1:17:15.2 on Thursday, April 21, 2016.

Node	Timespan	Content
1		We're here with [REDACTED] Can you tell me when was the point when you first started to become aware of the concept of student-centred learning?
2	0:22.8 - 2:19.1	It was definitely when I joined a Master's program in the UK, and I didn't know this until I actually finished the program, because that's when I realised that I was doing things differently. Throughout the course of the program we started doing a lot of things which had to do with, we actually lived, and experienced, student-centred learning. We started, for example, writing learning logs on the Master's program, and we were asked to write these reflective tasks, particularly for one module, but all the modules required us to write learning logs, to write about our learning, and then after that we wrote reflective tasks. We also had a formal assignment for the modules and a portfolio assignment for that, so in the portfolio task we wrote about our learning journey, and we started studying methodologies and adult learning and all these sort of new ideas. And when I finished some of the modules I realised what student-centred learning actually was, well for me at least, and that what I had been doing in my classroom was not promoting learning very much, because it was teacher-centred and mainly grammar-based. And then I knew that I needed to change something.
3	2:19.1 - 2:28.2	Could you develop that a little bit more, with relation to the way you were when you went away?

A.4.2. *Antonio*

phdNvivo69.nvp - NVivo

File Home Create External Data Analyze Query Explore Layout View Media

Media Tools

Transcript Video Size Video Player Waveform Fit To Player 100% Split Panes Stop Play / Pause Playback Start Selection Finish Selection Play Transcript Media Select Media from Transcript Assign Timespan to Rows Assign Frame as Thumbnail Transcript Rows Media Content Import

Sources

Internals

- 0. Observat
- 1. Teacher
- 2. Teacher t
- 3. Teacher
- 4. Teacher
- 5. Student f
- 6. Student
- 7. Student ti
- 8. Student
- Discussion

1. Teacher 1st interviews

Name	Nodes	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
1_100914a_TR_ED	8	20	15/09/14 08:33:10	NJB	21/04/16 11:48:42	NJB
1_100914b_TR_ED	27	98	15/09/14 08:33:10	NJB	04/04/16 18:27:32	NJB
1_300914a TR_ED	14	122	30/09/14 13:41:29	NJB	31/03/16 12:26:25	NJB

1\_100914a\_TR\_ED

Timespan	Content
3 0:08.8 - 0:14.4	The first question is, when were you first exposed to the idea of student-centred learning?
4 0:14.3 - 0:50.0	The first time that I was exposed to this kind of education was when we were trying to do CLIL. I say "trying", because we're not 100% sure it's ok <laughs>, but the first time we actually did it for real was for CLIL. It was in 2010 I think, four years ago, or 2009, I don't know exactly, but it was the first time. I say that it was the first time because when we entered here at the University, all of the teachers were asked to teach in a student-centred way.
5 0:49.9 - 0:53.5	When did that happen?
6 0:53.4 - 1:29.6	The first time you had the interview, I don't remember if it was with [REDACTED] the approach that was used at the University, and I'm quoting <laughs>, was "Communicative Language Teaching", and also with a mixture of student-centredness, that we shouldn't be using grammar or things like that, but that wasn't what was going on in the classroom. I perceived that all of the teachers were teaching a grammatical approach instead of doing what they were told to do.

In Nodes Code At

NJB 8 Items Nodes: 8 References: 20 Editable Unfiltered 0:00.0/3:57.9 3:57.9

### A.4.3. *Isabella*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project named 'phdNvivo69.nvp'. The 'Media Tools' tab is active, showing various playback and selection controls. The main workspace is divided into several sections:

- Sources:** A tree view on the left shows a hierarchy of sources, including 'Internals' and 'Sources'. The 'Sources' folder is expanded, showing a list of sources under the heading '1. Teacher 1st interviews'.
- Table:** A table lists the sources with columns for Name, Nodes, References, Created On, Created By, Modified On, and Modified By.
 

