

Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs About Language Learning and Communication Strategies: Does Language Proficiency Make a Difference?

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Abstract

This study examined pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning and communication strategies in the process of acquiring English as an additional language. Two groups of participants from a Spanish university's School of Education (n = 50) completed the Horwitz (1985) *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI). The bilingual group, which primarily received instruction through English, was compared with the non-bilingual group, which was predominantly trained in Spanish (their first language). After administering the t-test, differences were found between both groups in their beliefs on learning and communication strategies although they were not statistically significant. Since learning strategies play a key role in language learning, both in reception and production processes, these findings suggest that both groups (particularly the non-bilingual group, which had a significantly lower study load during their degree programme) may benefit from explicit instruction on communication strategies to promote awareness of the effectiveness of these strategies. In addition, such instruction might lead to improvements in their future experience as foreign language teachers.

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1 Introduction

In the last two decades, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has witnessed increased interest in introducing bilingual educational models into university curricula (Madrid & Julius, 2020). Stemming from the implementation of the Bologna Process, which strongly promotes mobility and therefore the existence of study abroad programmes, teaching through additional languages has become a common practice. However, foreign language teaching (FLT) has been on the agenda of university policymakers for decades, as “the importance of FLT as an integral part of education was recognized even before the Bologna Declaration was signed” (Poljaković & Martinović, 2009, p. 226).

The advantages of learning through additional languages in higher education have been widely described, highlighting the importance of equipping students with essential linguistic tools for an increasingly globalised world (May & Hornberger, 2008). As English is considered the language of work and an indispensable tool in the global economy, it is the most sought-after and widely taught

language in the EHEA (Galloway & McKinley, 2019; Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018; Wilkinson & Gabriëls, 2021). In Wee's words (2003), this translates into a "linguistic instrumentalization".

However, for education degree programmes, additional or foreign languages go far beyond being instrumental tools. Language learning goes hand in hand with the European and national policies pertaining to compulsory education, which is the target job of education undergraduates. In this respect and following the guidelines of the European Commission and the Council of Europe, an increasing number of plurilingual and bilingual programmes have been gradually introduced in schools in the last two decades, with the goal of achieving a trilingual European citizenry (European Commission, 2004). Within the Spanish context, numerous regions have reached or exceeded the benchmark of 40% bilingual primary schools (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020), with the percentage increasing yearly. This trend has led to more job opportunities for professionals who are able to teach through an additional language. In light of this development, pre-service education students need to acquire (and eventually demonstrate) proficiency in the school vehicular language to teach in bilingual and plurilingual schools. Their experiences as language learners, their language awareness, and ultimately their beliefs towards foreign languages significantly determine "what and how they learn and are also targets of change within the process" (Richardson, 1996, p. 102).

The beliefs of pre-service education students regarding foreign languages have been widely analysed and reviewed in the literature (Altan, 2012; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Pusparini et al., 2021; Zheng, 2009, among others). However, to the best of our knowledge, the beliefs of pre-service teachers enrolled in a bilingual curriculum, compared to those in a monolingual programme, have not been examined yet. In educational contexts where bilingual schools are prevalent (such as in Spain), primary education degree students are quite likely to teach through a foreign language, regardless of whether their university training is monolingual or bilingual. With this in mind, identifying their beliefs - the main objective of this study - could lead to a potential call for action regarding their current language learning process and their future teaching practice.

2 Literature review

2.1 Beliefs about language learning in the area of education

The impact of beliefs on human behaviour and learning has been extensively studied in disciplines such as psychology, pedagogy, and anthropology, to name a few. Concepts like *ethics*, *ideology*, *culture*, *attitude*, or *knowledge* are often included in the definitions of beliefs, making it difficult for researchers to narrow down the scope of the concept. One of the most widely known definitions, provided by Hahn (1973), considers *beliefs* as "general propositions about the world (consciously) held to be true" (p. 208). This idea of "truth" is commonly found both in general definitions of the term and in descriptions linked to specific areas. Thus, within the field of education, Borg (2001) defines a teacher's belief as "a proposition which may be unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour" (p. 186).

