EPIK Teachers' Beliefs About Language Learning and Teaching Processes

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The present study investigated newly recruited native-speaking teachers of the English Program in Korea (EPIK) with a focus on their individual characteristics, their perceptions on second language (L2) learning and teaching processes, and their teaching experience as a variable (novice vs. expert) in their understanding of language learning and teaching processes. A questionnaire was given to 244 EPIK teachers. Analysis of the self-reported data revealed that EPIK teachers were mostly in their 20s who were recruited from six inner-circle countries with teaching certificates. Results also demonstrated the importance of a teacher's teaching experience, where subsequent mean-difference models of novice and expert teachers revealed significant differences in their understanding of L2 learning and teaching processes. Findings showed that teachers with experience had beliefs aligned with the best teaching practices. These findings open discussions about the necessity of adequate subsequent support for native-speaking teachers.

Key words: native English-speaking teachers, teaching experience, teacher-education, teacher-beliefs, English program in Korea, EPIK

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hiring native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) to teach English as a second or foreign language is a topic that has generated considerable discussions (cf. Moussu & Llurda, 2008). The South Korean government, like Japan with the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET), hires NESTs to teach in public schools across the country through the English Program in Korea (EPIK). However, hiring these teachers has met resistance from local teachers' unions. They question if the skills and qualifications are worth the price that must be paid (Ock, 2019), and studies have documented local English teachers' concerns regarding NESTs' qualifications. In interviews with local English teachers and school administrators, Shin (2010) reported that one of their major concerns included NESTs' lack of character and understanding of English teaching methodologies. The interviewed teachers and administrators argued that the NESTs hiring policies should require them to major in English teaching or education and some sort of teaching certificates and teaching experience. Large-scale surveys of NESTs also echoed that NESTs were, in general, inexperienced and did not have extensive teaching credentials or experiences (Kim & Park, 2010; Yoon, 2008). Reflecting the concerns raised among various stakeholders, the EPIK recruitment policy was updated in 2015, and now a teaching credential is required among NESTs.

Although the policy has been in place for a while, no follow-up studies have been conducted. To respond to the dearth of information, the present study attempted to better understand the newly recruited NESTs for EPIK and to ascertain if these newly hired teachers have the qualifications and skills needed to teach effectively. Moreover, this study fills a gap by incorporating the research on teacher cognition and teachers' beliefs as critical factor that influences the quality of learning and teaching (Gurzynski-Weiss, 2017; Kartchava, Gatbonton, Ammar, & Trofimovich, 2020). Operationalizing NESTs' beliefs as their perceptions of second language (L2) learning and teaching processes, we examined to what extent their teaching experience influenced their beliefs about L2 learning and teaching processes. Our goal is to explore the characteristics of the English-speaking teachers in current classrooms and their links to L2 learning and teaching processes.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. English Program in Korea (EPIK)

Since 1995, the EPIK has been recruiting NESTs to South Korea. It started with 54 teachers in 1995 and by 2008 more than 1,900 teachers had served in the program (Jeon,

2009). From 2009 to 2018, there were more than 1,400 NESTs on average employed by the EPIK program each year. Within that time frame, there was a high of 2,151 NESTs in 2011 and a low of 937 NESTs in 2015 (EPIK, 2019). H. D. Kim (2019) noted that past English language education policies in S. Korea was an important issue in each administration; however, the actual policies were not fully developed. For instance, although previous presidential candidates had pledged to increase investment in English education including hiring NESTs and the systematic support of them, the promise was not always kept. The fluctuation in the South Korean economy and political interpretation in education have made it difficult to enact those policies consistently. Consequently, the EPIK program has been on the decline since 2011. These swings in teacher recruitment signify the political nature of education in South Korea and that of English education in particular. That means that, although the number of NESTs recruited by EPIK is in a low trough, this trend could quickly swing in the other direction. This is because acquiring and maintaining English language skills pre-occupy all levels of South Korean society. This preoccupation is not always rational and has often been characterized in the literature as a *fever* (Park, 2009), a *malady* (Song, 2011), and a *fanatical pursuit* (Kang, 2012).

English education has been seen as a political endeavor. One of the rationales used in the support of hiring NESTs for the EPIK is that the government feels pressured to help counteract the *English Divide* (Crookes, 2017) or the fact that knowledge of English is seen as "one of the mechanisms for maintaining and sustaining inequality" (Song, 2011, pp. 42-43). The English divide represents a social schism that is based on access to English language education (Song, 2013). Parents and families with financial wherewithal spend heavily on private English education. For example, in 2018, the total spending on private English education accounted for 5.7 trillion won or almost $5 billion (J. H. Kim, 2019).

In response to this divide and private spending on English education, the South Korean government recruits NESTs. According to the eligibility requirements for NESTs, "EPIK teachers must be citizens of one of the following countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States, or South Africa." (EPIK, 2019, para.1). Following Kachru (1992), this requirement indicates that the South Korean government seems to privilege inner-circle varieties of English only. Researchers have argued that due to the linguistic capital inner circle NESTs possess guarantees the teachers full-time teaching positions even if they lack specific qualifications as teachers (Jeon, 2009).

Compared to other Asian countries that also hire NESTs, the EPIK requirements for NESTs' formal education were rigorous. NESTs should hold at least a bachelor's degree, and unless they majored in English or education, they are also required to have one of the language teaching-related certificates (e.g., TESL/TEFL/TESOL/CELTA). These certificates typically involve a minimum of 100-hours of training, which neighboring countries with similar NEST programs do not require (Jeon & Lee, 2006). For instance, the

JET Program neither requires teaching experience nor a language teaching certificate; however, they indicate that more qualified candidates will be selected over less qualified candidates during the selection procedure. In addition, NESTs' salaries are directly related to their teaching credentials (Appendix A). The new policy requirement regarding NESTs' qualification of language teaching is a reflection of local English teachers' dissatisfaction with unqualified NESTs. In the previous large-scale surveys, Kim and Park (2010) and Yoon (2008) confirmed that a majority of the NESTs who participated in the EPIK were in- or under-experienced and did not have teaching credentials such as the previously mentioned language teaching-related certificates.

