English Language Teachers' Cognition in Foreign Language Reading Instruction in Slovak Upper Secondary Education Interpretative Research

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(Language) teacher cognition has been acknowledged as playing a crucial role in (language) teachers' lives due to the fact that it influences their subsequent behaviour, decisions and classroom practices. Although research studies in teacher cognition in developing reading skills are scarce, the author of this article analyzes their conceptually and methodologically diverse designs and research findings as a basis for her further research in this field, taking into account the Slovak educational context and its peculiarities. Thus, the article deals with examining English language teachers' cognition in developing reading in Slovak grammar schools, since reading skills are one of the four skills which are intensively developed in the EFL classroom and finally evaluated by taking a Maturita test. Teachers' beliefs, attitudes and personal practical knowledge are significant factors that have an impact on their classroom practices when developing students' reading comprehension skill. The author presents research findings based on a qualitative research paradigm (in-depth interviews as a research tool) carried out with five qualified English language grammar school teachers.

— Keywords:

grounded theory

paradigm model

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teacher cognition

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Introduction

The complex issue of teacher cognition has been elaborated and investigated since the 1990s. This inclusive term embraces the complexity of teachers' lives and refers to the unobservable cognitive dimension of (language) teaching. Due to the fact that (language) teachers' cognitions are highly influenced by their own prior experience of learners, they may suppress the impact of pre-service education in influencing what (language) teachers really do in their classrooms. With regard to the contextual factors, (language) teachers' cognitions interact bi-directionally with teachers' experience and classroom practices. The volume of research into language teacher cognition in foreign language reading instruction has been focused on a variety of concepts regarding teachers' beliefs and practices (e.g. Graden, 1996; Johnson, 1992; Kuzborska, 2011; Richardson et al., 1991) as well as teachers' practical knowledge (e.g. Meijer et al., 1999, 2001; Rahmany et al., 2014; Yu, 2011). Obviously, teachers' beliefs, attitudes and personal practical knowledge are significant factors that have an impact on their classroom practices when developing students' reading comprehension skills.

Reading, in its broadest sense, can be defined as "the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately" (Grabe & Staller, 2013, p. 3). It is a complex skill since it is best developed in association with writing, speaking as well as listening activities. Tandlichová (2001, p. 133) defines reading as "a multifaceted, complex skill made up of a number of psychological, physical, and social elements". Grabe (2009, p. 74) adds that it is also defined as "a combination of text input, appropriate cognitive processes, and the information that we already know". Similarly, Carrell, Devine and Eskey (2012) state that reading is dependent on the interactions among three types of knowledge – linguistic, schematic and background knowledge. Reading is an important communicative skill developed in the classroom as well as a significant aspect in the process of language acquisition as opposed to language learning. According to Repka and Šipošová (2017, p. 36), reading is a significant skill because the whole process of learning a foreign language moves from "comprehension to production", i.e. it begins with a receptive understanding of the language which is subsequently followed by a productive use of the language items.

Additionally, due to the fact that reading is accomplished without the writer's presence, the reader has sufficient time to process the text and comprehend its message. Consequently, reading is considered a relatively easy skill in comparison with listening, speaking or writing, and it is not very difficult to achieve a high level of proficiency. Eskey and Grabe (2006) claim that reading requires a high degree of grammatical control and a large-scale development of vocabulary in order to achieve fluency.

Based on the fact that teachers' cognitions – in particular, teachers' attitudes and beliefs about developing students' reading skills – significantly influence their teaching style and behaviours in a classroom, the aim of the following interpretative research is to enrich the scope of research results focused on examining this complex issue.

—— **Language teacher cognition**

According to Borg (2003, pp. 81–86), **language teacher cognition** is an inclusive term that embraces the complexity of teachers' lives; it refers to the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching. He emphasises that studies of language teacher cognition examine what second and foreign language teachers, at any stage of their careers, think, know, or believe in relation to various aspects of their work and which additionally, but not necessarily, entail the study of classroom practices (both preactive and interactive decision-making) and of the relationship between cognitions and these practices. A key point in the emergence of teacher cognition research came in 1975 when the National Institute of Education (NIE) in the USA concluded in their report that "it is obvious that what teachers do is directed in no small measure by what they think [...] The question of relationships between thought and action becomes crucial [...] Thus, an understanding of how teachers cognitively construct the reality of teaching and learning remains central to the achievement of NIE's overall goal of developing the means to improve the provision, maintenance, and utilisation of high quality teaching personnel".

