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Editorial

Poco a poco empezamos a pensar en el futuro con optimismo y esperanza. De la preocupación estamos pasando a la planeación de un porvenir mejor con la experiencia de lo vivido y aprendido durante la pandemia. Los manuscritos recibidos este año reflejan que, a pesar de todo, la vida sigue y el ser humano y sus procesos prevalecen como ha sucedido una y otra vez desde hace siglos. Los autores de los artículos presentados este año han sido capaces de ver hacia el futuro entrelazando lo aprendido y aplicándolo en sus investigaciones para ofrecernos un panorama que va desde lo local hasta lo internacional siempre con la intención de mejorar el aprendizaje o enseñanza de lenguas.

Con mucho gusto, *Lenguas en Contexto* pone a su consideración el ejemplar 2021 de nuestra revista. Durante la edición de los artículos nos gusta anticipar e imaginar el momento en que nuestros lectores descubren el contenido y esperamos que también se sorprendan gratamente con los artículos que les presentamos, tal como nosotras, cuando los recibimos. Agradecemos a todos los que han hecho posible la publicación de este número, el segundo en tiempos de pandemia. Autoridades, revisores, el equipo editorial, los diseñadores y sobre todo los autores hemos hecho un gran esfuerzo para seguir ofreciéndoles este ejemplar por medio del cual todos aprendemos y nos enteramos de lo que es importante en el campo de la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas. Gracias a todos.

Little by little, we have begun to think about the future with optimism and hope. We are moving from concern to planning a better future with the experience of what we all have lived and learned during the pandemic. The manuscripts received this year reflect that in spite of everything, life continues and human beings and their processes prevail as it has happened over and over for centuries. The authors of the articles presented this year have been able to see into the future by intertwining what they have learned and applying it in their research to offer us a broad view of what is happening, from the local to the international, and always with the intention of improving the learning or teaching of languages.

It is with great pleasure that *Lenguas en Contexto* offers you the 2021 issue of our magazine. During the editing of the articles, we like to anticipate and imagine the moment when our readers discover the content and we hope that they will also be pleasantly surprised by the articles we are presenting to them, just as we were when we received them. We thank all those who have made the publication of this issue possible, the second in times of a pandemic. Authorities, reviewers, the editorial team, the designers and especially the authors have made a great effort to continue offering you this issue from which, we hope, we all can know and learn what is important in the field of language teaching and learning. Thank you all.

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Introducción

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La condición actual de la lengua inglesa como “la primera lengua auténticamente global” (Crystal, 2005, p. 17) ha hecho que la enseñanza de esta lengua sea una de las asignaturas obligatorias en los currículos escolares de gran parte del mundo. “Enseñar lenguas”, en su modalidad extranjera, evidentemente, es una actividad que se realiza desde hace mucho tiempo, pero su reconocimiento como una profesión, es mucho más reciente (Toledo Sarracino, 2014). Esta calidad profesional exige dejar de pensar que sólo por ser un hablante nativo, se poseen las capacidades para enseñar esa lengua formalmente. A estas alturas del siglo XXI, debe ser claro para todos que el ejercicio profesional en el área de lenguas depende de una formación académica sólida, así como del conocimiento amplio de las metodologías que respalden una eficaz enseñanza que optimice su aprendizaje.

Richards y Rogers (2014) señalan que, en Norteamérica, al inicio del siglo XX, con la consolidación de la lingüística como un campo de estudios aplicado y de la psicología, se dieron intentos más intensivos por mejorar la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras a quienes, dentro o fuera de un territorio específico, demandaran un proceso formativo formal. Ya en la última década del siglo anterior, Crystal (2005) afirma que la revolución tecnológica promovió, a su vez, otra revolución a favor de la conciencia de que las lenguas existen y que son uno de los medios más poderosos para construir una identidad individual y colectiva y realizar por consenso la empresa humana.

En México, Encinas et al (2007) señalan que en la década de los 80 del siglo pasado se dio una transición en la que los centros de lenguas extranjeras, hasta entonces encargados de su enseñanza, cedió esta centralidad a los programas de licenciatura y posgrados dentro de las universidades. Esto significó, fundamentalmente, otorgar a las lenguas extranjeras su calidad de legítimos objetos estudio para las ciencias del lenguaje y, por ello, emprendieron una búsqueda de caminos más sistemáticos para enseñarlas y aprenderlas. Desde el aspecto pedagógico, los paradigmas de estudio científico

del lenguaje y los métodos de enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras han evolucionado. En el contexto actual, en donde los recursos tecnológicos digitales han tenido que sustituir muchas de las prácticas tradicionales en el aula, es inaplazable, reconocer, analizar y recrear los procesos pedagógicos en torno a la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras.

En este número de **Lenguas en Contexto**, reafirmando su convicción de “promover la investigación, la reflexión y el conocimiento en torno al lenguaje, explorando nuevos horizontes de estudio y aplicación de las lenguas en diversos contextos”, como lo enfatiza su Visión, pone a la disposición de sus lectores una serie de estudios empíricos y proyectos de investigación-acción en donde los autores analizan diversos aspectos de la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras en la enseñanza superior, aunque el nivel básico también abordado por uno de los trabajos. Los diseños de las investigaciones demuestran un aceptable nivel investigativo al señalar un enfoque teórico que sustenta la metodología y/o las técnicas de enseñanza y aprendizaje que se exponen en ellos (Richards y Rodgers, 2014).

Las temáticas de las investigaciones expuestas enfatizan diversos aspectos que configuran el contexto de las acciones pedagógicas, al centrarse en los participantes del acto de enseñar y aprender una lengua extranjera: estudiantes, docentes y materiales, lo cual enfatiza su filiación con los enfoques socioculturales y funcionales. En estos reportes de resultados el lector podrá encontrar temas que en el contexto de la pandemia por COVID 19 se encuentran en la primera línea de la discusión académica: las emociones, las motivaciones y las representaciones sociales de los actores pedagógicos.

De esta forma, Omrani (*Islamic Azad University of Zahedan*) y Tafazoli (Universidad de Newcastle, Australia) en su artículo titulado *English Language Learners' Pragmatic Knowledge: Do Motivation Type and Proficiency Level Matter?* indagan a través de un estudio mixto, si la motivación intrínseca o extrínseca de los estudiantes de una universidad iraní con la que emprenden el estudio del inglés como lengua extranjera, se relaciona con el nivel de eficiencia en el uso de la lengua meta. Además, los autores exploran si esta variable influye en la competencia pragmática de los estudiantes, es decir, en la manera en que usan la lengua meta en diferentes contextos de interacción.

En otra faceta del trabajo del docente, tenemos *Análisis de necesidades del español como lengua extranjera: Un estudio de caso en una universidad mexicana*, trabajo de García-Ponce (Universidad de Guanajuato) y Velázquez (Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México), en donde los autores realizan un análisis de necesidades de un grupo de docentes de español como lengua extranjera en la Universidad de Guanajuato. Este trabajo plantea un muy útil estado de la cuestión de la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera en nuestro país y pone de relieve un tema que definitivamente influye en las acciones pedagógicas concretas en el aula.