Name	Nodes	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
1_100914a_TR_ED	8	20	15/09/14 08:33:10	NJB	21/04/16 11:50:32	NJB
1_100914b_TR_ED	27	98	15/09/14 08:33:10	NJB	04/04/16 18:27:32	NJB
1_300914a_TR_ED	14	122	30/09/14 13:41:29	NJB	31/03/16 12:26:25	NJB
- Waveform:** A timeline at the top of the transcript view shows a waveform representing the audio content, with time markers from 0:00.0 to 55:00.0.
- Transcript:** A list of transcript segments is displayed, each with a Timespan and Content.
 

Timespan	Content
1 0:00.0 - 0:24.3	I'm here with my next participant. [REDACTED] Thank you very much for doing this for me. When was the first time that you can remember being exposed to the concept of student-centred learning?
2 0:24.2 - 0:34.9	It was during a readers and writers workshop in about the year 2001 in [REDACTED]
3 0:34.9 - 0:37.9	What happened? What did you do?
4 0:37.9 - 1:00.2	I realised that there are more ways of teaching, having the students participate more and create, not just having them listen to the teacher and receive dictation but actually produce writing and create an actual book during the class.
- Bottom Bar:** A status bar at the bottom shows 'In Nodes', 'Code At', and other project statistics: '8 Items', 'Nodes: 39', 'References: 203', 'Editable', 'Unfiltered', and a time indicator '0:00.0/57:34.7'.

#### A.4.4. *Ricardo*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for analyzing video data. The main window is titled 'phdNvivo69.nvp - NVivo'. The 'Media Tools' tab is active, showing various playback and selection options. The 'Sources' panel on the left lists the project structure, including 'Internals' and 'Sources'. The central area shows a video player with a timeline from 0:00.0 to 1:06:40.0. Below the video player is a transcript table with the following content:

Node	Timespan	Content
2	0:10.5 - 0:27.1	We're going to start with your undergraduate university education. Tell me about your degree in at the School of Languages.
3	0:27.1 - 1:12.0	I studied at the [redacted] at the School of Foreign Languages, I started an English Language Teaching degree, and after that I had a chance to study a Master's degree in Education, also in English Language Teaching, in the year 2011. When I was studying English Language Teaching, I had an opportunity to study a second degree, it was in Senior Management, and it was in a private school.
4	1:12.0 - 1:14.8	A second undergraduate degree?
5	1:14.8 - 1:15.9	Yeah.
6	1:15.9 - 1:18.0	When was that exactly?

The bottom status bar shows '8 Items', 'Nodes: 38', 'References: 116', 'Editable', 'Unfiltered', and a time range of '0:00.0/1:10:18.1'.

### A.4.5. *Elizabeth*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project named 'phdNvivo69.nvp'. The 'Media Tools' tab is active, showing playback controls and various media management options. The main workspace is divided into a 'Sources' panel on the left and a central '1. Teacher 1st interviews' section. The 'Sources' panel lists a hierarchy of folders: Internals, 0. Observat, 1. Teacher, 2. Teacher t, 3. Teacher, 4. Teacher, 5. Student f, 6. Student, 7. Student ti, 8. Student, and Discussion. The central section shows a list of nodes with their respective timespans and content. An audio waveform is visible above the node list, with a blue playhead indicating the current position at 0:00.0. The status bar at the bottom shows 8 items, 14 nodes, and 122 references.

Node ID	Timespan	Content
3	0:07.3 - 0:19.5	Can you start by explaining about your University degree, did you study at the School of Languages?
4	0:19.4 - 0:58.7	Yes, I studied here at the University, at the School of Languages. I knew English before I started my degree. I wanted to teach, so that's why I started to study there. And what I did was just polish and improve my English.
5	0:58.6 - 1:02.6	So you had quite a good level of English when you started?
6	1:02.6 - 1:39.7	Yeah, I think I was like an upper intermediate when I started, so I basically developed reading strategies, and I really didn't have to focus on my language. That's why I really enjoyed studying there, because I was learning about other topics related to education.
7	1:39.7 - 1:51.9	How did you learn English in the first place? When did you first start learning?