Some research attempts were made to evaluate the effectiveness of the EPIK on Korean students' English acquisition. Through meta-analyses of 26 published studies on the effects of co-teaching between Korean English teachers and NESTs, J. R. Kim (2011) revealed that co-teaching was only effective in teaching speaking but not teaching writing. However, co-teaching was effective on affective domains including students' self-control, confidence, and risk-taking. Hong and Jung (2006) argued that some of the reasons that NESTs were not as effective as expected were due to NESTs' limited qualification and lack of teaching experience. However, there have been no additional studies looking at the qualifications of NESTs in the EPIK since the NEST recruitment qualifications were revised in 2015. Although Ahn and Lew (2017) interviewed two NESTs and a Korean English teacher from the EPIK in which they reported that there was insufficient support for NESTs including a lack of teacher training, communication, and social activities, this study did not specifically address NEST qualifications.

To summarize, policymakers who advocate recruiting NESTs argue that the program eases parents' needs to seek private language education; on the other hand, the teachers' union calls this into question. They argue that NESTs are not as effective. As Moodie and Nam (2016) noted, there is a concern that the EPIK hires inexperienced NESTs and these inexperienced teachers make it harder for the program to achieve its goals in a timely and cost-effective manner.

2.2. Instructors' Individual Characteristics

While individual learner characteristics are not a new concept in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), it has rarely been applied to non-learners, in particular, instructors (Gurzynski-Weiss, 2013). When applied to instructors, it refers to all characteristics which instructors may have that vary in terms of differences, including gender, age, nationality, education, work experience, and so forth. Instructors' individual characteristics are an important area of study because instructors are the primary facilitators in the language classroom. As Gurzynski-Weiss (2017) has noted, the individual characteristics of

instructors that most commonly influence teaching behaviors are (1) teacher knowledge, beliefs and cognitive processes, (2) teaching experience, and (3) formal education and professional development. The individual characteristics of instructors that are significant to this study are described and developed in more detail below.

Teacher knowledge, beliefs, and cognitive processes provide the foundation for teacher action (Borg, 2003, 2019; Woods, 1996). This means that teachers are "active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (Borg, 2003, p. 81). Researchers, however, have found that it is often hard to separate teacher-knowledge from beliefs in teacher-cognition. For example, Grossman et al. (1989) attempted to describe what teachers perceived as teacher knowledge, and they concluded that making distinctions between teacher knowledge and teacher-beliefs "is blurry at best" (p. 31). Verloop et al. (2001) argued that this is because in the mind of the practitioner actionable decisions are rarely dependent on a single mental thread, but rather are an intertwined amalgamation of knowledge, concepts, beliefs, assumptions, and intuitions.

Teacher knowledge, beliefs, and cognitive processes have a tendency to resist change. For example, Lortie (1975) observed that teachers gain a significant portion of their initial beliefs about teaching and learning from their considerable time spent as learners. He called this an *apprenticeship of observation*, and he suggested that these beliefs, reinforced by years of observation, can often resist change even when faced with contradictory evidence. Consequently, an obvious goal of teacher-education is to help pre-service teachers become aware of these problematic beliefs and change them. However, that is not what actually happens. Johnson (1994), for example, found that pre-service teachers during their practicum made instructional decisions primarily based not on what they had learned in the program but based on images of teachers and classroom activities from their own formal language learning experiences. Several studies support the claim that language teacher education programs have little or no effect on teachers' beliefs (cf. Lo, 2005; Woods, 1996).

A more optimistic analysis of this research concluded that the effects of teacher training and professional development on teacher knowledge and beliefs are highly variable across programs, contexts, and individuals (Borg, 2003). He argued that changes in teacher-cognition do not simply happen through the aggregation of new information. Teacher-development and changes in teacher-cognition come about as a result of new experiences that push the teacher to reconceptualize his/her ideas, beliefs, or knowledge. This restructuring is progressive and highly personalized/contextualized because it tends to be specific to a particular time and place. It also tends to be complex and non-linear which results in the development of personal theories organized into categories separated by

themes (Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000). This suggests that teaching experience rather than formal teacher-education is more effective in changing and restructuring teacher-beliefs.

Research on teacher-cognition and classroom practice has collectively shown that language teachers' classroom practices are influenced and guided by a host of interacting and often conflicting factors (Borg, 2003). The main takeaway of this research is that teacher-beliefs and associated practices are socially constructed, interpretive, and highly idiosyncratic; that is, the underlying cognition, ideas, beliefs, knowledge, and assumptions that influence this decision-making process are highly variable even when classroom teaching behaviors are the same.

Experience is another important individual characteristic. Inexperienced and pre-service teachers are more likely to have misconceptions about teaching and learning than more experienced teachers. These misconceptions have been described as unrealistic or naive (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992) and they can interfere with proper decision-making. For example, Brown and McGannon (1998, as cited in Borg, 2003) used a questionnaire about SLA that was taken from a widely used textbook on SLA (Lightbown & Spada, 2013) and administered it to 35 students who were in the initial stages of their teacher training program. These participants held two beliefs that were inappropriate for effective language teaching. They believed that languages were mostly learned by imitation and that errors were mainly caused by first language interference. Decisions based on these beliefs would promote more drilling and controlled practice and thus give students fewer opportunities for interaction and authentic use.