Resaltar la conveniencia de convertirse en un docente que reflexione sobre su tarea pedagógica es el tema de Rojas Rivera del Programa Nacional de Inglés y de la BUAP y Sánchez Hernández, también de la BUAP. Mediante un modelo de investigación-acción, estos investigadores se propusieron exponer a un grupo de docentes de educación básica al ejercicio de la escritura reflexiva sobre su proceso profesional. *An action research intervention to promote reflection and development in ELT Mexican public basic education* es el título del artículo en el que se describe que, con este ejercicio, los docentes no sólo pudieron reconocer sus propios alcances en esta herramienta crítica, sino que pudieron entender las implicaciones de la reflexión como una herramienta útil para la construcción de un *syllabus* que, a su vez, fomenta un aprendizaje reflexivo en sus estudiantes.

Specialization and Diversification of Professors' Workload at a School of Languages es el artículo de Vez López y de Jesús Ly de la Universidad Veracruzana en el que los autores analizan el tipo de representación de los estudiantes acerca de la eficiencia del maestro de acuerdo con una acentuada especialización en la formación y desempeño del docente, o en un ejercicio más diverso, es decir, si se trata de un docente que imparte una mayor diversidad de cursos. Los resultados de este estudio mixto señalan que en las representaciones de los estudiantes no existe una tendencia definida hacia relacionar la especialización o la diversidad con la eficiencia. Estos interesantes resultados nos dan indicios del tipo de población docente y del contexto de sus decisiones profesionales que, al igual que en el artículo anterior, determinan la manera de conducir el proceso de aprendizaje en sus aulas.

Si la pandemia ha puesto en la mira de las discusiones académicas un tema, es el de la inteligencia emocional (Goleman, 1998). En esta línea, en la Universidad de Quintana Roo durante el verano de 2020, Dzay Chulim, Negrete Cetina y Percastre Tzuc realizaron un estudio sobre el desarrollo de la inteligencia emocional

a través del enfoque Socio-formativo basado en competencias de un grupo de docentes en pre-servicio. Su artículo, *Pre-service language teachers' conceptualization of Emotions at a Mexican university*, devela las emociones más recurrentes en los participantes de su estudio y hace hincapié en que el manejo de las emociones individuales y grupales en la tarea pedagógica cumple un papel muy relevante en el aprendizaje.

En una última sección dedicada a los materiales de trabajo, se presentan dos trabajos que reflejan otro de los tópicos más discutidos en el ámbito pedagógico surgido durante la crisis pandémica: la implementación de nuevos soportes digitales para los aprendizajes y la necesidad de reconfigurar los contenidos de los libros de texto para hacerlos más congruentes con las comunidades a las que van dirigidas. De esta forma, en *Using an app to learn vocabulary autonomously in a virtual environment*, Flores González y Mercado Olmos de la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla explican su experiencia al medir la manera en que la aplicación *Vocabulary.com* promueve el aprendizaje autónomo del léxico en un contexto virtual en estudiantes de esta universidad pública. Las autoras enfatizan sus resultados positivos y el potencial de este tipo de materiales y la virtualidad como nueva manera de establecer el vínculo entre docente y aprendices.

El segundo artículo en esta serie, *From local to global: The path to motivate students to learn English*, subraya la conveniencia de crear materiales adecuados y comprensivos con el contexto local de los estudiantes. De esta forma, es posible lograr un vínculo más auténtico con los aprendices para lograr una mejora sustancial en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje, tal como el autor lo enfatiza en sus conclusiones. Rodríguez, quien funge como Director de Políticas Lingüísticas de ANEP, expone la manera en que se trabajó en el programa de inglés en una escuela de pregrado en Uruguay con una propuesta local con el *e-book* llamado *#livingUruguay*. La evaluación de los estudiantes sobre este *e-book* demuestra cómo los contenidos de los materiales que son mediadores de estudio se constituyen en verdaderos promotores en la consolidación de la identidad local de los estudiantes, con la que, a su vez, pueden proyectarse con mayor seguridad en el mundo global.

Así, el número 12 de *Lenguas en Contexto* es una magnífica opción que contribuye a la difusión de trabajos que, como el lector podrá corroborar, documentan diversos contextos, necesidades y “panoramas” del campo profesional de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras (Tolledo Sarracino, 2014) en nuestro país y en algunos contextos internacionales. Agradezco la invitación del Comité

Editorial para escribir esta introducción, pues no sólo ha constituido una muy grata ocasión para reconocer la creciente calidad de la investigación en lenguas extranjeras y la consolidación de este campo de investigación, sino que también me ha dado elementos para reafirmar la convicción de que el mejor camino para la conversación mundial -ahora más palpable a través de las diversas plataformas digitales de comunicación a estas alturas ya familiares para estudiantes, docentes e investigadores- es la compren-

sión de nuestros problemas y la posibilidad de vislumbrar mediante la investigación sus posibles soluciones. Definitivamente, nuestra mejor y más versátil herramienta para adaptarnos al mundo y sus circunstancias es el lenguaje en cualesquiera de sus modalidades. Por último, quiero enfatizar, a manera de *In Memoriam*, las palabras de Humberto Maturana (2002, p. 23), un biólogo que entendió la fuerza del lenguaje en lo que somos como especie, al decir que: "... es en el conversar donde somos humanos".

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' PRAGMATIC KNOWLEDGE: DO MOTIVATION TYPE AND PROFICIENCY LEVEL MATTER?

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Abstract

Communicating appropriately in English is one of the most valuable assets among EFL learners all over the world and respectively in Iran. However, learners with a high proficiency level and a great desire toward learning a foreign language face many primary problems due to their lack of pragmatic knowledge and not being aware of this capacity. To this end, this article is based on a study which examined the differences among EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge with regard to their motivation types and proficiency level. The focus of this study was on 56 B.A students majoring English Translation and English Language and Literature. The participants were selected Non-randomly and during the first session, they were asked to administer the motivation questionnaire (mini-AMBT) and oxford placement test (OPT). In the second session, the participants completed a Written Discourse Completion Test. The collected data was analyzed through different independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA. The results indicated that EFL learners with different types of motivation performed differently in their pragmatic knowledge test. Another finding of this study showed that even high level of proficiency does not support pragmatic knowledge and learners with different proficiency levels performed almost the same.

Keywords: Motivation type, Language proficiency, Pragmatic knowledge, Iranian EFL learners

Introduction

Millions of people try to learn a new language with different goals, making them motivated or affecting their tendency toward acquiring the language. Most people, if not all, are motivated to learn English as an essential need and a means of communication due to its applications. According to Ngeow (1998), motivation is the extent of a learner's involvement and attitude toward learning a language, which is regarded as a complicated factor that is not desirable without its presence. Gardner (1985) described motivation as the desire and satisfaction of a learner to do an activity while learning a new language. He believes that an intrinsic second language (L2) learner tends to learn a language and its culture and people, while an extrinsically motivated learner is interested in learning a language to get a job, earn more money, sharpen life skills, and create a brighter future for themselves.