Teachers' beliefs are primarily shaped by their previous learning experiences, cultural backgrounds, and individual differences (Abdolazadeh & Nia, 2014; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Lőrincz, 2023). These assumptions influence their understanding of their work and have a significant impact on their lesson planning (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017) and classroom practices (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Thus, as observed by Borg (2015) and Ciascai and Zsoldos-Marchis (2016), pre-service teachers' beliefs affect their future students' learning approaches. As such, the university years may be regarded as a critical period for identifying the beliefs of pre-service teachers and modifying them if necessary. Once pre-service teachers begin their teaching careers, their beliefs may become further entrenched by, for example, classroom experience, making it difficult to change them even with professional development courses on teaching methodology (Ciascai & Zsoldos-Marchis, 2016).

2.2 BALLI-based studies on pre-service teachers' beliefs

To analyse pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning, a substantial body of literature recommends using the *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) by Horwitz (1985). The questionnaire consists of five dimensions: the difficulty and nature of language learning, foreign language aptitude, communication strategy, and motivation. Current research includes longitudinal studies, which usually consider all five dimensions of the questionnaire, and cross-sectional studies, such as the current one, which focus on only one or two of these dimensions

In longitudinal studies, it is common to focus on the impact of the teaching methodology implemented throughout the education degree programme. Results in this respect vary, ranging from no observable impact on pre-service teachers' beliefs (Kunt & Özdemir, 2010) to changes, mainly during the internship period (Suárez Florez & Basto Basto, 2017). For instance, Kunt and Özdemir (2010) observed no significant changes after participants from a Cypriot university had completed different methodology courses throughout their degree programme. Their pre-conceived ideas, rooted in previous experiences, were barely altered after their training. The BALLI questionnaire results mirrored those of Barrios' (2014), highlighting the influence of the previous language learning experience on beliefs.

Conversely, Cota Grijalva and Luis-Esparza (2013) reported changes in 40% of pre-service teachers' beliefs regarding error correction. Their study involved administering the BALLI questionnaire three times to 14 Mexican pre-service teachers. At the end of the process, results showed how these pre-service teachers became more flexible towards error-making and gradually favoured fluency over accurate grammar. Training on different methodologies and teaching practice had redirected their focus from *form* to *meaning*.

In a similar vein, Ormeño and Rosas (2015) examined the extent to which Chilean pre-service teachers' beliefs aligned with academics' beliefs, considering the higher academic level the latter possessed. The results revealed some item-level differences, but not at the level of the five BALLI dimensions. Likewise, Mattheoudakis (2007) found a gradual change in students' beliefs as a result of their three-year education programme, although the teaching practice "seems to have a low impact on the development of their beliefs" (2007, p. 1272).

In stark contrast, Suárez Florez and Basto Basto (2017) found significant changes in pre-service teachers' beliefs once they engaged directly with the classroom environment. Specifically, after the teaching practice, participants reported changes in favouring the role of translation and memorising lessons and the importance of pronunciation. Their study in the Colombian context suggests that internships may cause a shift in students' beliefs.

The BALLI questionnaire has also been widely used cross-sectionally to analyse specific dimensions of beliefs about language learning. In this respect, the teaching methodology experienced by participants as learners stands out as a frequently studied feature as it shapes their beliefs and attitudes towards the teaching-learning process. Barrios (2014) investigated the language learning beliefs held by prospective primary English language teachers in Spain. In identifying the areas which the curriculum should address before those pre-service teachers graduated, the study revealed certain preconceptions rooted in traditional FL teaching methods, which diverged from the communicative and/or functional approach.