Formal education and professional development, in general, have been shown to have little or no effect on teacher classroom behaviors (Johnson, 1994; Lo, 2005; Woods, 1996); however, specific courses that provide information and knowledge about a limited area of language learning and language teaching have been shown to influence teacher behavior. For example, formal education in two or more classes of SLA prompted instructors to give different feedback than instructors with a more literature-based education, and SLA classes influenced instructor feedback decisions during class, and they considered more factors when assessing learner errors (Gurzynski-Weiss, 2016). Busch (2010) also surveyed her students in an SLA course. She recorded their beliefs about 23 statements on language learning and language teaching prior to beginning the course and then she reassessed them at the end of the course. She found that 16 of the 23 statements were reversed by the end of the course. Although formal education has been shown to have an immediate short-term effect on teacher-beliefs, the question remains whether this effect endures over time.

While it has been almost 25 years since the introduction of the EPIK, there are still few studies that focus on this program. Accordingly, this study seeks to describe the individual characteristics of NESTs in the EPIK and examines the role of individual characteristics in EPIK teachers' understanding of L2 learning and teaching processes. Specifically, we

focus on the instructor characteristics which Gurzynski-Weiss (2017) has identified as being the most common to affect teaching behavior. Those characteristics are: (1) teacher knowledge, beliefs and cognitive processes, (2) teaching experience, and (3) formal education and professional development. This study addresses the following three research questions based on Gurzynski-Weiss' (2017) conceptualization of individual characteristics:

1. What are the individual characteristics of EPIK teachers?
2. Which of the teacher characteristics is associated with the L2 learning and teaching processes?
3. Does the EPIK teacher's teaching experience (novice vs. expert) demonstrate the same degree of beliefs about L2 learning and teaching processes?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Setting

The Korean Ministry of Education and the Metropolitan/Provincial Offices of Education mandate that EPIK teachers participate in a nine-day training program at the EPIK teachers' arrival in Korea. This study was conducted at a training site in a centrally-located, mid-sized-city in South Korea. We recruited EPIK teachers, and 244 agreed to participate.

The EPIK training program consisted of lectures on language teaching, logistical matters, and Korean language and culture. Each class lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Different types of classes included lesson planning, classroom management, Korean history and culture, and lesson observation to help them understand their new environment (e.g., language and culture) and provide content knowledge and professional development.

3.2. Procedure

The questionnaire data from participants was collected while the NESTs were in a mandatory teacher training session and carried out in a single session which lasted approximately 20 minutes. An EPIK orientation trainer, also this study's fourth author, administered the questionnaire to teacher participants. The teacher training was conducted at the participants' arrival in Korea but prior to their school placement. As a whole, the teacher training program lasted for a total of nine days (30 to 45 hours) which occurs in February and August of each year. After completing the questionnaire, participants

answered additional questions about their background to describe individual characteristics (i.e., gender, age, nationality, L2, education, certification, and work experience).

3.3. Instrument

The language learning (LL) and language teaching (LT) questionnaire items were drawn from Lightbown and Spada (2013) that cover participants' specialized knowledge and beliefs encompassing language acquisition theory to classroom teaching and learning for language teachers. LL-LT tap into the language learning dimension (8 items) and language teaching dimension (7 items) including 7 sub-dimensions (15 items), with each item associated with one of the sub-dimensions: 2 items on corrective feedback (CF), 3 items measuring form-focused instruction (FFI), 1 item on language teaching relationship (LTR), 1 item on native language influence (NL), 1 item on opportunities for interaction (OI) 4 items on structure of language (SL), and 3 items on individual characteristics of the learner (LC) (see Table 1). Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with a higher score indicating a more positive contribution to language learning and language teaching processes.

Item-total correlations and internal consistency reliability coefficients were computed for the LL-LT sub-dimensions. All items were retained due to the item-total correlations being greater than .21. The Cronbach's alpha reliability computed for the sample was .71. This value supports the internal structure of the subdimensions within the LL-LT scale for the current population of EPIK teachers.

Overall, the instrument revealed acceptable item discrimination (item-total correlations) and internal reliability indices (Cronbach's alpha; see Bachman and Palmer (1996) and Nunnally (1978) for a review of item analysis and reliability statistics). Teachers reported background data including gender, age, nationality, L2, education, certificate/certification, and work experience in a self-report.

TABLE 1

**Item Discrimination Index, Means, and Standard Deviations of
LL-LT Questionnaire Items by Subdimension**

Dimension	Sub-Dimension	k	No.	Item	Item-Total Correlation	M	SD
Language learning	FFI	1	(1)	Languages are learned mainly through imitation.	.33	5.02	1.46
	IC	1	(2)	Highly intelligent people are good language learners.	.28	3.36	1.44

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	IC	1	(3)	The best predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation.	.24	5.83	1.14
	IC	1	(4)	The earlier a second language is introduced in school programs, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.	.29	5.96	1.24
	NL	1	(5)	Most of the mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their first language.	.24	4.73	1.45
	FFI	1	(6)	The best way to learn new vocabulary is through reading.	.26	4.06	1.54
	FFI	1	(7)	It is essential for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.	.28	3.38	1.54
	SL	1	(8)	Once learners know roughly 1,000 words and the basic structure of a second language, they can easily participate in conversations with native speakers.	.21	4.07	1.55
Language teaching	SL	1	(9)	Teachers should present grammatical rules one at a time, and learners should practice examples of each one before going on to another.	.42	4.88	1.60
	SL	1	(10)	Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones.	.46	6.08	1.08
	CF	1	(11)	Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.	.42	4.42	1.75
	SL	1	(12)	Teachers should use materials that expose students only to	.40	2.94	1.41

	k			M	SD
			language structures they have already been taught.		
OI	1	(13)	When learners are allowed to interact freely (for example, in group activities), they copy each other's mistakes.	.30	3.46	1.24
LTR	1	(14)	Students learn what they are taught.	.43	3.96	1.42
CF	1	(15)	Teachers should respond to students' errors by correctly rephrasing what they have said rather than by explicitly pointing out the error.	.32	5.91	1.25

Note. k = number of items, *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation

3.4. Data Analyses

In response to the first research question, we administered a survey that was composed of ten questions about their demographic and educational background. To describe the background characteristics, descriptive and frequency analysis was used to explore the background characteristics of the newly recruited NESTs in Korea based on the data collected in the autumn of 2018.