In this regard, a considerable amount of research concerning motivation orientation and language learning have been conducted, and the results reported that there is a significant relationship between learners' motivation orientation and language learning (Alshenqeeti, 2018; Carrió-Pastor & MestreMestre, 2014; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Choubsaz & Choubsaz, 2014; Quan, 2014). In the same vein, researchers focused on what Gardner's (1985) emphasized as language learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Alqurashi, 2019; Geovanni et al., 2019; Ng & Ng, 2015; Kamaruddin et al., 2017).

In addition to motivation, language proficiency is considered as another critical factor for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students (Ghenghesh, 2015), which helps learners to progress through their education and may affect learners' pragmatic awareness (Koike, 1996, as cited in Alcón & Jordà, 2008). Liu and Jackson (2011) emphasized the interwoven relation between motivation and proficiency by asserting that the more motivated the students, the more proficient they are.

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However, in some cases, advanced EFL learners with excellent knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and idioms, fail to communicate appropriately in different contexts due to their lack of pragmatic knowledge (Tabatabaei, 2020). Therefore, pragmatic competence, which is defined as a second or foreign language learner's ability to make use of the target language in different contexts (Nureddeen, 2008), has become a research trend in EFL/ESL context worldwide (Barron, 2003; Chiravate, 2019; Hussein et al., 2019; Rafieyan & Rozycki, 2019), as well as Iran (Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Farahian et al., 2012; Noroozi, 2012).

Review of Literature

Motivation in Language Learning

Elliot and Covington (2001) described motivation, which is a key component in learners' learning process, as a desire and willingness to repeat an action. Ahn (2007) stated that motivation could provide the initial desire to start second or foreign language learning and later protract the process of learning. In this way, the role of affective variables such as motivation becomes vital in language learning studies.

Investigations on motivation following EFL learners' orientation in classroom contexts drive researchers (Bower, 2019; Hong & Ganapathy, 2017; Liu, 2015; Papi & Hiver, 2020; Thompson & Va' Squez, 2015) to concentrate on motivation as one of the main elements in language education. Gardner and Lambert (1972) divided motivation into two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Worth mentioning that Gardner (2007) gave no priority to motivation types and claimed that compared to learners without motivational orientation, motivated learners seem to be more proficient in learning a language.

This issue has been widely accepted by scholars worldwide, and motivation has been highly emphasized in the field of language learning (Albrecht & Karabenick, 2018; Alqurashi, 2019; Borenić, 2017; Dakhi & Damanik, 2018; Geovanni et al., 2019; Ng & Ng, 2015; Kamaruddin et al., 2017; Kitikanan, 2019; Namaziandost et al., 2019; Nasihah & Cahyono, 2017; Nugroho et al., 2020; Oga-Baldwin & Fryer, 2020; Romadloni & Mantasiah, 2017; Salikin et al., 2017; Wallace & Leong, 2020; Yang & Ren, 2019). In foreign language education, several scholars have investigated the relationship between learners' motivation and reading (Dakhi & Damanik, 2018; Salikin et al., 2017), and learners' learning strategies, motivation, and writing achievement (Nasihah & Cahyono, 2017). Also, research in L2 motivation concerning EFL learners' pragmatic

knowledge was the focus of numerous research (Ahn, 2007; Bahous et al., 2011; Borenić, 2017; Kitikanan, 2019; Kosovich et al., 2017; Li et al., 2015; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Schmidt, 1993; Tagashira et al., 2011; Yang & Ren, 2019).

Among them, Li and his colleagues (2015) conducted a study on the relationship between Chinese EFL learners' motivation and pragmatic knowledge. The target population of this study was 85 (70 females and 15 males) junior English students aged between 20 to 23. In order to evaluate the participants' pragmatic awareness, the researcher performed the multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT). Findings showed that Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic awareness was at a low level. Also, motivation and pragmatic awareness were significantly correlated.

A few similar studies have been carried out in Iranian EFL context (Arabmofrad et al., 2019; Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013; Rasouli Khorshidi & Bagherzadeh, 2013; Vaezi, 2008). Rasouli Khorshidi and Bagherzadeh (2013) sought to investigate the effect of motivation orientation on interlanguage pragmatics (ILP). The selected participants based on the proficiency test were asked to complete the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) designed by Gardner (1985). Among all those students, 80 students with the highest scores were selected and classified into two groups of instrumental and integrative motivated learners. After a week, a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was run to evaluate students' pragmatic competence. In order to examine learners' interlanguage pragmatics, another DCT, designed by Jianda (2006), was performed in the next two weeks. The results of their study revealed that motivation and pragmatic knowledge are related. Moreover, integrative motivated learners' outperformed the instrumentally motivated learners.

Another study carried out by Arabmofrad et al. (2019) investigated meta-pragmatic awareness and general and specific pragmatic motivation among Iranian advanced EFL learners. 78 Iranian advanced EFL students (52 females and 26 males) and four native American speakers (two males and two females) were involved in this study. Iranian participants aged 16 to 32 and the Americans were between 17 to 50 years old. The American participants' answers to the meta-pragmatic awareness questionnaire were considered as the native speakers' norms. The data analysis revealed that Iranian EFL learners' meta-pragmatic awareness and pragmatic motivation are related.

Pragmatic in Language Learning

Several studies have been conducted on the role of motivation and language proficiency and their relationship and effect on pragmatic features (Al-Aghbari, 2016; Amjadiparvar & Zarrin, 2019; Chen, 2017; Chiravate, 2012; Hamidi & Khodareza, 2014; Khamyod & Aksornjarung, 2011; Malmir & Derakhshan, 2020; Rafieyan & Rozycki, 2019; Tabatabaei & Farnia, 2015; Tajeddin & Ebadi, 2011; Xiao, 2015).

One of the recent studies is Amjadiparvar and Zarrin (2019) examination of the relationship between EFL learners' level of language awareness, motivation, and their achievement. The participants of this study were 120 advanced EFL students from different English language institutes in Kurdistan province, Iran, who were ranged from 18 to 32. The researchers used a foreign language motivation questionnaire, a language achievement test, and a language awareness questionnaire as the instruments. The learners were given the questionnaires to take them home and respond to items since the researchers were not allowed to take the class time. The results of their study demonstrated that language awareness and motivation were significantly related. Moreover, EFL learners' level of language awareness and their achievement were positively correlated.

Likewise, Tabatabaei and Farnia (2015) examined EFL learners' language proficiency and pragmatic comprehension. To do so, they selected 95 Iranian students from different majors of law, commerce, physics, computer sciences, and psychology, studying at the University of Mysore, India. An Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was given to the participants to measure their general language knowledge. Among all 95 participants (42 females and 18 males), 30 high-proficient and 30 low-proficient students were identified. They were ranged between 23 to 40 years old. A language proficiency test, a Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT), and a Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCT) were three instruments used in this study. The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to start the research process and find out learners' proficiency level. In the second step, the MDCT test consisting of 12 situations was employed in 20 minutes, and the learners were asked to read each situation and choose the most appropriate answer for each item among four options. The analyzed data showed that both high and low-proficient groups performed almost the same in pragmatic comprehension. Therefore, they concluded that language proficiency does not affect learners' pragmatic comprehension.