In the Slovenian context, Skubic and Fojkar (2017) analysed the differences in beliefs about foreign language aptitude among students of preschool, primary, and special education. They focused on the BALLI dimensions of *language-learning aptitude*, *the nature of language learning*, and *students' motivations and expectations for language learning*. No significant differences were found between the different groups, probably due to "their similar cultural backgrounds and the corresponding teaching approaches of their primary and secondary foreign language educations, especially since the comparison that was made with students from other cultural backgrounds showed some differences in their beliefs" (p. 114). Therefore, the authors highlighted the relevance of contextual features in shaping beliefs on language learning.

More recently, Liu and Rutledge (2020) explored how pre-service teachers' beliefs converged with the social realities at schools situated along the US and Mexico border to suggest improvements for the bilingual education provided to pre-service teachers who are likely to teach in bilingual schools. This study, which is close to our current study, focused on BALLI statements #7, #22, and #27, concerning accent significance, gender differences in language learning, and the relation between bilingualism and a good job respectively. Participants were significantly influenced by the use of English and Spanish, both commonly used in their academic and work or internship environments.

Overall, these studies indicate that beliefs about language learning are significantly context-bound, underscoring the importance of research that connects pre-service teachers' beliefs to cultural and educational contexts. Furthermore, particularly in longitudinal studies, there is evidence suggesting the potential for inducing changes in beliefs about grammar, translation, and error correction, especially after the pre-service training in methodology through the curriculum and/or teaching practice.

2.3 Beliefs about language learning and communication strategies

Since 1970, the relevance of communication strategies (CSs) in language acquisition has been increasingly emphasised in the literature (Dörnyei, 1995; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Maleki, 2010; Oxford et al., 2004). The communicative purpose of language and the potential of classroom interaction were highlighted after the onset of the Communicative Approach, generating an impact on methodologies and teaching materials alike. Such interest is also observed in the array of terms used as synonyms for *communication strategies* in the literature (see Bataineh, et al., 2017; Rabab'ah, 2003). Thus, in recent decades, terms such as *communicative strategies* (Corder, 1983), *communicational strategies* (Varadi, 1983), *compensation strategies* (Harding, 1983), or *compensatory strategies* (Poullisse, 1990) have been used in place of *communication strategies*. Simultaneously, a plethora of definitions of the term *communication strategies* revolves around the two main purposes of the CSs: negotiating meaning and overcoming communication problems. For instance, according to Rabab'ah (2003), "the key defining criteria for CSs are 'problematicity' and 'consciousness'" (p. 95). Both criteria are also reflected in one of the most cited definitions: "Communication strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (Faerch & Kasper, 1983, p. 36). This definition, like others from theoretical and empirical research in the 80s and 90s, reflects a psycholinguistic orientation.

Nowadays, however, another orientation, namely the communicative purpose, is more frequently highlighted, as observed by Bataineh et al. (2017): "CSs are potential catalysts for communicative competence and negotiation ability in a foreign language" (p. 214). This recent view aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 32), which describes communicative language strategies as "a kind of hinge between communicative language competences" (encompassing linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences) "and communicative language activities" (including reception, production, interaction, and mediation). In conjunction with general competences, communicative language strategies, activities, and competences collectively constitute the framework of language proficiency as currently conceptualised by the Council of Europe.

When compared with native speakers, second language learners understandably face more breakdowns in communicative exchanges, often due to insufficient communicative competence. In this context, we reference Savignon's (2002) definition of communicative competence as "the ability of classroom language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning" (p. 3). Accordingly, some scholars support teaching communicative strategies in the FL class, either directly or indirectly (Bataineh et al., 2017; Dörnyei, 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell 1991; Faucette, 2001). Jaca and Javines (2020) extend this recommendation to teaching contexts in general, considering that specific training on communication strategies for pre-service teachers is useful as a remedial task "to respond to their

communicative needs in the classroom” (2020, p. 70). There are, however, opposing views to this practice, mainly by those who consider CSs a hindrance to the learners’ linguistic competence and advocate against their teachability. These authors are, for example, Bialystok (1990), Skehan (1998), Grenfell and Harris (1999), Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), and Kellerman (1991). In particular, Kellerman (1991)’s advice to “teach the learners more language and let the strategies look after themselves” (p. 158) has been widely cited and supported.