#### A.4.6. *Student focus group – Antonio’s group at the School of Computing*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project named 'phdNvivo69.nvp - NVivo'. The 'Media Tools' tab is active, showing various playback and selection tools. The main workspace is titled '5. Student focus groups' and contains a transcript table. The transcript table has columns for 'Timespan', 'Content', and 'hablante'. The transcript content is in Spanish and discusses educational topics like teacher roles, student attitudes, and learning experiences.

Node	Timespan	Content	hablante
61	18:23.2 - 18:37.9	entonces vamos a empezar con el papel de el maestro y se puede mezclar en como ustedes piensan es la relación entre el y ustedes	Nicky
62	18:38.2 - 19:43.0	hemos concluido que respecto al maestro queremos considerar en primer lugar la actitud, la actitud ya la habíamos dicho anteriormente es muy importante y discutimos un punto respecto a la edad por ejemplo si este proyecto lo que esta haciendo a [redacted] usar esta nueva pedagogia que tal si se lo hubieran dicho a otro maestro de mayor edad que lo aplicara no iba a tener los mismos resultados, no sé si la edad sea un factor a considerar porque primero que todo [redacted] tiene actitud y llegamos a ese punto de la edad porque no es diferente [redacted] de nosotros por eso encaja bien le va mejor por eso pensaba que con alguien mayor podría tener dificultad en la metodología	[redacted]
63	19:43.0 - 20:19.2	si básicamente o sea te impone lo que tienes que hacer el te guía a como tu te sientas mejor aprender y otro punto importante es el control que tiene sobre el porque a pesar de decir que tenemos mucha confianza con de bromas y eso no le faltamos el respeto en nada y eso da mucho el control y el respeto que gana como maestro	[redacted]
64	20:19.2 - 20:54.6	y pues el punto de información si no fuera por como (no se entiende) nos da noticias nuevas con respecto de becas cursos exámenes que podríamos practicar y lo que me gusta de el es que siempre hay noticias nuevas que nos puede ayudar estábamos comentando que si no fuera por él nosotros no nos hubiera interesado entrar en un curso de francés que esta ahorita ni siquiera no hubiese pasado por la cabeza tomarlo	[redacted]

The bottom status bar shows: NJB | 18 Items | Nodes: 7 | References: 15 | Editable | Unfiltered | 0:00.0/30:37.5 | 30:37.5

## A.5. Examples of coding in NVivo

### A.5.1. Example of initial chronological/thematic coding (Antonio)

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface with the following components:

- Menu Bar:** File, Home, Create, External Data, Analyze, Query, Explore, Layout, View.
- Toolbar:** Includes icons for Go, Refresh, Open, Properties, Edit, Paste, Copy, Merge, Format, Paragraph, Styles, PDF Selection, Text, Region, Find, Replace, Delete, Spelling, and Proofing.
- Left Panel (Nodes):** Contains a tree view for Nodes, Relationships, and Node Matrices. A sidebar on the left lists Sources, Nodes (selected), Classifications, Collections, Queries, Reports, Models, and Folders.
- Main Workspace (Nodes Table):** A table listing nodes with columns for Name, Sources, Referenc, Created On, Created B, Modified On, and Modified. The nodes are organized hierarchically, starting with a root node '2' and branching into sub-nodes like '0. interpretation of SCL', '1. Up to 2007 - hiring at', '2. 2007-2009. First years working at the', and '3. 2009-2014. CLIL and the Master's'.