In another study, Malmir and Derakhshan (2020) investigated the pragmatic comprehension strategies of 40 English Language Translation and English Language Teaching students (20 females and 20 males) at an Iranian university. The participants were juniors, seniors, and graduate students (18-26 years old) who were homogenized based on their performance on the TOEFL paper-delivered test. The data collection process started with the MDCT, and simultaneously, the 'concurrent verbal think-aloud protocols', as the main instrument of the study, were used to record the students' think-aloud while responding to the questions. The findings indicated that in order to help learners improve their second language pragmatic awareness, pragmatic comprehension strategies should explicitly be taught since it allows them to choose the words and structures that are appropriate and acceptable in the target language context.

Research in EFL/ESL concerning pragmatic competence (Perdhani, 2016) has indicated that communication failure and conveying meanings appropriately may also occur among advanced learners (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). In some cases, advanced language learners who have a high level of proficiency can not express themselves adequately (Idri, 2014). Misbah et al. (2017) explained that learners' engagement in the learning process needs necessary language skills and lack of these skills causes their constant struggles in conveying meaning and weak performance in the subjects. Furthermore, it is well known from educational psychology that students cannot always transfer their acquired knowledge and strategies in different contexts (Hajian, 2019). Therefore, improving second language pragmatic competence results in successful communication in the target language (Schmidt, 1993, as cited in Kasper, 1997).

As the above discussion has shown, pragmatic is a critical issue that has been discussed over time, and a bunch of available studies about pragmatic competence has revealed that their main focus was on pragmatic comprehension, grammatical errors, speech acts, among others. Also many studies have been carried out on the theory of motivation and its role in learning a new language and learners' proficiency level in the past few decades (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Cocca & Cocca, 2019; Guerrero, 2015; Yu, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020), but less attention has been paid to the role of motivation types (intrinsic and extrinsic) and proficiency in respect to learners' pragmatic knowledge which is a fundamental aspect of communicative competence (Nordquist, 2020). This issue has become a core competence in English language learn-

ing (Geovanni et al., 2019). Therefore, this study aims to evaluate Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge, proficiency level, and motivational types as three crucial factors in language learning.

Thus, the researchers formulated the following research questions to meet the end of the study:

RQ1: Is there any significant difference among Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge in terms of their motivation types (i.e., intrinsic and extrinsic)?

RQ2: Is there any significant difference among Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge in terms of their proficiency levels (i.e., elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate)?

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted to determine whether Iranian EFL university learners acquire the knowledge of the appropriate use of English to be a better interlocutor both in learning contexts and real-life situations. To this end, motivation and language proficiency levels were determined as independent variables, and pragmatic knowledge was considered as a dependent variable through a mixed-method study. The mixed-method study is a set of qualitative and quantitative designs and procedures that a researcher employs to collect and analyze data within the same study (Fàbregues et al., 2020). The mixed-method design combines the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Al-Aghbari, 2016). Considering this, data were collected and analyzed during two sequential phases of quantitative and qualitative.

Participants

The participants of this study were 56 B. A. junior and sophomore students majoring in English Translation Studies (N=27) and English Language and Literature (N=29) at two universities in Iran. The purposive non-random sampling technique was applied to recruit participants according to their majors and grades. This technique was selected for having a common characteristic or a set of characteristics, and it can be useful in circumstances when the researcher needs to reach the target participants quickly (Crossman, 2020). The participants' age ranged from eighteen to twenty (18-20). It is worth mentioning that the number of male participants was almost half of the female participants. The first researcher informed the participants that the research participation is entirely voluntary, and they receive no payment or reward for their participation.

Instruments

The researchers applied the following instruments to collect the required data:

The Mini-Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery (Mini-AMTB)

The researchers utilized the Mini-Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (Mini-AMTB) (English version) developed by Gardner (1985) as the first data collection instrument, which is consisted of 18 items. This questionnaire included three constructs: a) students' extrinsic motivation (7 items from 1 to 7), b) students' intrinsic motivation (5 items from 8 to 12), and c) students' attitudes towards learning English (6 items from 13 to 18). The Mini-AMTB is a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire ranging from strongly agree (1), moderately agree (2), neutral (3), moderately disagree (4), and strongly disagree (5). The questionnaire is applied in numerous studies (Ahn, 2007; Choubsaz & Choubsaz, 2014; Li, 2015), and the questionnaire reliability and validity were reported in the Iranian EFL context (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Choubsaz & Choubsaz, 2014; Vaezi, 2008). The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) coefficient of the instrument for this study was estimated as .73, which was also reported .79 by Gardner (1985).

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

In order to assess participants' knowledge of grammatical structures, functional language, vocabulary, and collocation in English, the researchers utilized the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) as the second instrument. The OPT is developed by the Oxford University Press and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate in 2001. The reliability of the test in this study was calculated as .79, which is close to other studies that conducted in the same context which was reported as .78 (Motallebzadeh, 2011).

Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)

The Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) was applied to examine participants' pragmatic competence through the dialogue completion type developed by Yuan (2012). The WDCT provides 20 situations for the participants. The situations are not interactional conversations. Each student read the situations carefully and gave an appropriate response based on the situations. In addition, the reliability of the WDCT in this study was calculated and reported as .87.

Procedure

The study was divided into two phases; 1) a quantitative phase and 2) a qualitative phase. The quantitative phase

was first performed to determine the participants' motivation towards learning English. The participants were given an oral explanation before conducting each test. The data collection procedure of each university started by administering mini-AMTB motivation questionnaire in a limited time (10 minutes given based on the previous studies in the field). Then, the learners were asked to complete the OPT. The OPT test was administered immediately after the motivation questionnaire within 60 minutes to determine whether learners' proficiency level, considering their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and speaking skills were the same. The obtained results were analyzed, and the participants were divided into two groups based on motivational orientations (intrinsic and extrinsic). Then, to find out learners' proficiency level, the results of their tests were analyzed, and three different groups of learners (intermediate, pre-intermediate, and elementary) were chosen.

Ten days later, the qualitative phase of the study was started. In this phase, the students were asked to participate in the session 15 minutes earlier so that the first researcher could once again explain detailed instructions about the test. The WDCT including 20 speech act scenarios (refusal, compliment, and apology) between two speakers, considering one as a lower, equal, or higher status person. The students were supposed to write what they would say or how they would respond to each of the situations for 40 minutes. To clarify each situation, the first researcher helped the participants make sure they understood all parts of the test during the completion process. Simultaneously, the students were asked to write down in English and as much as they think is appropriate to each situation. The explanations were given all in English. The students were informed that their information will be kept confidential and will be used only for academic purposes.