Although the study of teacher cognition is generally characterised by a multiplicity of labels, among which we can find such concepts and notions as personal pedagogical systems, pedagogical principles, theories for practice, routines, conceptions of practice, pedagogical knowledge, personal practical knowledge images, theoretical beliefs,

images, practical knowledge, maxims, the culture of teaching, pedagogical reasoning, personal theories, specific pedagogical knowledge, and BAK (beliefs, attitudes, knowledge), it is obvious that identical terms have been defined in different ways and different terms have been used to describe similar (or even the same) concepts. This terminological ambiguity in English leads to even more ambiguity when translating the concepts into Slovak (or Czech), where we can find to some extent synonymous expressions, e.g. "pedagogické myslenie učiteľa", "učiteľovo chápanie výučby", "učiteľovo pojetí výuky", "učiteľova individuálna koncepcia vyučovania", and "subjektívne teórie učiteľa" (grounded in German as "Subjektive Theorien").

There are overlaps between numerous labels (concepts) leading to a unifying framework for understanding language teacher cognition, as depicted in Figure 1 (reproduced from: Borg, 2006). The diagram outlines relationships suggested by mainstream educational research between language teacher learning (both through schooling and professional pre-service and in-service teacher education, so-called professional coursework) and classroom practice, including practice teaching. Obviously, as can be seen from Figure 1, the core category "language teacher cognition" stands in relation to three categories which outline the basic three-level relationships with the core category, i.e. language teacher cognition and teachers' prior language learning experience (schooling), language teacher cognition and both pre-service and in-service teacher education (professional coursework) and language teacher cognition and classroom practice (including practice teaching), which is strongly influenced and shaped by contextual factors (i.e. the social and institutional contexts of classrooms). Moreover, a great deal of attention (for more information, see Borg, 2003, 2006) has been paid to the issue of teacher cognition in relation to teaching different language skills (mainly reading and writing) and language means/systems (mainly grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation). Although research studies carried out in ESL (English as a second language) contexts far outweigh those carried out in EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts, research in EFL contexts has boomed recently.

Figure 1. Language Teacher Cognition

Source: Borg, 2006, p. 283.

Literature review

The decade between 1990 and 2000 saw an increased number of research studies aimed at examining language teacher cognition, **teachers' beliefs**, and **teachers' practical knowledge**, in particular. The cognition of teachers teaching English to non-native speakers became a widely explored issue. Two main areas have been focused on since the 1990s, namely grammar and literacy instruction, including writing and reading. We intend to outline particular research studies focused on reading instruction carried out after 1990 as well as more recent studies published since 2000.

Johnson's (1992) research aim was to examine the extent to which language teachers possess beliefs about second language teaching and learning that influence their approaches and practices in a classroom. The research was carried out among 30 ESL teachers from suburban and urban areas of New York. The data were gathered via a Multidimensional TESL Theoretical Orientation Profile, consisting of an Ideal Instructional Protocol, a Lesson Plan Analysis Task, and a Beliefs Inventory, in order to determine the extent to which these 30 ESL teachers possessed theoretical beliefs about second language learning and teaching. Ideal Instructional Protocols were coded as **skill-based** (reading activities involved extensive oral practice and tended to emphasise appropriate pronunciation over meaning and writing activities in which words and/or phrases were first drilled orally and then written as patterned-practice), **rule-based** (reading activities in which the meaning of the text was derived through the study of grammatical structures and writing activities which were designed for practising and applying grammar rules in meaningful contexts), and **function-based** approaches (reading activities which focused on the concepts or ideas within the text and context-rich writing activities where students were encouraged to express their ideas without paying attention to grammatical correctness) towards second language teaching. The second task presented teachers with three separate instructional lesson plans, each designed to teach the same grammatical concept (modals; can, will, may, might), but each also reflecting one of the three methodological approaches (skill-, rule- or function-based). Teachers were asked to read each lesson plan carefully and select one which best reflected their own beliefs about second language teaching. Upon completion of this task, teachers were assigned either a skill-, rule- or function-based code, based on the type of lesson plan they had selected. Finally, a Beliefs Inventory contained 15 statements, which represented each of the methodological approaches towards second language teaching (five statements per approach). Teachers were asked to read all 15 statements and select five that most closely reflected their own beliefs about second language learning and teaching. Teachers were assigned a percentage score based on the number of skill-based, rule-based, and function-based statements they selected. As Johnson (ibidem, p. 87) emphasises, a multidimensional TESL Theoretical Orientation Profile was designed to gather information about teachers'