Despite ongoing controversy regarding the matter, recent research indicates a tendency towards the explicit teaching of communication strategies. Furthermore, whether for or against their teachability, there is general consensus on the importance of CSs to achieve more efficient communication and enhance the negotiation of meaning. Hence, the importance of raising awareness of them in the classroom is emphasised by Maleki (2010), among others.

3 Research questions

This study put forward the following research questions:

RQ1. What are pre-service teachers’ beliefs about language and communication strategies for FL learning?

RQ2. Do the beliefs about language and communication strategies differ between the pre-service teachers in a bilingual (BG) and those in a non-bilingual group (NBG)?

Based on the two research questions mentioned above, two hypotheses were proposed:

H0: Pre-service teachers’ beliefs are not affected by the bilingual or non-bilingual programme they are enrolled in.

H1: The BG is more strategic than the NBG.

4 Method

4.1 Participants

54 full-time undergraduate students from the School of Education of a university in Madrid (Spain) participated voluntarily in the study. Data from four participants in the sample were incomplete and therefore excluded from the analysis ($n = 50$). Male ($n = 7$) and female ($n = 43$) students accounted for 14% and 86 % respectively. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 31. They were enrolled in the second year of the four-year programme in primary education: 28 students in the BG (56%) and 22 students in the NBG (44%).

Except for one participant, all students reported Spanish as their first language, and all had studied English as a Foreign Language during secondary education. A minimum English proficiency level of B2 was required for enrolment in the BG, whereas no language proficiency requirement applied to students in the NBG. Additionally, only five students (10%) reported fluency in languages other than English, specifically Romanian, Italian, French, and Arabic. Regarding study abroad experiences, they were generally insignificant and limited to short-term exchanges during secondary education.

As for the study load received in English, the BG received 54 ECTS (90% of their study load) in English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in their first year. The NBG received all the teaching load in Spanish. As for the second year, English language was compulsory for all participants, covering 6 ECTS in a 240 ECTS curriculum. Table 1 shows the specific exposure to English for second-year students (both as second language or as a medium of instruction) and the substantial differences that can be found.

Table 1. Languages in number of ECTS per group (second year)

Group\lessons	English		Spanish	
	L2	Instrumental	L1	Instrumental
NBG	6 ECTS	4 ECTS	-	50 ECTS
		16,6%		83,3%
BG	6 ECTS	36 ECTS	-	18 ECTS
		70%		30%

As can be observed, the exposure to English for the BG involved a meaningful load of the 54 ECTS that constituted the second-year curriculum. Additionally, when asked about their daily use of English in informal contexts, participants from this group revealed more contact with the language compared to their NBG counterparts. This was achieved through, for example, teaching private lessons, taking additional EFL lessons, and using audiovisual materials, etc. Therefore, both formal and informal contexts facilitated a natural and frequent use of English and provided more ample exposure to the language for the BG.

4.2 Instrument

The BALLI was administered to the participants to gather information about their beliefs as language learners. The questionnaire is divided into five dimensions: (1) foreign language aptitude; (2) difficulty of language learning; (3) nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; (5) and motivations and expectations. This study focused only on the fourth dimension.

4.3 Procedure

The study was carried out in the second year of the four-year degree programme in primary education with participants from the bilingual and non-bilingual tracks. Both groups were invited to take part in the study questionnaire outside of class time. To facilitate access to the questionnaire and data collection, participants answered the questions through Google Forms. Prior to participation, all participants were informed of the nature of the study and provided with a consent form.

5 Results and discussion

After the survey was completed, group statistics were calculated to evaluate the homogeneity of the data obtained from the BG and NBG. Table 2 summarises the descriptive statistics for both groups.