Results

The First Research Question

The first research question was aimed to investigate the difference among Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge in terms of their motivation types (i.e., intrinsic and extrinsic). An independent sample t-test was run to probe pragmatic knowledge between two motivational groups, intrinsic and extrinsic. Before running the analysis, the distribution assumption was checked. The distribution of the dependant variable should be normal (Kotz et al., 2005). Table 1 presents the normality of pragmatic knowledge.

Table 1. *Tests of Normality of Written Discourse Completion Test*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pragmatic	.089	56	.200*	.967	56	.134

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
Lilliefors Significance Correction

As shown in Table 1, the sig value of the Shapiro-Wilk test is greater than 0.05 (Sig=.134 > 0.05), meaning that the data is normally distributed. The results for the independent samples t-test and the descriptive statistics of motivation are depicted in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Motivation*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Motivation	Intrinsic	30	39.4333	15.13772	2.76376
	Extrinsic	26	48.9231	13.46083	2.63989

As Table 2 shows, the mean of the extrinsic group (48.9) was higher than the mean of the intrinsic group (39.4), and it proved that students who have extrinsic motivation (M=48.9, SD:13.4) performed better on the pragmatic test compared to those with intrinsic motivation (M= 39.4, SD:15.1).

Table 3. *Independent Samples Test of Motivation*

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means				
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean	Std. Error	Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	.638	.428	-2.462	54	.017	-9.48974	3.85459	-17.21772	-1.76176
Equal variances not assumed			-2.483	53.957	.016	-9.48974	3.82196	-17.15244	-1.82704

Also, the results of Levene's test are reported in Table 3, which is attested to the equity of the variances. An independent sample t-test was administered to check the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation groups. As shown in Table 3, the extrinsic group outperformed the intrinsic group ($t=-2.4$, $df=54$, $p=.017$, 2-tailed). The results of the above Tables illustrated the difference between the two groups ($t(54)=-2.46$, $p=.017$). Students who have an extrinsic orientation ($M=48.9$, $SD: 13.4$) performed better on the pragmatic test compared to those with intrinsic motivation ($M= 39.4$, $SD=15.1$).

The Second Research Question

The second research question looked into the possible differences among Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge in terms of their proficiency levels (i.e., elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate). Table 4 displays the descriptive analysis of language proficiency, and Table 5 shows the results of one-way ANOVA, which helps us to investigate the second research question.

Table 4. *Descriptive Analysis of Language Proficiency*

					95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
Proficiency Levels	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Max	Min
Elementary	19	41.4737	14.43133	3.31077	34.5180	48.4294	16.00	65.00
pre-intermediate	22	44.4545	16.52625	3.52341	37.1272	51.7819	16.00	72.00
Intermediate	15	45.933	14.05330	3.62855	38.1509	53.7158	21.00	67.00
Total	56	43.8393	15.03303	2.00887	39.8134	47.8652	16.00	72.00

Table 5. *One-Way ANOVA Test of Language Proficiency*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	180.429	2	90.214	.390	.679
Within Groups	12249.125	53	231.116		
Total	12429.554	55			

Following the results of descriptive analysis of language proficiency (Table 4), there is no significant difference between the three proficiency levels, i.e., Elementary ($M=41.47$, $SD=14.43$), Pre-intermediate ($M= 44.45$, $SD: 16.52$), and Intermediate ($M=45.93$, $SD=14.05$). Moreover, the results of one-way ANOVA in Table 5 indicates that students' proficiency level did not have any significant difference in their performance on the pragmatic test ($F(2, 53)=.39$, $p=.679$).

Discussion

Through the findings of the first research question, which dealt with the differences among students' pragmatic knowledge concerning motivation types, it could be inferred that the participants are extrinsically motivated, while based on the previous studies conducted in the field of motivation, learners who are intrinsically motivated in learning English perform better in their pragmatic test rather than their counterparts (Arabmofrad et al., 2019; Takahashi, 2005). In line with these findings, Samad et al. (2012) explored EFL learners' proficiency level and their motivation orientation. They stated that EFL learners are integratively motivated. Li et al. (2015) focused on Chinese EFL learners' pragmatic awareness in connection with motivation. Their research indicated a low level of pragmatic awareness among Chinese EFL learners. Consequently, the obtained results indicated motivation, specifically intrinsic motivation, is related to the learners' pragmatic knowledge.

Furthermore, the findings of the study nearly support Takahashi (2005), who examined the effects of motivation and proficiency in respect to pragma-linguistic awareness. His study revealed that the more the learners pay attention to the classroom activities, the more they realize target language communicative norms. Also, in this study, the exercises were organized in a way that learners considered them as the great language proficiency improvement material.

Besides, Takahashi (2005) obtained two more major findings about learners: (1) the target language pragma-linguistic features are perceived differently; and (2) while learners' pragmatic awareness features were correlated with motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, there was no correlation with learners' proficiency. Above all, intrinsic motivation was the affective variable on learners' pragmatic knowledge. All-mentioned findings demonstrate that motivation has a significant effect on learners' pragmatic awareness. Without practical exercises and interactions, it would be difficult for learners to fully understand the target language norms even if they become highly proficient.

The second research question results showed that there is no difference among learners' pragmatic knowledge regarding their proficiency level, but also a high level of proficiency does not necessarily indicate learners' ability to apply their pragmatic knowledge appropriately in the authentic contexts. Concerning proficiency level and pragmatic knowledge, the findings also support the study of pragmatic and language proficiency

conducted by Tabatabaei and Farnia (2015). The results of their study revealed that high and low proficient groups performed almost the same in pragmatic knowledge and comprehension. Also, far from researchers' expectations, pragmatic knowledge didn't affect learners' language proficiency. The students' low scores in pragmatic tests could suggest their weakness in pragmatic knowledge. In line with this study, the findings of Dehghayedi and Sadighi's (2015) study also indicated the insignificant differences between the three proficiency groups' performance (high, mid, and low proficient) on the Discourse Completion Test. It was concluded that pragmatic failure could occur in an interaction between individuals with different proficiency levels. That is, even high proficient students could not perform well in situations where pragmatic comprehension was needed and they sometimes committed pragmatic failures which were considered rude in some cases.

Conclusion

Iranian EFL learners mostly have no chance to interact with native speakers or use their knowledge in authentic situations. Hence, this study was conducted to determine whether Iranian EFL university learners who have the least opportunity to use their acquired knowledge of English or the lowest level of interaction with native speakers in real situations can perform well or not. Thus, the primary goal of this study was to investigate the differences among Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge with regard to their motivation types. The findings revealed that the students who are extrinsically motivated had better performance in their pragmatic test. Moreover, results showed that there is no significant difference among learners' proficiency levels in terms of pragmatic knowledge use.

One of the most important aspects determining success in learning English is motivation. As Gardner (1985) stated, several factors influence learners' motivation, such as student's personal characteristics, teachers, classroom environment, contents, and materials. Therefore, the courses adapted in teaching the English language across the curriculum should be offered according to learners' motivational orientation, and learners should be interested and become decisive in learning a foreign language.