theoretical beliefs across three separate measures. All three measures on the profile were administered during a 20- to 30-minute private meeting between the researcher and each teacher. The data were subsequently analysed. The research results indicate that the majority of the researched ESL teachers (60%) possessed clearly defined theoretical beliefs that consistently reflect one particular methodological approach (function-based approach) towards second language teaching. As the author points out, this finding is consistent with the changes and innovations in language teaching that occurred in the late 1950s. That is, the skill-based approaches of the 1950s and 1960s were overshadowed by a rise in rule-based approaches in the 1970s, followed by function-based approaches, which were popularised during the 1980s (Stern, 1983). The dominance of the function-based theoretical orientation may represent the overwhelming popularity of this approach among ESL teachers in the 1990s. In the second phase of the research, which was aimed at determining the extent to which ESL teachers' instructional practices are consistent with their theoretical beliefs, three secondary-level ESL teachers identified as having different theoretical orientations were observed. A careful analysis of transcribed classroom observations revealed that literacy instruction was consistent with each teacher's theoretical orientation. Furthermore, ESL teachers with different dominant theoretical orientations provided strikingly different literacy instruction. Overall, Johnson's study supports the notion that ESL teachers teach in accordance with their theoretical beliefs and that differences in theoretical beliefs may result in differences in the nature of literacy instruction. However, as the author admitted, many further research questions appeared during the research, so additional inquiry was essential. The author openly admitted the research limitations, in particular the fact that it did not take into consideration several other aspects (social, cultural, political, etc.) which influence teachers' beliefs. Thus, Johnson (1992, pp. 83–108) considers the findings of the study as a good basis for further investigation.

Kuzborka's (2011) qualitative study was focused on investigating the belief system of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers regarding their teaching of reading to advanced learners of English in the context of a state university. The research sample consisted of eight language teachers (teaching practice varied from 8 to 24 years) from a Lithuanian state university. All teachers from the research

sample had been teaching advanced learners. This need stemmed from the fact that the language teaching and learning at the university was essentially text-based, with a number of activities based on these texts. English teachers are required to develop students' academic and professional communicative competence, enabling them to effectively communicate in academic and professional contexts. The data were collected via lesson observations, video-stimulated recall followed by a semi-structured interview and document data analysis. The observations were accomplished within three successive lessons per teacher, each of which was 90 minutes in length. All the lessons were audio- and video-recorded and subsequently analysed for events concerning activities related to the teaching of reading. The video tapes served as a stimulus for the teachers who, while watching, recalled their thought processes at that time and subsequently explained what they were doing or thinking. The author noted that the stimulated recall sessions were accomplished in Lithuanian in order to reduce stress and encourage teachers to answer freely and openly. The data were transcribed and later analysed by applying a combination of inductive and deductive approaches, which were coded and the codes then clustered into categories. The research findings indicate that the teachers of the research sample taught in a way that was in accordance with their theoretical beliefs. Furthermore, the results pointed out that the teachers' approach was predominantly skill-based with its focus on vocabulary, reading aloud and translation of texts. The texts used by the teachers were mostly assigned for homework and reading in a classroom was carried out with little or no prior preparation or discussion. The research also revealed that the teachers lacked knowledge of alternative and innovative instructional practices for reading, owing to little or no previous participation in such specific training. For these teachers, moving beyond the traditional approach to reading instruction will require access to alternative approaches. As Kuzborska (2011, p. 122) emphasises, in order to address these concerns, preparatory programs in Lithuania can provide teachers with a firmer background in the reading process and in an appropriate second language (L2) reading instruction methodology. But, most importantly, beliefs towards reading and reading instruction first need to change. Similarly to the previous research by Johnson (1992), Kuzborska (2011, p. 122) also openly calls for more research on EAP

teachers' beliefs and practices in the area of reading instruction in order to further advance our knowledge of how EAP teachers think and act and how we can better bridge the gap between practice and research. Nevertheless, she stated that even though her research was conducted within the specific context of Lithuania, its findings and recommendations could be relevant for the professional development of teachers in general.

