

ELEMENT 4

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BELIEFS, MOTIVATION, AND INVESTMENT

Objectives

To describe what beliefs are and their impact in materials design.
To connect motivation and investment as key elements in materials design.

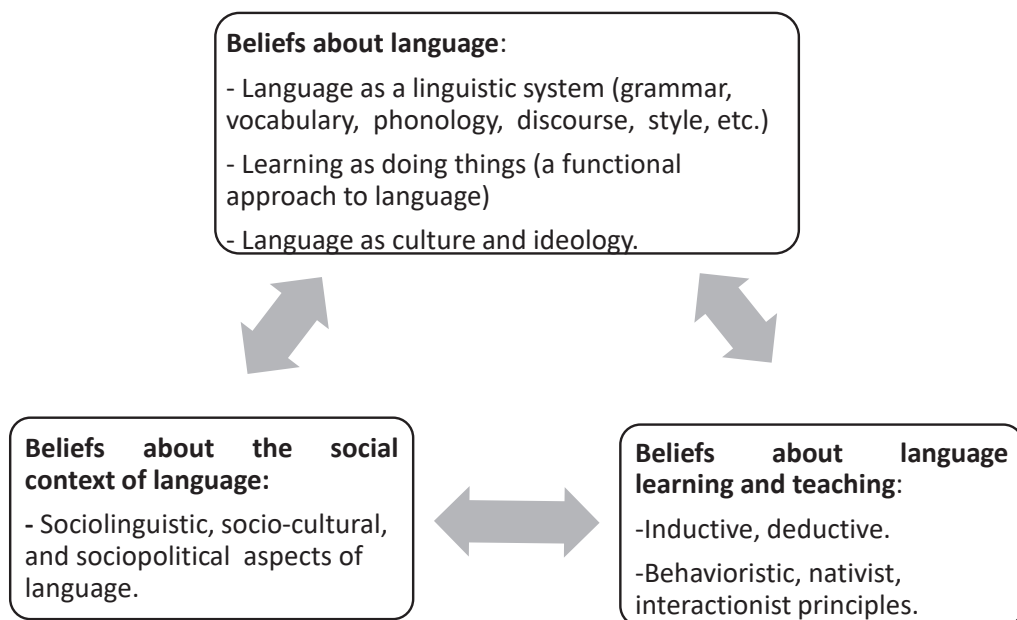
Teachers' Beliefs

The concept of beliefs has a foundation in psychology. Skott (2015) and Pajares (1992) stated that beliefs are a “messy” construct because of its difficulty to define. According to these authors, beliefs are dynamic and rooted in society and culture. Given its complexity, beliefs can be interpreted from different perspectives. Nevertheless, beliefs can be defined as the ideas that individuals consider to be truths. These ideas or principles are historically built, and they are constructed and negotiated with the communities people interact with during their lives.

Teachers shape and reshape their beliefs based on their past learning experiences, their current teaching practice, and their development of possibilities (Graves, 1997). Núñez et al. (2009) suggested that teachers

ought to be aware of their own beliefs since they affect their decisions when designing materials.

Stern (1992) mentioned that teachers hold beliefs about language, the social context of language, language learning, and language teaching. The following diagram summarizes these four beliefs:



1. In the following lines, you can write down your beliefs regarding each section.

1.1 Language
(What is language?)

1.2 The social context of language

(What cultural and political aspects are shaped through language?)

1.3 Language learning

(How do people learn languages?)

1.4 Language teaching

(How do you teach the language?)

2. Share your answers with a partner. Do you hold the same beliefs?
Why? Why not? Use the following lines to write down your answer.

Motivation and Investment

3. Answer the following questions. Then, ask a partner and write down his/her answers.

QUESTIONS	YOU	A PARTNER
Is it important to motivate students?		
How do you motivate students?		
Can some people destroy your motivation?		
How are you best motivated?		
How do you motivate your friends?		
What are some of the factors of motivation?		
What part does motivation play in effective teaching?		
What are three things that motivate you?		
Do you feel motivated when learning something new?		
How can we help people increase their motivation?		
Why do you study English?		
What is your proudest accomplishment so far this year?		
Do you find that motivated people are more successful than unmotivated people?		

Often, teachers will be affectionate toward their students and try to motivate them, so that the affective filter decreases. In doing so, teachers can better prepare students for the learning process and engagement with the material. Usually, experiences charged with a strong affective component reinforce long-term memory.

Musso and Ortega (2018) suggest that “motivation is a multifaceted construct with different components (need, desire, interest, attitude, behavior, etc.)” (p. 6). Overall, motivation in foreign language learning refers to a dynamic process that students go through while learning. Motivation combines what students’ want and the willingness to learn the language. Furthermore, motivation is widely considered to be an essential factor that influences language learning and achievement (Al-Hoorie, 2016; Dörnyei, 2009; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 2007; Goodridge, 2017; MacIntyre, 2002). Motivation is a concept based on psychological principals and is usually an individual process.

Authors such as Weedon (1987) said that the individual should not only be seen from a single dimension. In fact, social subjects have several dimensions, including cognitive features. The human being is holistic. Therefore, the concept of motivation should be linked to investment, so that social subjects are seen as much more than the sum of isolated dimensions put together.

Investment considers the relationship between the learner’s history and his or her social world. The concept of investment comes from sociological principles that acknowledge the meaningful connection between learners’ desire and commitment (Norton, 2010). Investment contemplates that individuals change across time and space. This author further stated that investment means commitment from the learner.

In other words, an individual’s investment depends also on the community that person interacts with. That is why, knowing the context where learning a language takes place is of paramount importance in materials design.

- 4. Read the following case. With a partner, discuss the role social context plays in this case. What can we say about students' investment?**

You happen to be the school principal and the English teacher in a school located in a low-income town. In this school, the pedagogical aids have traditionally been scanty.

As their English teacher, you want students to learn the language and, if possible, to achieve the English National Standards. However, students usually repeat that they do not want to study English because they are never going to travel abroad, and they will remain in the same living conditions as their parents.