As mentioned, the universities should switch traditional English language classes to more integrative ones to motivate learners and allow them to be partially or totally engaged in their learning process. English

courses at universities should arrange favorable circumstances for learners to participate in choosing the contents. Consequently, English instructors should rethink the university programs to consider learners' needs. To do so, student-oriented activities can do more than just extending their speaking time, and they will find some time to increase their pragmatic competence. Also, it will give them some chances to perform conversational and communicative activities and interact with others in completing a task (Kasper, 1997).

However, even teacher-oriented classrooms offer some pragmatic competence activities. Teachers' management has a significant influence on learners' learning process because, in that case, language becomes a means for communication. Classrooms should be managed in L2 to provide learners' authentic opportunities to interact in English. Eventually, being aware of such problems and solutions can contribute to EFL teachers and learners' ingenious ideas about classroom activities.

To understand all dimensions of motivation, language proficiency, and pragmatic knowledge, the researchers believe that they have a great deal to do with teachers and learners. Having a better understanding of the issue and its different variations, we can draw a more advantageous and standard plan for the language. To this end, language teachers and scholars who have common goals and concerns must cooperate with each other.

Thus, the researchers recommend more in-depth research on students' pragmatic knowledge in L2 English language classes at the university level. This study was focused on monolingual and bilingual EFL learners, and no comparison was made to find out whether there is any significant difference among these two types of learners. Therefore, it is suggested that further studies should focus on raising the pragmatic awareness of bilingual learners.

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ANÁLISIS DE NECESIDADES DE LA ENSEÑANZA DEL ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA EN UNA UNIVERSIDAD MEXICANA

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Resumen

El análisis de necesidades comúnmente se ha definido como un proceso que puede ayudar a profesores y estudiantes a identificar, entender y atender de manera exitosa los retos de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje con la finalidad de mejorar su desempeño pedagógico y lingüístico, respectivamente. Con base en esto, el presente artículo muestra los resultados de un análisis de necesidades que se realizó en una universidad mexicana con el objetivo de conocer las necesidades que se viven en relación con la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera. Un grupo de nueve profesores de español para extranjeros fueron entrevistados para conocer su perspectiva sobre la situación de la enseñanza del español en este contexto. A través de un análisis temático, las respuestas de los profesores mostraron perspectivas positivas hacia la enseñanza del español y el contexto donde lo enseñan. Asimismo, sus respuestas mostraron algunas necesidades que desde su perspectiva deben ser atendidas para mejorar la enseñanza del español en este contexto. Este artículo muestra las ventajas de utilizar un análisis de necesidades para identificar áreas de oportunidad con el objetivo de mejorar la educación del español como lengua extranjera en nuestro país.

Palabras clave: Análisis de necesidades, español como lengua extranjera, enseñanza del español, retos, universidad mexicana.

Abstract

Needs analysis has been commonly defined as a process which helps educators and students identify, understand

and address challenges with a view to improving teaching and learning performance. Based upon this, the present article reports on a needs analysis which was conducted at a Mexican state university in order to understand the needs concerning Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) teaching. A group of nine SFL teachers were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews in order to understand their perspectives on SFL teaching in this context. Through a thematic analysis, the teachers' responses indicated positive perspectives on SFL teaching and the context where they teach it. Moreover, their responses suggested several needs which they felt have to be addressed in order to improve SFL teaching in this context. This article shows the benefits of using needs analysis to identify areas of opportunity and solutions which could enhance SFL education in Mexico.

Key words: Challenges, Needs analysis, Mexican university, Spanish as a foreign language, Spanish teaching.

Introducción

El español es una de las lenguas más importantes del mundo con casi 500 millones de personas que la hablan como lengua materna. Esto lo constata el Instituto Cervantes cuando reporta que el español tiene aproximadamente 472 millones de nativo hablantes en el mundo (Instituto Cervantes, 2018). El número de hablantes del español como lengua materna, segunda lengua y lengua extranjera alcanza 567 millones de hablantes. Además, el español es hablado por el 8% de la población mundial y se espera que el porcentaje se mantenga hasta el 2050. Asimismo, el español es la lengua con la que se comunican 21 países del mundo.

Los países que hablan español representan un 6.4% del PIB mundial. La tasa de crecimiento de la producción científica en Latinoamérica ha sido del 128% desde el año 2003. Casi el 5% de las páginas de internet multilingües utilizan el español (Centro de Estudios Internacionales Gilberto Bosques, 2018). El español tiene una gran importancia en las redes sociales y es la tercera lengua más popular entre los usuarios del internet. Es el

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segundo idioma más hablado en Facebook, solamente superado por el inglés, y el tercero más utilizado en Twitter. Por el rol que juega en áreas políticas, sociales, académicas y particularmente laborales, el creciente interés en el español como lengua extranjera ha ocasionado que la matrícula incrementa año con año y así crezca la demanda de cursos de español. (Moreno-Fernández, 1995). Por estas razones, más de 21 millones de personas estudian español en el mundo actualmente (Morales, 2017).

Considerando los puntos anteriores, podríamos asegurar que la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del español se fortalecen cada vez más en contextos de segunda lengua y lengua extranjera (Pérez y González, 2008). Sin embargo, en México la situación de la enseñanza y aprendizaje del español como lengua extranjera ha sido un área poco explorada por las instituciones de educación superior pública (Gómez et al, 2017). Además, las instituciones que se dedican a promover y homologar la enseñanza y aprendizaje del español son pocas. Con base en nuestro conocimiento, no son más de diez instituciones públicas las que ofertan la enseñanza de español de manera continua. En nuestro país, la institución más conocida que ofrece enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera es el Centro de Enseñanza de Español para Extranjeros (CEPE) de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Esta institución oferta cursos para la enseñanza de español a extranjeros, pero las actividades que desarrolla no son suficientes para cubrir las necesidades de otras instituciones educativas públicas en el país (Velázquez-Vilchis y García-Ponce, 2021). Otra institución que ofrece enseñanza del español es el contexto donde tuvo lugar el presente estudio. La institución forma parte de la Universidad de Guanajuato en el centro de México. Esta institución ofrece cursos de español para extranjeros en horarios matutinos y vespertinos entre semana y fines de semana. Uno de los problemas que enfrentan estas universidades públicas es que cada vez hay un número mayor de extranjeros que se interesan en aprender la lengua (Díaz, 2016) y esto a su vez incrementa la demanda.

Para promover y fortalecer la enseñanza y aprendizaje del español en instituciones mexicanas es importante hacer una exploración de la situación lingüística del español, su pedagogía y los esfuerzos administrativos que giran alrededor de la lengua con la finalidad de identificar necesidades y así poder tomar decisiones adecuadas para la enseñanza local. Para contribuir a esto, el objetivo de la presente investigación es presentar un análisis de necesidades a través de las voces de los profesores que se dedican a la enseñanza del español para extranjeros en este contexto.