In response to the second and third research questions, we adopted Lightbown and Spada's (2013) LL and LT questionnaire items. A series of statistical analyses were run to examine *which* background characteristics influenced EPIK teachers' beliefs about language teaching and language learning processes. Then, to address the last research question, we employed a chi-square test, *t*-test, or analysis of variance (ANOVA), to examine the differences between groups on language teaching and language learning processes. Specifically, we investigated EPIK teachers' teaching experience (novice vs. expert) to check for possible language teaching and language learning differences.

4. RESULTS

This section describes the results of the study in the sequence of our research questions. First, we present the individual characteristics (i.e., gender, age, nationality, L2, education, certification, and work experience) of the EPIK teachers. Second, the presentation of

descriptive statistics (RQ 1, see section 4.1) for each of individual characteristics is followed by statistical analyses of those same characteristics to assess if there is an association between these individual characteristics and their beliefs about language teaching and language learning processes (RQ 2, see section 4.2). Next, teachers' characteristics, namely, teaching experience, are explored across the language teaching and language learning domains (RQ 3, see section 4.2).

4.1. Individual Characteristics of the EPIK Teachers

The sample consists of 244 NESTs (M_{age} = 25.95 years, SD = 3.95) of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, arriving from the United States, Canada, England, South Africa, Ireland, or Australia. The background characteristics of recently recruited EPIK teachers were examined in terms of gender, age, nationality, L2, education, certificate/certification, and teaching experience. The initial analyses of the data revealed that among NESTs, 73% (or n = 179) were female, and 27% (or n = 65) were male. After the United States (n = 164, 67%), the shares of the seven countries are as follows: United Kingdom (n = 34, 14%), Canada (n = 22, 9%), South Africa (n = 17, 7%), Ireland (n = 5, 2%), and Australia (n = 2, 1%). The gender distribution of NESTs for five of the six countries showed women outnumbering their male counterparts (see Figure 1). Although the age of those participating in the EPIK varied widely, it was more common for younger individuals to be represented across an array of nationalities. Among all NESTs reporting their age, 54% were 20-25 years old, 33% were 26-30 years old, 10% were 31-35 years old, and 2% were 36-50 years old. A more general statement of age in relation to EPIK NEST recruits is that more than 80% of the incoming workforce from each country consist of individuals under the age of 35 (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 1

Gender Distribution of EPIK Teachers by Country

FIGURE 2

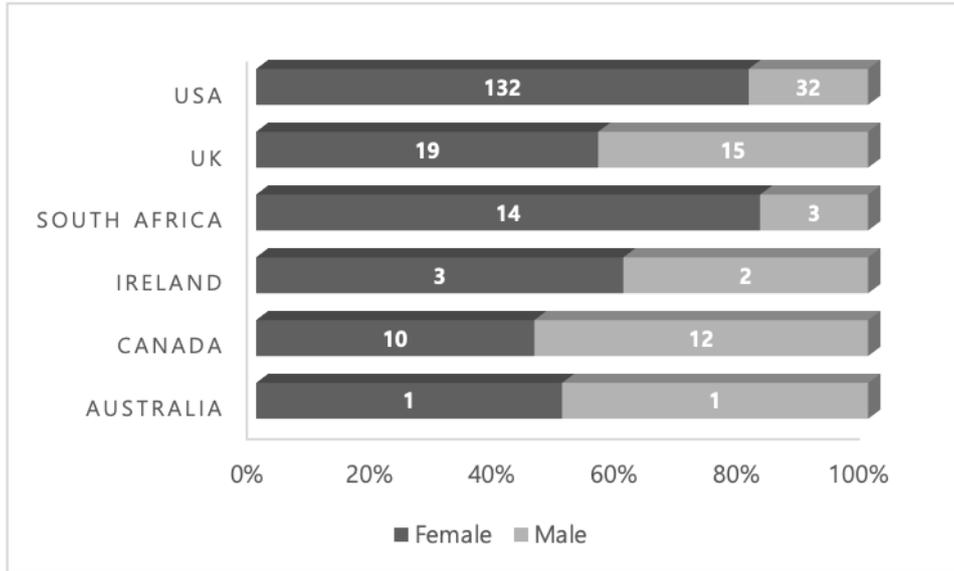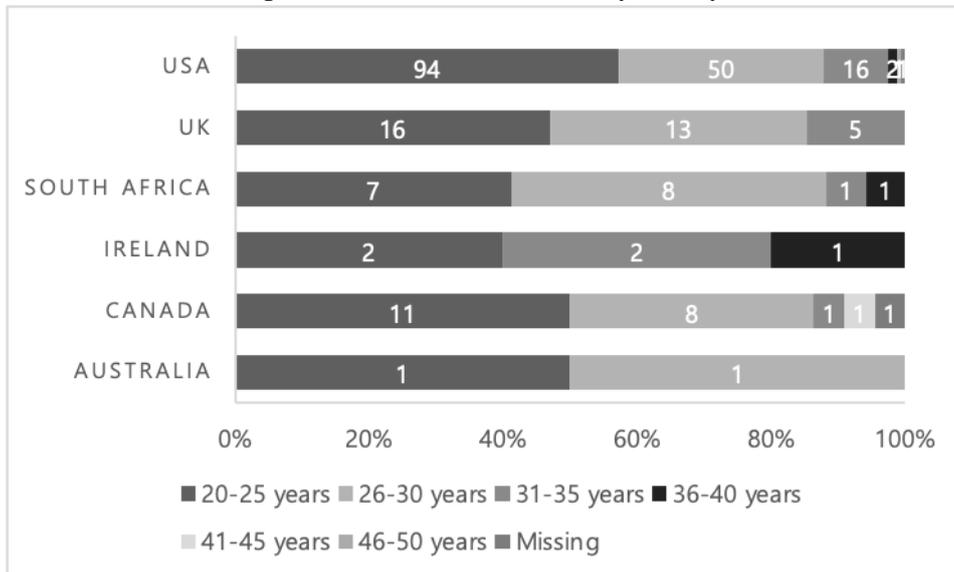**Age Distribution of EPIK Teachers by Country**