While the previous two studies examined the relation between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices concerning teaching reading, the following studies are aimed at the exploration of the teachers' personal practical knowledge about teaching reading comprehension in English. The aim of the research study conducted by Yu (2011) was to describe and illustrate the content of 13 (2 males and 11 females, teaching experience varied from 3 to 14 years) teachers' personal practical knowledge about teaching reading comprehension to non-English majors at a university in China. It also examined similarities (shared knowledge) and differences in teacher knowledge and potentially relevant background variables. As the author points out, teachers' personal practical knowledge is the knowledge of teachers which is principally known and produced by teachers themselves. Greatly inspired by Meijer, Verloop, and Douwe (1999), the study used a questionnaire and an interview. Meijer, Verloop, and Douwe provided a system of categories of teachers' practical knowledge about teaching reading comprehension in their study: (1) subject matter knowledge, (2) student knowledge, (3) knowledge of student learning and understanding, (4) knowledge of purpose, (5) knowledge of curriculum, and (6) knowledge of instructional techniques. The study by Yu (2011) included these six categories in the design of the questions in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the research subjects via e-mail. After the analysis, the questionnaire was subsequently followed by interviews. The interviews were informal and conversational in their nature, carried out via the chatting software QQ with each teacher separately, and they were recorded. As Yu (2011) states, shared knowledge in these teachers' practical knowledge about teaching reading comprehension could not be found. Instead of belonging to the same category of teachers, as he presupposed, the teachers could be classified into three groups: **subject matter-oriented**

teachers (little clear knowledge about students in general and how students work; for them, teaching reading is seen as the training of skills), **student-oriented teachers** (detailed knowledge about students; they think text selection is a kind of strategy to motivate students), and **student learning-oriented teachers** (clear knowledge about both the subject matter and students in general; they select texts and design their lessons based on goals that have to be achieved in lessons). Moreover, six potentially relevant background variables were discussed in this study, in particular, personal characteristics, personal experiences and teaching context, teaching experiences, prior education and reflections on teaching, also based on the study by Meijer et al. (1999). By matching the six background variables to the responses of the teachers, three patterns in potentially relevant background variables were developed: **professional growth teachers**, **student-centred teachers**, and **authority-maintaining teachers**. Similarly to previous studies, the author admits that reliable generalisationss of teachers' knowledge about teaching reading cannot be made because of the small sample in the study. Therefore, Yu (2011, p. 55) suggests further research to investigate a larger group of teachers to achieve more generalised results.

The research carried out by Rahmany, Hassani, and Fattahi (2014) aimed at investigating teachers' individual practical knowledge about teaching reading comprehension to engineering major students. The first part of the study searched for a shared category among the categories of practical knowledge (based on Meijer et al., 1999) and isolated the unshared parts. The second part examined the unshared parts in order to see whether the differences were significant or not. The research sample consisted of 36 English for specific purposes (ESP) teachers (18 teachers had a Master's degree and 18 had a doctoral degree) from Payame Noor University of Kermanshah, Islamic Azad University of Kermanshah and Razi University of Kermanshah. The research tool was a questionnaire consisting of 10 closed questions with three choices offered and six categories of practical knowledge based on Meijer et al. (1999). The questionnaire was distributed in person or via e-mail. The research results of the first part showed the teachers did not have any shared practical knowledge. The result of the first part of the study showed the knowledge of student learning and understanding category had the greatest