La situación del español como lengua extranjera

Recientemente, la globalización ha motivado cambios sustanciales en actividades políticas, sociales, académicas y, particularmente, laborales. Debido a este fenómeno político-económico, varios países en el mundo han apostado a la inversión de compañías internacionales que continuamente buscan recursos humanos capaces de comunicarse en varias lenguas extranjeras (Pérez y González, 2008; García-Ponce, 2020). Anteriormente, era posible insertarse en el campo laboral sin poseer conocimientos de otras lenguas diferentes a la lengua materna. En la actualidad, es necesario que los profesionistas demuestren contar con conocimientos disciplinares y un alto dominio en al menos una segunda lengua.

El fenómeno de la globalización ha tenido un gran impacto en las prácticas académicas que se realizan en instituciones de educación superior para promover la internacionalización (Knight, 2010). Debido a esto, en las universidades se ha intentado fomentar la investigación, la producción científica y las redes de calidad internacional (García-Ponce, 2020). Entonces, ha sido necesaria la formación profesional de recursos humanos que sean capaces de desempeñarse en varios ámbitos disciplinares y lingüísticos. Un punto clave para lograr esto ha sido la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas (Romo et al, 2005), pues son consideradas instrumentos que permiten la comunicación, relaciones internacionales y la inserción laboral. Un ejemplo es el español, el cual ha recibido considerable atención debido al interés de que países latinoamericanos participen en mercados internacionales competitivos (García-Ponce, 2020). La importancia del español en ámbitos socioeconómicos sin duda ha impactado en que personas extranjeras se interesen en aprender la lengua y la cultura (Pérez y González, 2008), ya que el español progresivamente se ha asociado con la vanguardia de desarrollos científicos, tecnológicos, económicos y culturales en nuestro país y otros países de Latinoamérica. Particularmente, las relaciones políticas y económicas que mantiene Latinoamérica con países de primer mundo han motivado que un número ascendente de hablantes se interesen en aprender el español como lengua extranjera (Díaz, 2016).

Gracias al interés de personas extranjeras por aprender la lengua, el español se ha posicionado como una lengua de gran importancia dentro de las segundas lenguas (Quintero et al, 2014). Asimismo, las universidades en varios contextos latinoamericanos han notado la necesidad de tener programas educativos que enseñen el español como lengua extranjera, así como preparar y contar con docentes que posean conocimientos sólidos de la enseñanza del español con calidad interna-

cional, centrada en el estudiante y con base en valores institucionales. En México, aún existe la necesidad de programas que ofrezcan la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del español como lengua extranjera. La realidad en nuestro país es que existen pocos programas en universidades públicas que ofrecen estos cursos con validez internacional. Entonces, el número de estos programas aún no es suficiente para satisfacer las necesidades de personas extranjeras que vienen a nuestro país para desarrollar competencias lingüísticas del español y conocer más sobre nuestra cultura. Por otro lado, países latinoamericanos como México han registrado un número bajo de estudiantes del español como lengua extranjera en comparación con España (Quintero et al., 2014). La razón de esto ha sido la falta de una planificación lingüística, así como una limitada flexibilización, internalización y recursos tecnológicos que permitan promocionar la enseñanza y aprendizaje del español (Ferreira, 2016). Ante esto, es necesario realizar una examinación de la enseñanza y aprendizaje del español en nuestras instituciones públicas con la intención de identificar necesidades y atenderlas para potencializar los recursos pedagógicos que tenemos en las universidades.

El presente estudio tiene el objetivo de examinar las necesidades que docentes perciben en cuanto a la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera en una institución que forma parte de la Universidad de Guanajuato donde se ofrecen cursos de español para extranjeros y otras lenguas. La relevancia de este estudio es que da cuenta de la situación actual del español en una institución de educación superior en México desde una perspectiva de la enseñanza. Asimismo, muestra las necesidades que observan profesores y que pueden ser de relevancia para otras instituciones de educación superior en nuestro país.

El estudio de necesidades

De acuerdo con Català (2017), el análisis de necesidades se utilizó por primera vez en la década de los 20s por Michael West quien trabajó la relación del porqué y cómo los estudiantes deberían aprender el inglés. Con mayor fuerza en los 90, este tipo de análisis comenzó a tomar relevancia, pues, como lo asegura Wilkins (1979), la especificación de objetivos curriculares y pedagógicos “se basará en un análisis de las necesidades de los alumnos” (p. 55).

Existen muchas definiciones de lo que es un análisis de necesidades. Sin embargo, consideramos que la siguiente definición precisa la idea central de esta técnica:

El análisis de necesidades se refiere a las técnicas para recolectar y evaluar información que sea relevante para diseñar cursos: es el medio de establecer el cómo y el qué de un curso. Es un proceso continuo, puesto que la enseñanza se puede modificar cuando se sabe más sobre los estudiantes y de esta manera, se ve reflejada en la evaluación, el medio de establecer la efectividad de un curso. (Hyland, 2006, citado en Paltridge y Starfield, 2013, p.325) (traducción del autor)

De manera similar, Iwai et al (1999) definen al análisis de necesidades como las actividades para recolectar información que servirá como base para desarrollar un currículo que satisfará las necesidades lingüísticas y pedagógicas de un grupo de estudiantes. Como lo sugieren las definiciones anteriores, la técnica de análisis de necesidades se ha utilizado comúnmente para distinguir necesidades para atender y promover el desarrollo lingüístico de estudiantes. Sin embargo, como veremos en esta sección, el análisis de necesidades también puede ser utilizado para analizar los medios para lograr los objetivos lingüísticos, como, por ejemplo, los factores relacionados con la enseñanza y recursos pedagógicos.

En general, un análisis de necesidades se utiliza para diferentes propósitos. En la educación, un análisis de necesidades busca establecer qué se requiere que los actores hagan con respecto a la educación de lenguas (West, 1994). Además, un análisis de necesidades puede ser útil para evaluar programas de lenguas y, de ser necesarios, se pueden realizar cambios los cuales coincidan con necesidades de estudiantes y el logro que se espera que tengan con respecto a la lengua meta. En relación con esto, Richards (1990) argumenta que un análisis de necesidades puede ser de utilidad para la planeación de cursos y programas de lenguas. Otros beneficios del análisis de necesidades es que puede proporcionar información valiosa sobre las perspectivas, creencias y percepciones de estudiantes y profesores. Esta información entonces puede ser adaptada para diseñar estrategias que promuevan el logro de objetivos pedagógicos (Pushpanathan, 2013). Con base en esto, Tudor (1996) mantiene que un análisis de necesidades es pertinente para explorar cursos de lengua.

En la literatura, podemos observar que varios enfoques de análisis de necesidades se han propuesto dependiendo los objetivos (véase, por ejemplo, Català, 2017; Hutchinson y Waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997; Robinson, 1991; entre otros). Por ejemplo, enfoques como: el análisis de la situación meta, que investiga los usos de la lengua en situaciones de propósitos específicos. El análisis

lisis de la situación actual que pretende analizar lo que los estudiantes pueden hacer con la lengua al final del curso. Mientras que el análisis de carencias que examina las diferencias entre lo que los estudiantes pueden hacer al principio y al final del curso de lengua. Otros términos son el análisis de necesidades de aprendizaje, proceso que busca las diferencias individuales, estrategias y estilos de aprendizaje de estudiantes con respecto a la lengua. El análisis de los medios que busca “los factores que pueden afectar la programación del curso: la disponibilidad, las instalaciones, los equipos, los materiales y otros recursos, a su vez, muestra las actitudes culturales y los niveles de competencia de los profesores (su formación y capacidad de enseñanza) en términos de limitaciones y fortalezas” (Català, 2017, p.100).