Education level was coded based on degrees conferred such as *associate*, *bachelor*, *master*, etc. The largest percentage of teachers listed a bachelor's degree as their highest

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degree earned (88%), followed by a master's degree (11%). Less than 1% held either an associate degree (.4%) or a doctorate degree (.4%) (see Figure 3). In addition, relatively more NESTs with bachelor's degrees held more certificates (91%) than NESTs who held a master's degree (9%). Teachers with certificates are educated individuals who have demonstrated their understanding for teaching English to non-native speakers. Many have completed at least 120 hours of training, with a vast majority of the NESTs having some form of certificate (e.g., CELT/TESOL/TEFL) in ESL/EFL (81%). About 44% of all NESTs reported that they spoke additional languages other than English. Interestingly, among the NESTs who responded speaking an additional language, they also reported having majored in a language (e.g., French, English, Spanish) as an undergraduate, $\chi^2(1) =$ 14.13, $p < .001$. Among all NESTs who reported experience in teaching in second-language context, 75% reported that this was their first year ($n = 179$), 17% had 1-2 years of teaching experience ($n = 40$), 7% had 3-5 years ($n = 17$), .8 % had 6-10 years ($n = 2$), and .4% had teaching experience between 11-15 years ($n = 1$). The data suggests that the newly arriving teachers, regardless of their home country, are generally less experienced, although many of them have teaching qualifications and formal teaching degrees (see Figure 4). This means that although a large proportion of the NESTs have teaching certificates, this does not mean that they have commensurate in-class teaching experience which is to be expected, due to the high number of young professionals being recruited into EPIK.

FIGURE 3
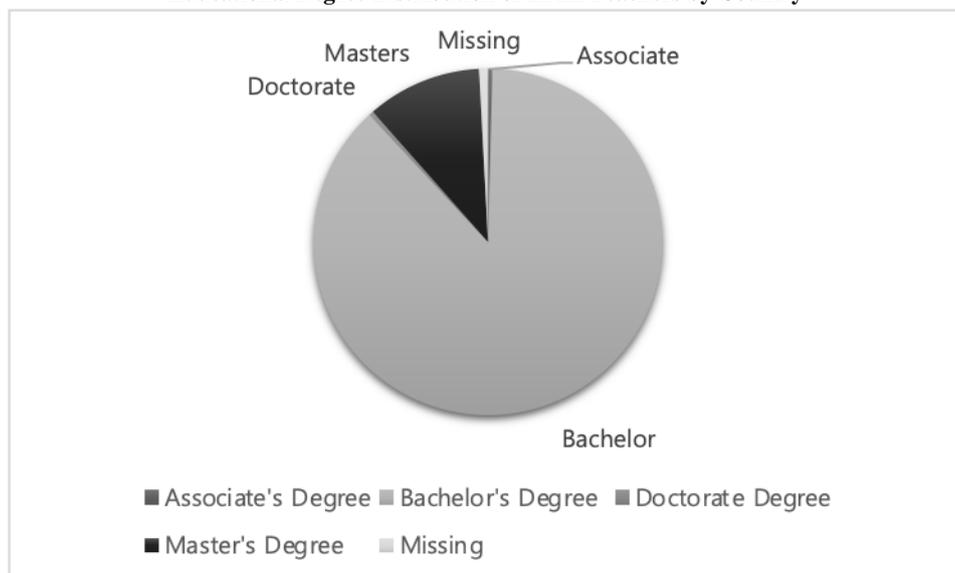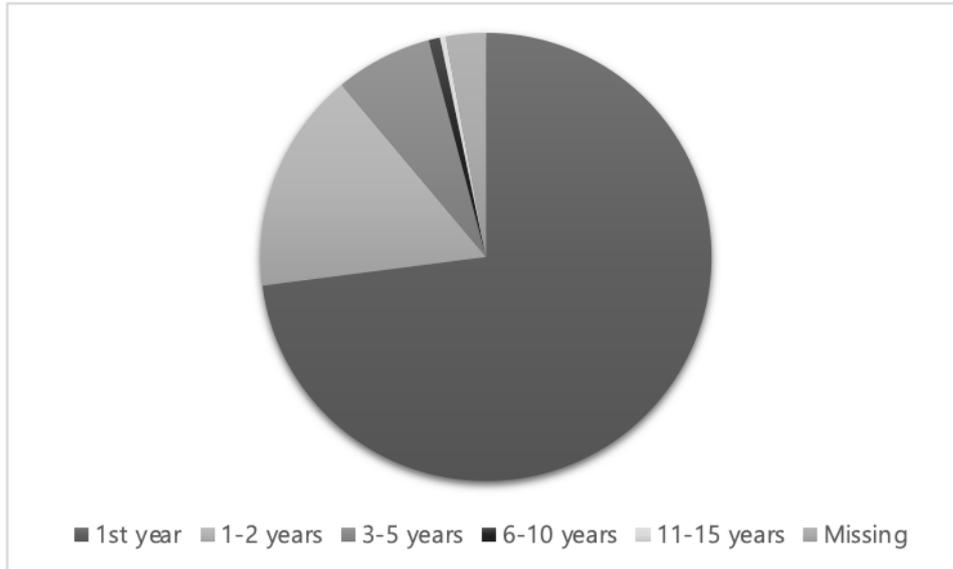
Educational Degree Distribution of EPIK Teachers by Country