Table 2. Group statistics

Group	N	M	SD	SEM
BG	28	22.2143	2.49974	.47241
NBG	22	20.7727	3.06954	.65443

Subsequently, the questionnaire results were compared using the t-test in the SPSS statistical software, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Independent sample tests

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-Test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(bi-lateral)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
								Infe-rior	Super-ior
Equal variances assumed	.365	.548	1.831	48	.073	1.44156	.78733	-	3.02459
Equal variances not assumed			1.786	40.116	.082	1.44156	.80712	.14148	3.07266
								-.18955	

It is apparent from this table that the homogeneity of variance was assumed (Sig. = .548). Regarding the aforementioned hypotheses, the values $t(48) = 1.83$ and $p > .05$ indicate that participants in the BG ($M = 22.21$, $SEM = .472$), when compared to those in the NBG ($M = 20.77$, $SEM = 0.65$) could not be considered more strategic (H1). Although there was no statistically significant difference between the BG and the NBG, the value .073 supported a trend towards significance. This suggests that both groups, despite their differences, performed similarly in terms of their use or application of strategic learning techniques.

In the study, participants responded to survey items using a 5-point Likert scale, where values were assigned as follows: 1 for *Strongly Disagree*, 2 for *Disagree*, 3 for *Neutral*, 4 for *Agree*, and 5 for *Strongly Agree*. Most percentages presented in the text are obtained by combining the *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* responses. To compare responses between the two groups, the means and standard deviations for each survey item within each group were calculated. The mean values provided an average score for each group, indicating their overall level of agreement with the items, while the standard deviations measured the variability of responses within each group. These statistical measures were used to assess and compare the central tendencies and dispersions of the groups' responses (Table 4). Thus, regarding the two research questions, specific answers to the items included in the fourth dimension of the test (RQ1) and differences in beliefs between the two groups (RQ2) were obtained.

BG and NBG provided similar responses concerning items #7 and #9, both related to *accuracy*. For item #7 ("It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent"), the mean scores were above 3 for both groups (3.04 for the NBG and 3.4 for the BG), reflecting a tendency towards neutral-to-agree. Despite the ST for the BG (1.132) which indicated some variability within this group, the average position for both groups was moderate. This is noteworthy given the teaching approach the participants received while studying EFL. Since the introduction of the Communicative Language Teaching approach five decades ago, FL teachers have been emphasising the importance of having intelligible pronunciation, rather than striving to mimic native speaker pronunciation. In line with this approach, a position closer to disagreement with the native speaker ideal was expected. However, the participants in the study showed a high willingness to sound like native speakers, a finding which is consistent with other studies (Burri, 2023; Tamimi Sa'd, 2018; Wach, 2011).

Item #9 ("You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly") speaks to another key principle of the communicative approach: the promotion of fluency over accuracy. Since communication is the main objective of language use, answers to this item were expected to be closer to the *Disagree* or *Strongly Disagree* options. This was the case for the NBG ($M = 1.45$) indicating the group's agreement with the principle. The findings are in line with those of Mattheoudakis (2007),

Skubic and Fojkar (2017), Liu and Rutledge (2021), and Nakano (2021). The BG, however, prioritised correct outputs more than the NBG when using the FL ($M = 2.95$), consistent with Barrios's results (2014). Responses obtained for items #7 and #9 demonstrated that both groups generally aligned with the primary aim of the Communicative Language Teaching approach, prioritising communicative over linguistic competence. However, the difference between the two groups may be due to the BG's potentially greater metalinguistic awareness and lower tolerance for error.

Item #12 refers to seizing opportunities to use the FL with native speakers ("If someone speaks English, I would go there to practice speaking English"). Almost two-thirds of the respondents (63.62% in the NBG and 67.84% in the BG) reported *agreeing* or *strongly agreeing* with the statement, with mean scores of 4.25 and 3.77 respectively. These percentages fall between Nakano's (2021) finding of 38% and Tercanlioglu's (2005) 81%. Tercanlioglu highlighted the relationship between this item and the opportunities to use the language outside the classroom. These opportunities, as well as perceived needs, differ for each participant, which explains the wide range of results and the standard deviations (.550 for the NBG and .922 for the BG) observed for this item in the study.