diversity in the responses and the student knowledge and knowledge of purpose had the lowest. The results of the second part revealed that there was a significant difference in the overall categories of practical knowledge. This was mostly due to the significant difference in the knowledge of purpose and knowledge of curriculum categories. The teachers in the study tended to reflect on their teaching in a way that maintained the focus of their practical knowledge, e.g. teachers focusing on the subject matter category tended to think that subject matter is an important issue in their teaching. Similarly, teachers who focused on the student knowledge category believed that knowledge of the students (age, sex, level, personality, etc.) should be taken into account prior to teaching. The Master's-holding teachers in the study, in contrast to the doctorate-holding teachers, put a different emphasis on different categories of practical knowledge, focusing more on the knowledge of purpose and knowledge of curriculum categories. The reason for this difference might be due to the fact that the Master's-holding teachers tended to be more conservative than the doctorate-holding teachers. They focus mostly on the required textbook and the given syllabus and try to follow the syllabus exactly as written. On the other hand, the doctorate-holding teachers do not mostly follow the given syllabus exactly as stated. They prefer to design their own teaching material rather than use the materials recommended by authorities, such as textbooks. They also do not focus on the final exam as much as the Master's-holding teachers. However, the relationship between a teacher's practical knowledge and their teaching methods was not examined. Rahmany, Hassani, and Fattahi (2014, p. 457) suggest that further research should be carried out to investigate this issue. Another issue that could be investigated is whether a teacher's practical knowledge affects the learning process of the learners.

We have presented a basic overview of research conducted worldwide within the past 20 years in the relevant field. The methods used to collect the research data varied – both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Despite all our efforts, however, we could not find any relevant research studies conducted in the Slovak educational context. Thus, in order to fill the gap, we designed the following qualitative research study.

Qualitative Study

Research design – research subjects

This qualitative study was designed within the framework of qualitative research methodology, applying the grounded theory approach. The data for it were obtained through in-depth interviews. Boyce and Neale (2006) identify in-depth interviewing as a qualitative research technique that involves intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, programme, or situation. The research subjects were selected based on purposive sampling. Smith, Flower and Larkin (2009) recommend purposive sampling for participants who are selected because they share particular characteristics and experiences. Thus, the common features characterising our research subjects were as follows: all of them were qualified EFL teachers (faculties of education graduates) whose teaching practice varied from 5 to 10 years and who were all teaching English at the upper secondary level (grammar schools). The research study was carried out from November 2018 to February 2019. The group of research subjects consisted of five subjects (females). The in-depth interviews were held in a friendly atmosphere in the participants' respective staff rooms. The 25- to 30-minute interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded.

Methodology and data collection tools

For the purpose of this study, we chose a qualitative methodology, specifically, the application of the grounded theory approach. Kostrub and Šipošová (2015, p. 202) claim there is a significant need to apply qualitative research in the educational context, especially when analysing learner performance in the teaching and learning process. According to Kostrub (2019, p. 19), "qualitative investigation represents a consistent and complex approach to subjective and intersubjective realities as legitimate objects of scientific knowledge". Stake (2010) stresses the fact that qualitative research has moved social research away from cause-and-effect explanations and towards personal interpretation. Kostrub (2016) emphasises the fact that qualitative research relies heavily on interpretive perceptions through the planning, data gathering, analysis and conclusion of the study. Following our decision to explore this issue through a qualitative analysis, we created

a theory that would express, enlighten and interpret the beliefs, opinions and attitudes of EFL teachers about teaching reading in the EFL classroom. To achieve this goal, we applied the grounded theory approach, which, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 12), is "derived from the data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process".

Grounded theory has a systematic procedure and is defined by identifying important words with the goal of providing many theoretical codes (often called labelling), coding the material leading to the creation of basic categories and variables for the theory, and, finally, constructing the theory as a set of statements between categories and variables. These acts often coincide and are mutually created as one influences the other. They are also often referred to as the open, axial and selective coding process. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), initial coding is often said to fracture the data, whereas axial coding reconnects the data in ways that are conceptually more abstract. Selective coding, as the last part of the work with the data, focuses on actualising the core category in a highly abstract conceptual manner. Hence, they provide a fundamental analytical technique which breaks data into fragments that are later clustered into relevant concepts. These concepts are categorised according to a common criterion. By common criterion, we mean subcategories that belong to subsidiary categories of the core category, which is the central phenomenon of the research. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stress the importance of locating the core category. Categories stemming from coding are the crucial parts of the consequent theory. The naming of particular levels of coding is sometimes ambiguous. The aforementioned concepts or labels are sometimes referred to as properties. They see this procedure as the key to success, in this case, the key to a consistent theory. The central category provides a base for other categories as well as a base for a new theory. It could be any core category from the paradigm model, depending on the relations between categories for each particular piece of research. The entire theory is usually explained on the basis of this category. The final theory is usually consistently presented in two ways, verbally and complementarily displayed in the form of schemata (paradigm models), diagrams or concept maps. The grounded theory methodology allows the elaboration of a story line, which is based on the paradigm model.