FIGURE 4

Teaching Experience Distribution of EPIK Teachers

■ 1st year ■ 1-2 years ■ 3-5 years ■ 6-10 years ■ 11-15 years ■ Missing

4.2. EPIK Teachers' Understanding of Language Learning and Language Teaching Processes

A series of statistical analyses were conducted to examine *which* of the individual characteristics played a role in EPIK teachers' understanding of LL and LT process (see Appendix B). The analyses revealed relatively few associations between background characteristics and teachers' beliefs in either LL or LT processes. Only teaching experience, $F (4, 228) = 2.42$, $p < .05$, and formal education, $F (3, 234) = 2.70$, $p < .05$, were associated with beliefs in LL and LT processes. Post-hoc tests of formal education, however, did not show any group differences at any educational level (all $ps \geq .096$). Following the analyses, and as evidenced by previous research on teacher-education, we focused our subsequent analyses on another key characteristic of instructors of English: teaching experience. Taken from the teaching experience data, we collapsed the seven categories into two: expert and novice. Novice teachers were in their first year of teaching while the expert group consisted of teachers with more than one year of teaching experience. The subsequent section presents the results of our mean-difference models that examine the differences of novice and expert teachers on their perceptions of language learning and beliefs about language teaching.

Inspection of the LL-LT processes generated by EPIK teachers in the expert group showed that, overall, NESTs perceived a mean score of 4.42 ($SD = .09$). The novice

teachers, on the other hand, perceived a mean score of 4.60 (*SD* = .04), showing a significant difference between the two groups of teachers, *t*(233) = 2.07, *p* < .05. This finding indicates that novice NESTs had more misconceptions about LL and LT processes, and this is in line with previous research that has looked at the relationship between teacher knowledge, teacher-cognition, and reconceptualization of beliefs. Previous studies have suggested that teacher-development and changes in teacher-cognition are the result of teachers' reflections on classroom experience as they adapt to the challenges of language classroom environments. Further analysis of differences in the average perceived LL and LT processes between expert and novice teachers revealed similar patterns, but the differences were less striking. An independent samples *t*-test showed no significant difference between expert NESTs (*M* = 4.59, *SD* = .05) and novice NESTs (*M* = 4.42, *SD* = .11), *t*(239) = 1.62, *p* = .106, for their perception of LL process, but for LT beliefs, expert NESTs were significantly lower (*M* = 4.36, *SD* = .10) than novice NESTs (*M* = 4.64, SD = .05), *t*(239) = 2.70, *p* < .01.

Additional comparisons were conducted on the differences among sub-dimensions for the novice and expert groups. Of the seven sub-dimensions, only two significant differences between the novice and expert groups were found in their understanding of corrective feedback in classrooms and language teaching relationship (see Table 2). Specifically, novice NESTs believed that students learn what they are taught in the classroom (*M* = 4.18, *SD* = .10) more than expert NESTs in their view of the language teaching relationship, (*M* = 3.49, *SD* = .10), *t*(237) = 3.47, *p* < .001. However, novice NESTs believed strongly that feedback should be given immediately following a learner's error and that teachers should not provide any explicit correction (*M* = 5.30, *SD* = .08) versus NEST participants in the expert group (*M* = 4.91, SD = .16), *t*(238) = 2.18, *p* < .05. These beliefs may reflect some expert teachers' teaching experience or training received in their certification process. While form-focused instruction was not statistically significant per se, it approached significance. Among novice NESTs (*M* = 4.22, *SD* = .07), but less by expert NESTs (*M* = 3.94, *SD* =.14), form-focused instructional beliefs varied somewhat in their teaching experiences, *t*(238) = 1.97, *p* = .050. Further, results showed no other significant differences in sub-dimensions reported by EPIK participants in the novice and the expert group (i.e., native language interference, *t*(238) = 0.86, *p* = .388, opportunities for interaction, *t*(238) = -.65, *p* = .515, structure of language, *t*(239) = 0.82, *p* = .413, and teacher characteristics, *t*(237) = 1.42, *p* = .157).

TABLE 2

Summary of Results of T-Tests

	Novice M (SD)	Expert M (SD)	t
Corrective feedback	5.30 (.08)	4.91 (.15)	2.18*
Form-focused instruction	4.22 (.07)	3.94 (.14)	1.97
Language teaching relationship	4.18 (.10)	3.49 (.17)	3.47***
Native language interference	4.78 (.11)	4.60 (.19)	.86
Opportunities for interaction	3.45 (.09)	3.56 (.17)	-.65
Structure of language	4.55 (.06)	4.46 (.10)	.82
Teacher characteristics	5.09 (.06)	4.91 (.12)	1.42

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation
*$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$

5. DISCUSSION

The present study investigates who the NESTs are in terms of (1) their individual characteristics (RQ 1), (2) teacher characteristics associated with the second language learning and teaching processes (RQ 2), and (3) the teaching experience related differences in the language learning and teaching processes (RQ 3). Our data show that the majority of the NESTs are from inner-circle countries, major in varied subject areas at college, and have less than a year of teaching experience. Two of the NESTs' individual characteristics that draw our attention are (1) their formal education and (2) lack of teaching experience.

5.1. NESTs' Individual Characteristics and Their LL-LT Responses

To answer the first research question, we asked questions about their individual factors including nationality, gender, education, and teaching experience. The NESTs recruited at the time of this study were a relatively homogeneous but diverse group. They were relatively homogeneous as they are from mostly inner-circle countries and are in their 20s. However, they were diverse in terms of the areas of the studies they majored at college. We could also categorize them into a novice and experienced group in terms of their teaching experience. In the subsequent analysis, we focused on the factors that diversified the NESTs.