Statement #13 ("It is okay to guess if you do not know a word in English"), a desirable strategy to be used by language learners, received significant approval from both groups. Specifically, and matching Nakano's results (2021), three-quarters of the BG participants (75%) selected *Agree* or *Strongly Agree*, in contrast to 67.97% of the NBG participants ($M = 3.95$ and 4.5, respectively). Jee (2017) noted that students with high perceived linguistic self-confidence as speakers are more inclined to guess, while those with low perceived linguistic self-confidence show more resistance. In this case, the BG likely possessed high perceived linguistic self-confidence, which is closely associated with risk-taking, potentially explaining the difference between the two groups.

Items #17 and #21 represent strategies stemming from the Audiolingual Method, which to different extents and using updated technology, remains widely used by language teachers. Item #17 ("It is important to repeat and practice a lot") yielded compelling results in both groups: 92.85% for the BG and 95.45% for the NBG ($M = 4.72$ and 5). These percentages are very close to those found by Barrios (2014) and Nakano (2021), at 88.59% and 100% respectively. The students' perceptions of their learning experiences, as mentioned above (Abdolahzadeh & Nia, 2014; Ciascai & Zsoldos-Marchis, 2016, among others), might have influenced their answers. Current teaching methods continue to utilise repetitions and drills, and the respondents could have considered these techniques as significantly enhancing their communication proficiency.

For item #21 ("It is important to practice with audio devices, DVDs, and computers"), 42.85% of the BG and 27.27% of the NBG responded with *Strongly Agree* or *Agree*. However, the standard deviation of the means showed a high value for the BG (1.063). This suggests that some BG participants might be likely to seek authentic language exposure through internet sources such as series and videos for leisure. Most of them studied in bilingual schools where opportunities to use additional languages in real contexts were more common. This practice might be less frequent for the NBG, which also had a more limited exposure to EMI. It would be interesting to investigate whether this group found audiovisual material to be useful resources for improving other comprehension-related features, such as intonation and rhythm.

Regarding statement #18 ("I feel timid speaking English with other people"), 54.54% of the NBG participants selected *Agree* or *Strongly Agree*, while only 17.85% from the BG did so ($M = 3.45$ for the NBG and 3.05 for the BG). The previously mentioned higher perceived linguistic self-confidence (Jee, 2017) may account for this difference in the results. Conversely, 45.45% of the NBG and 35.7% of the BG agreed with item #19 ("If beginner students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak"). Again, the disparity in the proficiency levels between both groups might explain the results. The BG might be more focused on conveying meaning over form and accuracy in communication. In addition, due to their educational background (bilingual schools and bilingual track at university), the BG had been "forced" to communicate through an additional language in content lessons, where the focus is not on correction. Cota Grijalva and Ruiz-Esparza (2013) explained their results (50% agreed or strongly agreed, similar to the

NBG's responses) by linking the answers to the participants' lack of teaching experience: language teachers recognise the importance of maintaining a tolerant attitude toward errors in the language acquisition process as errors can be indicators of progress. Supporting our analysis, these authors' initial data were collected before their participants began the practicum experience. As noted in their 2013 longitudinal study, it is expected that the perceptions of both groups will change after their internship, once they have experienced the roles of communication, risk-taking, and negotiation of meaning in the conduct of real lessons.