Thus, the story is simply a descriptive narrative about the central phenomenon of the study and the story line is the conceptualisations of this story (abstracting). When analysed, the story line becomes the core category while subsidiary categories are related to the core category, according to the paradigm model, the basic purpose of which is to enable the researcher to think systematically about the data and relate them in complex ways.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommend a **paradigm model**, which comprises all of these categories and can be identified as follows: Causal Conditions → Phenomenon → Context → Intervening Conditions → Action/Interaction Strategies → Consequences.

In the model, causal conditions are events that lead to the development of a phenomenon. The phenomenon is defined as the core category (i.e. the central idea, event or happening). Context refers to the particular set of conditions and intervening conditions, the broader set of conditions, in which the phenomenon is couched. Action/interaction strategies refer to the actions and responses that occur as a result of the phenomenon, and finally, the outcomes of these actions and responses are referred to as consequences.

Since qualitative researchers have special concerns regarding the validity as well as reliability of the research results, it was important to utilize more research tools. The process of triangulation, which refers to the application and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon, adds depth to the data that are collected. Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2018, p. 22) distinguish four types of triangulation: data, investigator, theory and methodological. According to the authors, methodological triangulation can be within method or between methods (also known as across methods), although the generally understood type is within method, such as multiple sources of data found within one design, e.g. triangulating data from multiple data collection methods (interviews, focus groups, observations, etc.). Thus, by combining in-depth interviews and unstructured observations, we hoped to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases of the data in order to increase the credibility and validity of the research results. We carried out observations of two lessons taught by each of the research subjects. We focused on teachers' classroom practices, teaching style, behavioural patterns and interactions, as well as the overall classroom dynamics.

Aim of the study

The aim of this research study was to examine the influence of EFL teachers' cognition on teaching reading comprehension in upper secondary education. Thanks to our deep professional understanding of the teaching profession, we focused on examining and interpreting English teachers' beliefs, attitudes, opinions and reading instruction practices, which are interrelated and therefore influence each other.

Research questions

RQ1: What are the teachers' beliefs and attitudes about developing reading skills?

RQ2: What classroom practices do English language teachers use while teaching reading?

RQ3: What changes related to teaching reading have English language teachers made since they started teaching?

In order to capture the essence of the research subjects' views on this issue, we deliberately decided to ask several **in-depth questions** which allowed for a variety of answers. The interviews were held in a semi-structured manner, i.e. we had prepared some questions concerning particular issues in advance. However, during the interviews (25–30 minutes long), we flexibly asked a vast range of ad hoc questions in order to clarify the issues which emerged.

In-depth interview questions

Q1: Why did you become an English language teacher?

Q2: How do you teach reading comprehension in your classes? Could you tell me about the pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading activities you use with your students?

Q3: What kinds of materials do you use when developing reading skills in your classes?

Q4: What is your personal attitude towards reading comprehension and its teaching?

Q5: What do you remember from your early teaching experience? What are the differences between the techniques you used when you started teaching and the techniques you currently use?

Q6: What was your own experience as a learner of English at school?

Q7: What do you think the attitude of your students is towards English language and reading comprehension?

Answering research questions

RQ1: What are the teachers' beliefs and attitudes about developing reading skills?