Name	Sources	Referenc	Created On	Created B	Modified On	Modified
2	0	0	19/09/14 15:24	NJB	18/07/15 07:14	NJB
0. interpretation of SCL	1	1	26/05/15 11:27	NJB	26/05/15 11:27	NJB
1. Up to 2007 - hiring at	0	0	19/09/14 15:25	NJB	29/06/15 10:25	NJB
1a. Evolution of beliefs and practices	0	0	29/06/15 09:39	NJB	29/06/15 09:51	NJB
1x. Roles and relationships	1	1	29/06/15 09:38	NJB	29/06/15 10:28	NJB
1y. Self-efficacy	1	2	29/06/15 09:38	NJB	29/06/15 10:54	NJB
2. 2007-2009. First years working at the to the point he realised grammar wasn't working	0	0	19/09/14 15:26	NJB	07/07/15 05:41	IJB
2a. Evolution of beliefs and practices	0	0	29/06/15 10:11	NJB	29/06/15 10:24	NJB
1. Asked to teach SC at beginning, but didn't make much difference. Obstacles in the context didn't facilitate either	3	17	29/06/15 10:12	NJB	29/06/15 10:36	NJB
2. Tutoring - being told he was good at explaining grammar (reinforcement of TC beliefs)	3	5	29/06/15 10:13	NJB	29/06/15 10:51	NJB
3. Starting to realise that grammar, TC approach wasn't working	3	13	29/06/15 10:13	NJB	29/06/15 10:55	NJB
2b. Roles and relationships	2	11	29/06/15 10:11	NJB	07/07/15 05:41	IJB
2c. Self-efficacy	2	4	29/06/15 10:11	NJB	29/06/15 10:55	NJB
3. 2009-2014. CLIL and the Master's	0	0	19/09/14 15:27	NJB	29/06/15 12:27	NJB
3a. General change to-reinforcement of SC beliefs after introduction of CLIL	3	12	29/06/15 11:45	NJB	21/04/16 11:50	NJB
1. Positive results (+ve S feedback)	1	3	29/06/15 11:48	NJB	29/06/15 16:52	NJB
2. Tutoring sessions (reinforcement of value of teaching vocabulary)	2	5	29/06/15 11:49	NJB	29/06/15 12:25	NJB
3. Master's helping process of assimilation	2	4	29/06/15 11:53	NJB	29/06/15 12:25	NJB
3b. Demands a lot of Ts, hard at first, lots of work	2	4	29/06/15 11:56	NJB	29/06/15 12:06	NJB
3c. Obstacles to fully implementing	0	0	29/06/15 11:46	NJB	29/06/15 11:46	NJB
1. Ss' attitudes, not used to SCL. Especially not used to autonomous work	2	20	29/06/15 11:51	NJB	29/06/15 16:31	NJB
2. Administration	3	4	29/06/15 11:51	NJB	07/07/15 11:55	IJB
3. Much harder with larger groups	1	1	29/06/15 11:50	NJB	29/06/15 12:09	NJB

At the bottom left, the user profile 'NJB' is shown with 791 items.

### A.5.2. *Example of initial chronological/thematic coding (Elizabeth)*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project named 'phdNvivo69.nvp'. The interface includes a ribbon menu with tabs for File, Home, Create, External Data, Analyze, Query, Explore, Layout, and View. Below the ribbon are various toolbars for workspace, item, clipboard, format, paragraph, styles, editing, and proofing.

The main workspace is divided into two panes. The left pane shows a hierarchical tree of nodes, and the right pane shows a table of node data. The table has columns for Name, Sources, Reference, Created On, Created B, Modified On, and Modified. The nodes are organized into a hierarchy, with the following structure:

- 3. [Redacted]
- 4. [Redacted]
- 5. [Redacted]
- 0. [Redacted] interpretation of SCL
  - 0. Pre-2003 - [Redacted] and studying at Lenguas
    - 0.1. [Redacted]
    - 0.2. Lenguas
  - 1. 2003-2005 - First two years teaching
    - 1.1. [Redacted]
    - 1.2. [Redacted]
    - 1.x. Roles and relationships
    - 1.y. Self-efficacy
  - 2. 2005-2006 - ICELT-COTE and 'Learning to learn' course
    - 2.1. ICELT-COTE
    - 2.2. 'Learning to learn' course
    - 2.x. Roles and relationships
    - 2.y. Self-efficacy
  - 3. 2006-2014 - Gradual development
    - 3.1. 2006-2011 - More courses e.g. learning-centred strategies, competencias
    - 3.2. 2011-2014 - School restructuring to better support SCL; CLIL introduced
    - 3.v. Current description of teaching
    - 3.w. Mixture of experiences; gradual development; not ONE way to teach E
    - 3.x. Roles and relationships
    - 3.y. Self-efficacy