Table 4. Questionnaire results, bilingual and non-bilingual group

	N BG	N NBG	Mean BG	Mean NBG	S.D. BG	S.D. NBG
7. It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.	22	28	3.04	3.4	1.132	.882
9. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	22	28	2.95	1.45	.898	.604
12. If someone speaks English, I would go there to practice speaking English.	22	28	3.77	4.25	.922	.550
13. It is okay to guess if you do not know a word in English.	22	28	3.95	4.5	.998	.512
17. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	22	28	4.72	5	.550	0
18. I feel timid speaking English with other people.	22	28	3.45	3.05	1.184	.825
19. If beginner students are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak.	22	28	3.13	3.5	1.166	1.051
21. It is important to practice with audio devices, DVDs, and computers.	22	28	3.13	3.7	1.063	.656

Both the BG and NBG predominantly gave neutral-to-agree responses on the Likert scale, indicating a consensus on using strategies such as talking to new people and guessing meaning in context. This suggests that the participants, regardless of the group, were aware of various strategies for applying their English in practical situations. However, the high standard deviations observed in most items point to significant variability in individual perspectives. These findings highlight the importance of instruction that addresses the varied strategic preferences and levels of awareness among students, ensuring that all pre-service teachers can effectively enhance their strategic learning techniques.

6 Limitations of the study

This study presents several limitations. First, the sample size of 50 students was small, which limits the ability to generalise the results to a larger population of language learners. Second, the participants were drawn from a specific undergraduate cohort, which does not represent the diversity of language learners in terms of age, educational background, and motivation. Third, the self-reported data from the participants may either overestimate or underestimate their language abilities and learning strategies. Finally, the study design did not explicitly account for external factors influencing language learning, such as prior language exposure, socioeconomic background, or access to learning resources. These limitations suggest that future research should consider larger, more diverse samples and use longitudinal designs to address these concerns comprehensively.

7 Conclusion

Over the past two decades, a considerable body of literature has explored pre-service teachers'

beliefs about language learning worldwide. This study aimed to identify the beliefs of pre-service teachers from a BG and an NBG about language and communication strategies for FL learning and to explore the potential differences between these groups. Considering the BG's higher EFL proficiency level and their greater exposure to English at university, apparent differences between both groups were expected. However, the findings of this study did not show significant differences between them, but revealed only marginally statistical significance, indicating that the BG tended to use certain communication strategies more frequently on a limited number of items.

The study yielded results showing the relevance of focus on form and accuracy through the participants' language learning process. It also provided evidence for both groups' emphasis on error avoidance. This is somewhat surprising since both groups have been exposed to methodologies derived from the Communicative Approach as FL learners. Tertiary education, a critical period for reconsidering learning processes, offers an optimum environment to revisit beliefs formed from previous learning experiences. The shift may encourage viewing errors as opportunities for learning and skill development. This insight is also valuable for future research, as it can guide investigations into how pre-service teachers' attitudes toward errors influence their teaching practices and student outcomes.

As reported in previous studies, participants' experience during internships, where their role is closer to that of a teacher than that of a learner, may change their initial perceptions. Specifically, regarding language learning and communication strategies, prospective teachers can recognise their value, revisit them and raise awareness as part of their training. These processes, together with specific instructions, might lead pre-service teachers to change certain perceptions and beliefs throughout their degree programme. They might also result in future didactic implications emphasising the exploitation of communication strategies.

In addition, the substantial standard deviation values for some items indicate the importance of addressing certain pre-service-teachers' beliefs. Particularly, approaches to handling errors and fostering risk-taking during speaking activities should be addressed to better prepare them for effective teaching practices. Emphasising the development of linguistic awareness among pre-service teachers may be crucial, as this could influence their strategies for addressing errors and enhancing student engagement in their future teaching practices. It might also have an impact on how effectively they can support language learners in overcoming communication challenges.

The need for more research on pre-service teachers' beliefs has been frequently noted. However, the findings of this exploratory study suggest that there is a need to identify specific beliefs that differ between students whose training is mainly bilingual and those whose academic training in or through an additional language is more limited. The increase in bilingual programmes at university, particularly within the field of education, suggests that more research in this area is needed to confirm a potential change in the approach towards conventional communication strategies for both groups.

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