Based on the research findings and observations, our research subjects believe that reading comprehension undoubtedly plays a significant role in the process of English language learning. However, they see that reading is pushed aside and more attention is devoted to other communicative skills (listening, speaking and writing). The research subjects believe in the importance of being able to read original English texts and the necessity to master reading as a life skill. They also recognize higher requirements for and demands on the learners and the fact that the texts found in course books are not sufficient. Their beliefs about the learners' attitudes about reading significantly influence the way they approach developing reading skills in the EFL classroom. In other words, a research subject who believes that learners' attitudes are rather negative has the tendency to think that the learners are lazy and ignore reading activities; as a result, this leads to falling back on the use of true/false activities, translation, and reading aloud in the classroom. If the teacher believes that the learners' attitudes towards reading are positive, s/he is more likely to use additional, authentic materials and choose more sophisticated activities. All of our research subjects feel very positively about developing reading skills. They claim they like reading and attempt to make it attractive for their learners. The research subjects do not consider reading difficult, and despite the fact that they are aware of the challenges associated with it (it can be time-consuming, requiring learners' undivided attention, which is difficult during the lesson), they attempt to stress the positive features of reading. Moreover, they agree that the teacher's attitude influences the way s/he teaches and that there is a huge difference between a teacher who is truly committed and a teacher who is just punching the clock.

RQ2: What classroom practices do English language teachers use while teaching reading?

Based on the teachers' answers and observations, the research subjects use student-centred teaching to a great extent. They personalise the selection of texts to their students' needs and interests, they ask students about their own experience, they encourage them to express

their opinions and attitudes, and they attempt to help them relate the content of the texts to their own lives. However, they also favour traditional teaching methods – much of the classroom work is still dependent on a course book – and engage in stereotypical activities, such as true/false tasks, translation to and from the mother tongue, and reading aloud. To provide an overall picture, the following are particular examples of activities. In the pre-reading stage, the research subjects use activities such as brainstorming, descriptions of pictures, small group work discussions, guessing content from the title or headline and vocabulary activities (pre-teaching of new words). During the reading stage, the research subjects claim that they do not use any specific activities and the students just read the text. One of the research subjects indicated that students were occasionally asked to focus on a certain pronoun and to find the noun it referred to or to fill in the missing words in a sentence. In the post-reading stage, the research subjects use questions and discussions to a great extent, answering teachers' questions, true/false activities, and determining keywords to summarise content. The research also proved that the research subjects lacked methodological knowledge concerning the during-reading stage.

RQ3: What changes related to teaching reading have English language teachers made since they started teaching?

According to our research subjects' answers, the changes in their approach primarily concern the usage of a course book. They claim that, as novice teachers, they had the tendency to rely on course books without using supplementary texts. It made them feel more comfortable and confident since the course books provided ready-made lesson plans and activities. Nowadays, they use supplementary materials and authentic materials. The research subjects also claim that they stick strictly to the texts and do not use alternative follow-up activities. They also state that they gradually changed their approach as they acquired more teaching experience. They also note that workshops and seminars have a certain impact in terms of implementing new techniques. Their approaches as novice teachers were strongly influenced by stress combined with a lack of teaching experience and confidence. Furthermore, the research subjects attributed certain changes to a rapid increase in learners' requirements

resulting from developments which are changing from year to year. As a result, the teachers are forced to adapt to the changes and adjust their teaching techniques accordingly.

— The Paradigm Model Interpretation

With regard to the grounded theory methodology, we elaborated a story line based on the paradigm model (English teachers' cognition in reading instruction in Slovak upper secondary education). A story is simply a descriptive narrative about the central phenomenon under study, and the story line is the conceptualisations of this story (abstracting). When analysed, the story line becomes the core category while subsidiary categories are related to the core category, according to the paradigm model, the basic purpose of which is to enable the researcher to think systematically about the data and relate them in complex ways (see the Methodology section above for further details on the paradigm model).

As can be seen from Figure 2, the paradigm model represents a visual interpretation of the research findings. As mentioned before, it consists of six pivotal categories. In order to distinguish particular relationships among the given categories, one-way or two-way arrows are used, depending on whether the relationship is reciprocal or not. The small solid-line arrows express strong relations and small dashed-line arrows denote weaker relations (i.e. depending on the frequency of occurrence). Long dashed-line arrows leading from supporting and paralysing strategies are utilised to emphasise certain consequences which are under their influence. To start with the broadest category of **context**, this represents the set of conditions in which each of the categories takes place.

Within the framework of our research, two main categories for context were created, namely **personal conviction** (subcategories: responsibility and prejudices) and **situational conditions** (subcategories: requirements of the Slovak curriculum and institutional factors). These categories represent sets of conditions in which our research subjects taught and in which our research was conducted. The influence of context is depicted by a thick solid line surrounding the rest of the categories since its impact is markedly strong.