*A.5.3. Example of a thematic category (Rebecca – “importance of reflection”)*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project named 'phdNvivo69.nvp'. The main window shows a thematic category titled '3. Importance of reflection' with a coverage of 10.82%. Below the category name, four references are listed with their respective coverage percentages and text excerpts:

- Reference 1 - 2.51% Coverage**  
We started, for example, writing learning logs on the Master's program, and we were asked to write these reflective tasks, particularly for one module, but all the modules required us to write learning logs, to write about our learning, and then after that we wrote reflective tasks. We also had a formal assignment for the modules and a portfolio assignment for that, so in the portfolio task we wrote about our learning journey
- Reference 2 - 2.51% Coverage**  
when I finished some of the modules I realised what student-centred learning actually was, well for me at least, and that what I had been doing in my classroom was not promoting learning very much, because it was teacher-centred and mainly grammar-based. And then I knew that I needed to change something.
- Reference 3 - 0.25% Coverage**  
For example, in one of the modules I was asked to describe my lesson.
- Reference 4 - 1.75% Coverage**  
just describe it - "what happens in your classroom?" And then I started describing it, and I said "well, I have 20-something students, all of them sitting in rows, and the teacher at the front, explaining a grammar point and then going through the exercises in the book and then checking

The interface also shows a left-hand navigation pane with options like Sources, Nodes, Classifications, Collections, Queries, Reports, Models, and Folders. The status bar at the bottom indicates 'NJB 791 Items Sources: 2 References: 18 Unfiltered' and a zoom level of 100%.

#### A.5.4. *Example of coding for triangulation (Rebecca)*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface with a hierarchical tree of nodes. The tree is organized into levels: Teachers' educational life histories, Triangulation, 1. [redacted], 1. Teaching methods, 1. Use of SC methods (consistent), 2. Roles and relationships, 3. Students as obstacles, and 4. External obstacles. Each node has associated source and reference counts, and creation/modification dates.

Name	Sources	Referen	Created On	Created B	Modified On	Modified
Teachers' educational life histories	0	0	29/10/15 11:51	NJB	29/10/15 16:22	NJB
Triangulation	0	0	29/10/15 11:52	NJB	29/10/15 11:52	NJB
1. [redacted]	0	0	29/10/15 11:53	NJB	29/01/16 09:06	NJB
1. Teaching methods	0	0	29/01/16 09:06	NJB	29/01/16 09:06	NJB
1. Use of SC methods (consistent)	0	0	29/01/16 09:07	NJB	29/01/16 09:16	NJB
1. More practical, participative classes; use of English in class; oral, group work	3	4	29/01/16 09:10	NJB	29/01/16 10:49	NJB
2. More autonomous learning activities	1	1	29/01/16 09:11	NJB	29/01/16 09:36	NJB
3. Meaningful content; ESP	1	1	29/01/16 09:11	NJB	29/01/16 10:50	NJB
4. Personalised attention; adapting class to individual students' needs	2	4	29/01/16 09:11	NJB	29/01/16 10:51	NJB
2. Use of TC methods (but [redacted] does recognise this, or recognises that she uses a 'hybrid' approach)	3	4	29/01/16 09:13	NJB	29/01/16 10:52	NJB
3. Use of TC methods (inconsistency)	4	11	29/01/16 09:13	NJB	29/01/16 10:53	NJB
2. Roles and relationships	0	0	29/01/16 09:07	NJB	29/01/16 09:07	NJB
1. More SC role (consistent)	0	0	29/01/16 09:14	NJB	29/01/16 09:14	NJB
1. More S autonomy, less dependence on T	0	0	29/01/16 09:14	NJB	29/01/16 09:14	NJB
2. Less of a distance between T+S, more friendly relationship	3	16	29/01/16 09:14	NJB	29/01/16 10:56	NJB
2. More TC role (inconsistency)	2	2	29/01/16 09:15	NJB	29/01/16 11:00	NJB
3. Students as obstacles	0	0	29/01/16 09:07	NJB	29/01/16 09:07	NJB
1. Lack of motivation, discipline, effort, etc	1	2	29/01/16 09:15	NJB	29/01/16 11:00	NJB
2. Not used to SC approaches (or feel TC approaches are better)	1	1	29/01/16 09:15	NJB	30/01/16 06:52	NJB
4. External obstacles	0	0	29/01/16 09:07	NJB	29/01/16 11:07	NJB
1. Lack of time	1	2	29/01/16 11:02	NJB	29/01/16 11:07	NJB
2. Time spent (wasted) preparing for the TOEFL exam	1	9	29/01/16 11:02	NJB	29/01/16 11:06	NJB