Using the framework presented in Gurzynski-Weiss (2017), in the second and third research questions, our study assessed (1) NESTs' knowledge and beliefs presented in their perceptions of LL - LT processes and (2) the associations between individual characteristics, in particular, formal education and teaching experience with NESTs' knowledge and beliefs in LL - LT processes. Our analysis shows that NESTs' perceptions

of LL - LT theories and practices are statistically different depending on NESTs' formal education, in this case their major. Those who majored in English or education had more accurate understanding and perceptions of LL and LT theories and practices overall. In all sub-dimensions including the areas of language structure, corrective feedback, form-focused instruction, and perceptions of LL and LT, English/education major NESTs showed more accurate understanding, which were statistically different or approaching statistical significance. As other studies show, it is confirmed that NESTs' teaching experience is another robust factor that influences the NESTs' perceptions of LL-LT processes. Those who have more than one-year of teaching experience had more accurate perceptions and understanding of LL-LT theories and practices (overall as well as per division).

We report that there are no differences in novice and expert NESTs' responses to the questionnaire related to LL theories; however, their responses to the following three items related to LT practices in the questionnaire are statistically different: (1) Students learn what they are taught, (2) Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits, and (3) Teachers should respond to students' errors by correctly rephrasing what they have said rather than by explicitly pointing out the error.

Novice NESTs expressed their belief in the direct relationship between instruction and learning. They respond that the instruction they provide will be translated into learning. However, research on teaching-learning mechanisms shows that it is not always the case; For instance, Pienemann (1998), showed that unless a learner is developmentally ready, classroom instruction may not be conducive to his/her language learning. Furthermore, classroom management-wise, not every learner will pay attention or learn what is taught in class. Actual teaching experience could have helped the NESTs understand that students do not necessarily learn everything they were taught in the classroom (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

The next two questionnaire items, to which NESTs respond differently per their teaching experiences, are regarding corrective feedback. Novice NESTs positively respond that learners' errors should be corrected immediately to avoid bad habit formation, and teachers should not use explicit corrective feedback. Meta-analyses on error correction timing and techniques have revealed that teachers should judiciously decide when and in what ways to provide corrective feedback based on learners' age, L2 development, target form, and other factors. Li's (2010) meta-analysis, for example, reviewed thirty-three studies and showed that effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback varied due to instructional settings, learners, and target forms. Furthermore, research studies showed that implicit feedback (e.g., recast) is more frequent than explicit feedback in language classrooms (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Our findings are in line with previous studies. For example, Busch (2010) and Gurzynski-Weiss (2016) have reported how beliefs about error correction are affected by a teacher's individual characteristics. Busch (2010) looked at the effect that education and training has on preservice teacher's beliefs. She described how courses in SLA altered their beliefs. This suggests that teacher education can raise awareness of issues involved in the teaching and learning process and participants can use that knowledge to make changes to their beliefs. Gurzynski-Weiss (2016) used stimulated recalls of language lessons taught by the teacher to investigate their feedback decisions. She found that decisions about corrective feedback were influenced by a teacher's individual characteristics, especially educational training and teaching experience.

As Brown and McGannon (1998, as cited in Borg, 2003) noted, it is highly possible that NESTs' misconceptions of teaching-learning relationship (e.g., students learn what they are taught.) and of corrective feedback (e.g., immediate and no explicit feedback) may impact NESTs' future teaching practices. Those who believe that students learn what they are taught would be easily frustrated by the fact that not every student will learn what they have been taught. The unrealistic expectation of learning can cause unconstructive interaction between NESTs and local language learners. Immediate feedback after errors as well as non-explicit feedback may cause confusion and limit the effectiveness of the corrective feedback. Timing and type of feedback should be tailored to learner needs especially in relation to the learners and the teaching context.

In another study, it was noted that experienced teachers were significantly more disposed towards using either peer or delayed corrective feedback; whereas novice teachers tended to believe that immediate feedback was necessary (Fallah & Nazari, 2019). They suggested that experienced teachers were more in control of their practices, better able to use reflection-in-action, and to recognize patterns of effective classroom practice than less experienced teachers. Our study seems to support this because the majority of experienced NESTs had also majored in English or education which made them more aware of effective classroom procedures.

Although seventy-five percent of the NESTs in our study were novice teachers, that is, they reported having less than a year of teaching experience. They, nevertheless, were qualified, that is eighty-five percent of them held degrees in English/education. This suggests that those who have education related majors may be more aware of effective teaching practices. There are, however, differences between programs in terms of the amount of student-teaching required; nonetheless; most NESTs with an education major or certificate such as the CELTA would have completed around six hours of supervised student teaching ("What is in the CELTA course?", n.d.). Considering that the NESTs' teaching experience made statistical differences in terms of their understanding of language

learning and language teaching theories and practices, it is advisable to recruit those who majored in English language/linguistics or education.

5.2. Changes Made in EPIK Policies

The EPIK has responded to the criticisms aimed at it. First, using archived versions of the EPIK website, one can note that requirements for recruited NESTs have changed. For example, in 2014 applicants did not need teaching credentials. Applicants were required to "hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree from an accredited university, [but] applicants with a two-year associate degree or who [had] completed a minimum of 2 years in university [could] apply…" (EPIK, 2014, para 4). This supports Jeon's (2009) contention; full-time teaching positions were given to applicants more for their native speaker status rather than for their teaching qualifications. However, by 2015, it was clear that the EPIK was moving in another direction. Applicants were warned that TEFL courses may be required (EPIK, 2015). Although applicants with an associate degree or who had completed two years at a four-year university could still apply, they "will need to obtain a 100 hour or more [in] TEFL/TESOL/CELTA/etc." (EPIK, 2019, para. 5) before they can become teachers with the provision: "This may be completed during the application process, so applicants may apply before they have obtained the certification as long as it will be finalized no later than 6 weeks before the final expected arrival date in Korea" (EPIK, 2019).