The **intervening conditions**, presented as **socio-cultural factors**, include five subcategories. Our research subjects are aware

of the development of the current era and the changes that have to be implemented into their teaching since learners are more demanding nowadays. They also admit the importance of English in present-day society is undeniable since the learners are surrounded by English not only at school but in their everyday lives. The research subjects also consider technological development as significant. They claim that it is easier to find additional materials for learners nowadays due to internet access. It was also revealed that the teachers' motivation plays a significant role, and this is conditioned by internal and external factors.

As a result of the intervening conditions, **causal conditions** occur. They are presented as **schooling** (subcategories: pre-service education, previous teachers' influence, seminars and course) and **stress and frustration** (subcategories: fear, personal preference of age group). As is apparent from the model, causal conditions directly influence action/interaction strategies and subsequently lead to the development of the phenomenon. The research has revealed that the choice of strategies, approaches or techniques is influenced by teachers' own schooling and experience, particularly their pre-service education. Moreover, the influence of their previous teachers plays a significant role. The category of stress and frustration was saturated with codes which also condition the choice of particular strategies, but rather negatively, e.g. a fear of the time allotted for reading activities and a fear of working with older learners.

The category of **action/interaction strategies** is divided into two subcategories, which reflects the fact that the choice of strategies is directly influenced by the causal conditions. These are presented as **supporting** (subcategories: personalisations, individualisations) and **paralysing strategies** (subcategories: stereotyped activities, translating into mother tongue). This resulted in the division of the model into two parts. As aforementioned, the outcomes of action/interaction strategies are referred to as **consequences**. While supporting strategies result in utilising **teachers' activation practices** (subcategories: learner-centred teaching, supporting autonomous learning, use of authentic materials) in a classroom, paralysing strategies lead to the **resignation** of teachers (subcategories: slavish use of course books, learners' disinterest). In this case, certain aspects of traditional teaching were noticed during the observations, e.g. slavish use of the course book.

Figure 2. Paradigm model

Source: author's elaboration.

The last category of the paradigm model, the core category and the key concept at the same time, is the **phenomenon**. The phenomenon is guided by action/interaction strategies but also influences them at the same time. Similarly, the consequences both result from the phenomenon and influence the phenomenon at the same time. The mutuality of the relations among these categories is displayed via big two-way arrows. The phenomenon, identified as **language teachers' cognition in reading instruction**, was saturated with teachers' beliefs and attitudes about reading instruction. As is apparent from the paradigm model, principles, approaches, knowledge, and theory codes also occur. These codes are based on the analysis of the verbatim transcripts and notes taken during the observations. However, they were not saturated enough to create a category. On the other hand, it was necessary to include them in the model, hence they are represented by short dashed-line arrows.

Conclusion

In essence, our research findings shed light on the issue of teacher cognition in reading instruction. The presented research shows that there are many significant aspects that play crucial roles in the process of developing English language teachers' cognition. Since generalisations is not accepted by many researchers as the purpose of qualitative, interpretative research, our research concern with the opinions, beliefs and attitudes of EFL teachers about developing reading in upper secondary education leads us to the following conclusion, notwithstanding the fact that it cannot be generalised to the overall upper secondary English language teacher population.

Our research subjects' attitudes about reading instruction appear to be positive. They express their passion for reading in general and their attempts to make it attractive for the learners. Nevertheless, the importance of teachers' beliefs is even stronger. Their classroom performance depends on what they believe in. Their beliefs are connected with prejudices they possess about the learners, in particular, their age characteristics and their attitudes towards reading. This results in the resignation of the teacher and their use of the same stereotyped true/false and translation activities over and over again. On the other hand, their beliefs also have a positive impact which results in them implementing student-centred teaching, in which the focus is shifted

from teacher to learners and which is based on personalisations and individualisations. The teachers are enthusiastic about using authentic materials and various sources for the texts. To conclude, teachers' beliefs significantly impact their classroom practices, and their performance depends on what happens in their minds, i.e. what they believe in. Therefore, we consider these research results important for trainee, novice and expert teachers alike. All of them have to be aware of their own mental constructs, which significantly influence their classroom practices.

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