

Learning Trajectories of Mexican Language Teachers: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study

Authors : Alberto Mora-Vazquez, Nelly Paulina Trejo Guzmán

Abstract : This study examines the learning trajectories of twelve language teachers who were former students of a BA in applied linguistics at a Mexican state university. In particular, the study compares the social, academic and professional trajectories of two groups of teachers, six locally raised and educated ones and six repatriated ones from the U.S. Our interest in undertaking this research lies in the wide variety of students' backgrounds we as professors in the BA program have witnessed throughout the years it has been around. Ever since the academic program started back in 2006, the student population has been made up of students whose backgrounds are highly diverse in terms of English language proficiency level, professional orientations and degree of cross-cultural awareness. Such diversity is further evidenced by the ongoing incorporation of some transnational students who have lived and studied in the United States for a significant period of time before their enrolment in the BA program. This, however, is not an isolated event as other researchers have reported this phenomenon in other TESOL-related programs of Mexican universities in the literature. Therefore, this suggests that their social and educational experiences are quite different from those of their Mexican born and educated counterparts. In addition, an informal comparison of the participation in formal teaching activities of the two groups at the beginning of their careers also suggested that significant differences in teacher training and development needs could also be identified. This issue raised questions about the need to examine the life and learning trajectories of these two groups of student teachers so as to develop an intervention plan aimed at supporting and encouraging their academic and professional advancement based on their particular needs. To achieve this goal, the study makes use of a combination of retrospective life-history research and the analysis of academic documents. The first approach uses interviews for data-collection. Through the use of a narrative life-history interview protocol, teachers were asked about their childhood home context, their language learning and teaching experiences, their stories of studying applied linguistics, and self-description. For the analysis of participants' educational outcomes, a wide range of academic records, including reports of language proficiency exams results and language teacher training certificates, were used. The analysis revealed marked differences between the two groups of teachers in terms of academic and professional orientations. The locally educated teachers tended to graduate first, to look for further educational opportunities after graduation, to enter the language teaching profession earlier, and to expand their professional development options more than their peers. It is argued that these differences can be explained by their identities, which are made up of the interplay of influences such as their home context, their previous educational experiences and their cultural background. Implications for language teacher trainers and applied linguistics academic program administrators are provided.

Keywords : beginning language teachers, life-history research, Mexican context, transnational students

Conference Title : ICFLTAL 2015 : International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics

Conference Location : Vancouver, Canada

Conference Dates : August 06-07, 2015