### A.5.5. *Example of coding for triangulation (Isabella)*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project named 'phdNvivo69.nvp'. The interface includes a ribbon menu with tabs for File, Home, Create, External Data, Analyze, Query, Explore, Layout, and View. The main workspace is divided into a left-hand navigation pane and a central data table.

The left-hand pane shows a tree structure of nodes. The 'Nodes' section is expanded, showing a hierarchy of nodes. The central data table provides a detailed view of these nodes, including their names, source counts, reference counts, and creation/modification dates.

Name	Sources	Referen	Created On	Created	Modified On	Modified
3. [REDACTED]	0	0	29/10/15 11:53:5	NJB	29/01/16 09:09:	NJB
1. Teaching methods	0	0	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	29/10/15 16:21:	NJB
1. Use of SC methods (consistent)	0	0	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	29/01/16 09:16:	NJB
1. More practical, participative classes; use of English in class; oral, group work	4	7	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	29/01/16 09:11:	NJB
2. More autonomous learning activities	2	2	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	30/10/15 18:29:	NJB
3. Meaningful content; ESP	5	14	30/10/15 15:08:5	NJB	30/10/15 18:31:	NJB
4. Personalised attention; adapting class to individual students' needs	2	4	30/10/15 15:13:1	NJB	30/10/15 18:14:	NJB
2. Use of TC methods (but [REDACTED] does recognise this, or recognises she uses a 'hybrid' approach)	2	6	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	29/01/16 09:16:	NJB
3. Use of TC methods (inconsistency)	0	0	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	29/01/16 09:16:	NJB
2. Roles and relationships	0	0	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	29/10/15 16:21:	NJB
1. More SC role (consistent)	0	0	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	29/10/15 16:43:	NJB
1. More S autonomy, less dependence on T	1	3	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	30/10/15 18:33:	NJB
2. Less of a distance between T + S, more friendly relationship	3	5	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	30/10/15 18:38:	NJB
2. More TC role (inconsistency)	0	0	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	30/10/15 15:09:	NJB
3. Students as obstacles	0	0	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	30/10/15 20:57:	NJB
1. Lack of motivation, discipline effort, etc	4	15	30/10/15 20:55:0	NJB	30/10/15 20:58:	NJB
2. Not used to SC approaches (or feel TC approaches are better)	2	5	30/10/15 20:55:2	NJB	30/01/16 06:53:	NJB
4. External obstacles	0	0	30/10/15 15:07:2	NJB	30/10/15 19:00:	NJB
1. Obligation to follow the grammatical syllabus (although this is no longer the case)	1	1	30/10/15 18:48:1	NJB	30/10/15 18:59:	NJB
2. School of Visual Arts generally not setting a good example, e.g. punctuality	2	4	30/10/15 18:48:4	NJB	30/10/15 18:58:	NJB
3. Different language levels in same group; no thought of people e.g. with learning disorders	2	8	30/10/15 18:49:1	NJB	30/10/15 19:00:	NJB
4. Too many students in a group	1	1	30/10/15 18:57:0	NJB	30/10/15 18:58:	NJB
5. [REDACTED] obsession with exams and/or the world's obsession with TOEFL	1	1	30/10/15 18:49:3	NJB	30/10/15 18:57:	NJB

### A.5.6. *Example of cross-case coding (Research Question 1)*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project named 'phdNvivo69.nvp'. The main window shows a hierarchical tree of nodes for cross-case coding. The nodes are organized into a tree structure starting with '1. RQ1 - What factors influence T belief change (towards SC EFL learning)'. The left sidebar shows navigation options like Sources, Nodes, Classifications, Collections, Queries, Reports, Models, and Folders. The bottom status bar shows 'NJB 791 Items'.