Our research also supports the idea that the EPIK has improved its NEST recruitment. Our data showed that 91% of the NESTs hired with a B.A. also had completed at least 120 hours of language teacher-training in the form of a CELTA, TESOL, or TEFL certificate. This averaged out so that 85% of the recruits had some form of formal training, either a degree in English education or a language teaching certificate. Unlike other Asian countries that have NESTs hiring programs, EPIK currently has the most rigorous educational requirements. For instance, the JET program only requires teachers to hold a B.A. and do not state they prefer formal teaching training or a language teaching certificate.

6. CONCLUSION

Using a questionnaire, this study investigated the newly recruited NESTs' individual characteristics and their beliefs and understanding of L2 teaching and learning processes. This study is timely because there have been few follow-up studies on the EPIK teacher qualification since the new recruitment policy went into effect in 2015. This study reported

that the NESTs' teaching qualification including L2 teaching certificate has improved; however, teaching experience had a more significant impact on their understanding of L2 teaching and learning processes. Based on these findings, the ideal EPIK recruit is one who has studied English/education and has at least one year of teaching experience.

We recommend that EPIK's training program start with the diagnosis of NESTs' initial understanding of language learning and language teaching theories and practices. This is in line with previous studies in which teacher-training and professional development programs have been advised to determine the beliefs of their program participants before it starts so that they can "use this knowledge to inform course content and facilitate 'in time' learning" (Kartchava, Gatbonton, Ammar, & Trofimovich, 2020, p. 222). Thus, depending on the initial needs of NESTs in terms of their knowledge and beliefs, EPIK would provide focused-training based on that groups' needs. EPIK currently uses a *one-size-fits-all* strategy in which all the NESTs attend the same training. Providing several training modules per NESTs' initial characteristics, credential, formal education, and their knowledge in language learning and teaching theories and practices would be more effective and efficient. For instance, EPIK should offer training on not only theories of the timing and types of corrective feedback but also hands-on experience to provide different types of feedback per student's need.

Another recommendation is for a system to hold NESTs accountable. NESTs' collaborating teachers, school principals, students, or community members should provide input regarding NESTs' performance and contribution. It should not be judgmental but constructive for the NESTs' growth as language teachers. NESTs should be part of the English teaching community and contributing members for English education in Korea. Simultaneously, collaborating teachers and school principals should be also accountable to maximize the advantages of NESTs' presence in their classrooms by closely interacting with them to increase their understanding of their culture and their worldview.

Hiring NESTs for public schools was implemented as a solution for the *English divide*; however, not every NEST was *ready* to teach Korean students. A recommendation has been made for training to enhance NESTs theoretical and practical understanding of language teaching and learning. Moreover, a system of accountability as well as opportunities for professional development would also be beneficial.

The most significant limitation that this study confronted was a time constraint. We had a restricted amount of time with the participants, so a mixed method approach with follow-up interviews could not be used. The investigation was also limited to the scale of the LL-LT questionnaire. Future research should use additional measures and methods to replicate the results of this study and to further explore teachers' beliefs toward language teaching and learning. For example, the beliefs about language learning inventory [TBALLI] for teachers (Horwitz, 1988) could be used. This would allow for comparability across studies

(e.g., Barcelos, 2003; Busch, 2010). Second, improving the sub-dimensions will enhance the quality of measurement of the dimension of language learning and language teaching. For example, there is only one item about the native language influence, opportunities for interaction, and language teaching relationship. While some may argue that these sub-dimensions constitute their own dimension, others might question how accurately one-item can capture a teacher's beliefs about language teaching and learning processes. Third, the current analysis identifies expert educators as teachers with one year or more of teaching. This all-or-nothing categorization oversimplifies the developmental nature of praxis. Thus, a more graded view of novice and expert is needed (i.e., none, 1- 3 years). This more graded view of teaching experience combined with an expanded questionnaire of teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching processes might provide a more nuanced view of the emergent nature of teacher-development and the reconceptualization of teacher-beliefs.

Future directions for research should focus on the link between teachers' individual characteristics and their classroom practices. One way to do this is to use stimulated recall (Gass & Mackey, 2017). Stimulated recall uses video recordings of observed classes. These recordings are then viewed by the teacher and the researcher together. The videos help the teacher to recall what was happening, so that the researcher can elicit and discuss the teacher's thought processes during class; thereby, providing data that can be used to infer the link between individual characteristics such as education, teaching experience, and beliefs and actual classroom practices.

Applicable levels: Secondary, tertiary

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APPENDIX A

NESTs' Pay-Scale and Required Teaching Credentials

Level	Pay Scale	Required Teaching Credentials
1+	2.5 – 2.7 M	After 2 consecutive years as Level 1 with the renewing province
1	2.3 – 2.5 M	2 years of full-time teaching experience + BA or MA in TESOL related field, teaching certification (license) or TEFL/TESOL/CELTA certificate or after 1 year as a Level 2+ with the renewing province
2+	2.1 – 2.3 M	1 year of full-time teaching experience + BA or MA in TESOL related field, teaching certification (license), TEFL/TESOL/CELTA certificate, or after 1 year as a Level 2 with the renewing province
2	2.0 – 2.2 M	BA in TESOL related field with teaching certification, BA with TEFL/TESL/CELTA certificate, BA with teaching certification, or BA with 1 year TaLK scholar
3	1.8 – 2.1 M	Bachelor's degree in any discipline

Note. Adopted from http://www.epik.go.kr/contents.do?contentsNo=49&menuNo=278, the currency unit is KRW. Depending on their teaching experience and credentials, the pay differences are not unsubstantial. The difference between the lowest and the highest monthly pay was 900,000 KRW as of Spring 2019, which is approximately $10,000 a year.

APPENDIX B

T-test Analyses of Background Characteristics on Teachers' Beliefs in LL and LT

	Language Learning	Language Teaching	LL-LT
Age	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Nationality	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Teaching credential	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Formal education	*ns*	*ns*	*
Gender	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Second language	*ns*	*ns*	*ns*
Years of teaching	*ns*	**	*

Note. LL-LT = language learning and language teaching; *ns* = not significant
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$