Name	Sources	Referen	Created On	Created B	Modified On	Modified
1. RQ1 - What factors influence T belief change (towards SC EFL learning)	0	0	19/12/15 11:22:	NJB	19/12/15 11:22:	NJB
1.1. Factors influencing establishment of TC beliefs; reinforcement of TC beliefs; unsuccessful change to SC beliefs	0	0	19/12/15 11:26:	NJB	19/12/15 11:27:	NJB
1.1.1. Teaching as they were taught; unconscious TC beliefs due to immersion in generally TC Mexican ed culture	6	34	19/12/15 11:30:	NJB	29/12/15 06:12:	NJB
1.1.2. Positive results with TC approaches, as learners and teachers; everyone is happy, all feel comfortable under the TC appr	5	26	19/12/15 11:30:	NJB	21/12/15 07:17:	NJB
1.1.3. Ineffective professional development opportunities (see 1.2.1)	0	0	19/12/15 11:30:	NJB	20/12/15 09:36:	NJB
1.1.4. Initial resistance; gradual change	6	20	20/12/15 08:48:	NJB	29/01/16 08:37:	NJB
1.2. Factors influencing initial change to SC beliefs	0	0	19/12/15 11:27:	NJB	19/12/15 11:36:	NJB
1.2.1. Experiencing poor results with TC approaches	3	17	19/12/15 11:33:	NJB	29/12/15 11:41:	NJB
1.2.2. Being 'forced' to adopt SC approaches	2	6	19/12/15 11:35:	NJB	29/12/15 12:30:	NJB
1.2.3. Effective courses or professional development opportunities	7	17	19/12/15 11:34:	NJB	29/01/16 08:42:	NJB
1.2.3.1. Longer	2	3	19/12/15 11:38:	NJB	29/01/16 08:38:	NJB
1.2.3.2. Follow-up, ongoing support, mentoring, 'lifelong learning'	3	9	19/12/15 11:38:	NJB	29/01/16 08:38:	NJB
1.2.3.3. Taught in a SC way themselves	3	10	19/12/15 11:38:	NJB	29/01/16 08:39:	NJB
1.2.3.4. Make connections with real contexts; make connections with participants' real teaching situations; realistic aims	5	13	19/12/15 11:38:	NJB	29/01/16 08:41:	NJB
1.2.3.5. Incorporate reflection	5	16	19/12/15 11:38:	NJB	21/12/15 06:56:	NJB
1.2.3.6. Inspirational tutors	2	4	19/12/15 11:39:	NJB	29/01/16 08:39:	NJB
1.2.3.7. Being told how and why to behave in a SC way; clear instructions and routines	1	1	20/12/15 08:50:	NJB	29/12/15 07:52:	NJB
1.2.3.8. Incorporate teaching practices, observation schemes, etc	2	4	20/12/15 11:22:	NJB	21/12/15 06:57:	NJB
1.3. Factors influencing reinforcement of SC beliefs	0	0	19/12/15 11:28:	NJB	19/12/15 11:28:	NJB
1.3.1. Experiencing improved results	2	4	19/12/15 12:02:	NJB	20/12/15 11:40:	NJB
1.3.2. Receiving positive student feedback	5	15	19/12/15 12:03:	NJB	20/12/15 12:32:	NJB
1.3.3. Courses to reconfirm SC beliefs	2	7	19/12/15 12:03:	NJB	30/12/15 11:53:	NJB
1.3.4. Frustration at standardised tests not successfully assessing communicative ability	1	3	20/12/15 11:42:	NJB	20/12/15 11:42:	NJB
1.3.5. Support from Schools	1	2	20/12/15 11:42:	NJB	20/12/15 11:43:	NJB

### A.5.7. *Example of cross-case coding (Research Question 2)*

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for a project named 'phdNvivo69.nvp'. The main workspace shows a hierarchical tree of nodes under the 'Nodes' section. The nodes are organized into a tree structure, with the following details:

Name	Sources	Referenc	Created On	Created B	Modified On	Modified
2. RQ2 - What factors influence matches or mismatches between Ts' beliefs and practices	0	0	19/12/15 11:24	NJB	19/12/15 11:24	NJB
2.1. PATH 1 - TC beliefs, TC practices (no or limited belief change, no or limited behaviour change)	5	12	19/12/15 12:10	NJB	21/04/16 14:55	NJB
2.1.1. Teachers 'don't know any different' (see 1.1.1)	0	0	19/12/15 12:17	NJB	21/12/15 07:00	NJB
2.1.2. Teachers are in a comfortable situation, experiencing positive results, everybody seems happy (see 1.1.2)	0	0	19/12/15 12:18	NJB	21/12/15 07:00	NJB
2.1.3. Ineffective professional development opportunities (see 1.2.1)	0	0	19/12/15 12:18	NJB	20/12/15 09:50	NJB
2.1.4. Initial resistance; gradual change (see 1.1.4)	0	0	20/12/15 09:50	NJB	20/12/15 09:51	NJB
2.2. PATH 2 - TC beliefs, SC practices (no or limited belief change, but behaviour change).	1	1	19/12/15 12:10	NJB	21/04/16 14:55	NJB
2.2.1. [redacted] in the US - being forced to change and then believing after (+examples of being forced to change practices but no be	1	8	20/12/15 11:15	NJB	21/12/15 07:16	NJB
2.2.2. Example of [redacted] realising, in retrospect, that her practices were actually MORE SC than her beliefs	2	5	20/12/15 11:16	NJB	21/12/15 06:49	NJB
2.3. PATH 3 - SC beliefs, TC practices (belief change, but no or limited behaviour change)	1	1	19/12/15 12:12	NJB	21/04/16 14:55	NJB
2.3.1. Lack of understanding of SCL ('false clarity')	3	4	19/12/15 14:23	NJB	29/01/16 08:47	NJB
2.3.2. Lack of experience 'doing' SCL	4	5	19/12/15 14:23	NJB	29/01/16 08:47	NJB
2.3.3. Contextual constraints (core beliefs thus overriding peripheral beliefs) - Parts and Partners	3	11	19/12/15 14:24	NJB	29/01/16 08:47	NJB
2.3.3.1. Ts are forced to use a TC textbook or syllabus	8	23	19/12/15 14:24	NJB	29/01/16 08:47	NJB
2.3.3.2. Ts are forced to set TC exams	6	16	19/12/15 14:33	NJB	29/01/16 08:34	NJB
2.3.3.3. Groups are too large to effectively teach in a SC way	4	7	19/12/15 14:33	NJB	29/01/16 08:47	NJB
2.3.3.4. There are insufficient hours dedicated to English, so it is easier to revert to TC practices	3	3	19/12/15 14:33	NJB	29/01/16 08:29	NJB
2.3.3.4.2. Teacher overload - teaching too many hours	2	3	20/12/15 08:42	NJB	20/12/15 11:53	NJB
2.3.3.5. Most groups are too heterogenous (especially no language levels)	3	6	19/12/15 14:33	NJB	21/12/15 07:06	NJB
2.3.3.5.2. Harder to teach SCL to lower level students	2	6	20/12/15 11:37	NJB	20/12/15 11:48	NJB
2.3.3.6. Desks can often not be moved around	1	2	19/12/15 14:39	NJB	20/12/15 09:01	NJB
2.3.3.7. Lack of resources to aid in SCL approaches	5	17	19/12/15 14:39	NJB	29/01/16 08:45	NJB
2.3.3.8. SC approaches undermined by Heads of School or University central administration	6	15	19/12/15 14:33	NJB	29/01/16 08:44	NJB
2.3.3.9. SC approaches undermined by 'content teachers'	6	12	19/12/15 14:33	NJB	29/01/16 08:44	NJB

The interface also shows a left-hand navigation pane with options like Sources, Nodes, Classifications, Collections, Queries, Reports, Models, and Folders. The status bar at the bottom indicates 'NJB 790 Items'.