Para el propósito de este estudio, un enfoque de Análisis de los Medios fue adoptado para conocer las necesidades sobre la enseñanza del español en un contexto determinado, pues, como lo asegura Català (2017), el objetivo de este enfoque es identificar “cuáles son las restricciones y fortalezas contextuales, esto es, la información sobre el entorno en el que se realizará el curso” (p.1).

Con base en lo anterior, y para poder mejorar la enseñanza del español, es necesario conocer las necesidades que tienen algunos de sus actores. Sin embargo, la presente institución no cuenta con información sistematizada sobre los esfuerzos que se implementan para mejorar la situación del español como lengua extranjera al interior del espacio académico. Para atender esto, en 2020 se llevó a cabo la presente investigación para vislumbrar la situación de la enseñanza de español para extranjeros a través de un análisis de necesidades. Creemos que la información recuperada y resultados del presente estudio servirán para formular estrategias de mejora en este contexto.

Metodología

Para llevar a cabo el análisis de necesidades de este estudio, se siguieron los principios de la investigación cualitativa. Dörnyei (2007) explica que la investigación cualitativa se enfoca en opiniones subjetivas, experiencias y sentimientos de individuos y su principal objetivo es explorar las perspectivas de los participantes sobre una situación dada. Entonces, una perspectiva cualitativa nos permitió estudiar las necesidades de los participantes en cuanto a la enseñanza del español en su contexto, con el propósito de interpretar el fenómeno en términos de los significados que proporcionan los participantes (Denzin y Lincoln, 2000). Para lograr esto, Denzin y Lincoln (2000) sugieren que hay un número de herra-

mientas que el investigador puede utilizar para describir las experiencias y perspectivas de los participantes. De acuerdo con esto, se aplicaron entrevistas semiestructuradas (véase sección Instrumento y Participantes).

El contexto

La institución se encuentra ubicada en la zona centro de México y ofrece programas a nivel medio superior y superior. Los programas van desde niveles de preparatoria, licenciatura, maestría y hasta doctorado en cuatro campus ubicados en varios puntos del Estado de Guanajuato. La institución goza de prestigio en Latinoamérica, pues se encuentra ubicada entre las 100 mejores universidades de Latinoamérica y del Caribe de acuerdo con el Ranking Iberoamericano SIR 2012 (SCImago Research Group, 2012). En México, de 264 universidades evaluadas, la institución se ubicó entre las diez mejores del país. Con base en esto, podemos decir que la educación que ofrece esta institución se distingue por su excelencia a nivel nacional e internacional.

La institución cuenta con un área de enseñanza de lenguas, como el inglés, francés, alemán, japonés y el español como lengua extranjera. En cuanto al español, los cursos se ofertan cada semestre y han sido populares entre extranjeros de diferentes nacionalidades. Sin embargo, como muchas universidades en México, la institución se ha visto afectada por la inseguridad en años recientes, lo que ha hecho que el número de estudiantes extranjeros esté disminuyendo. Asimismo, por las condiciones de pandemia en 2020, los extranjeros que se encontraban estudiando en la institución regresaron a sus países de origen y esto ocasionó que la matrícula de estudiantes extranjeros disminuyera hasta la fecha de elaboración de este artículo.

Participantes e Instrumento

Todos los docentes (12) del español para extranjeros en este instituto fueron invitados para participar en el estudio. Entonces, el tipo de muestreo fue intencional o por juicio, es decir, se invitó específicamente a los profesores quienes estaban impartiendo clases de español en el momento de la investigación. Según Otzen y Manteola (2017), el muestreo intencional (o por juicio) “[p]ermite seleccionar casos característicos de una población limitando la muestra solo a estos casos. Se utiliza en escenarios en las que la población es muy variable y consiguientemente la muestra es muy pequeña” (p.230). Solo nueve participantes (siete mujeres y un hombre expresaron su interés en participar en el estudio. La antigüedad de los participantes en la institución iba de un año a 30 años de experiencia en aula. En este estudio, se

utilizan seudónimos para referirse a los participantes de la siguiente manera:

Participante	Seudónimo
1	María
2	Tanya
3	Aranza
4	Juan
5	Rosa
6	Irasema
7	Lisa
8	Martha
9	Beatriz

Tabla 1: Descripción de seudónimos en el estudio

Después de haberles explicado el estudio y su participación, los participantes dieron su consentimiento para participar y utilizar los datos que proporcionaron.

Recolección de datos

Existen varias formas para recopilar información en el análisis de necesidades. Los instrumentos que normalmente se utilizan son: la entrevista, encuesta, diálogo y negociación (Català, 2017). Para realizar el análisis de necesidades en este estudio, se aplicaron entrevistas semiestructuradas. De acuerdo con Català (2017), las entrevistas tienen que realizarse cara a cara para tener un contacto directo con el entrevistado. Para ella, las entrevistas en el análisis de necesidades “brinda la posibilidad de solucionar o aclarar *in situ* cuestiones que vayan surgiendo en la entrevista o que hayan surgido en algún otro tipo de análisis anterior” (p.108). Asimismo, las entrevistas se realizaron de manera individual, pues, como lo sugiere Català (2017), “se mantiene la forma personal y privada, por lo que el entrevistado puede sincerarse” (p.108).

Las entrevistas tuvieron el objetivo de conocer con mayor detalle la situación que viven los diferentes responsables de la enseñanza en la institución. Las entrevistas abordaron diferentes áreas divididas en secciones. La primera sección incluyó ítems para obtener información personal, como edad, sexo y educación. La segunda sección se enfocó en funciones que se llevan a cabo, las fortalezas que existen, así como las necesidades que perciben. La última sección incluyó un espacio para que los profesores dieran su opinión general sobre el proceso de enseñanza - aprendizaje en la institución, así como

recomendaciones para la mejora de la enseñanza. Para la confiabilidad y validez del guion de la entrevista, se invitó a tres expertos jueces que no formaron parte de la investigación. Los jueces evaluaron el instrumento, su estructura y contenido en relación con los objetivos de la investigación. Con base en sus sugerencias, se hicieron los cambios pertinentes y el instrumento final fue aprobado por los tres jueces para su aplicación.

Para el análisis de los datos, se siguieron las recomendaciones de Miles y Huberman (1994) para transcribir, familiarizarse con los datos, codificarlos y organizarlos. Primero, todas las entrevistas fueron grabadas con audio y transcritas en Word. Posteriormente, utilizamos el software MaxQDA para realizar un análisis temático. Decidimos realizar un análisis temático porque es una técnica de utilidad para identificar temas, patrones y significados (Berg, 2009). Entonces, fue necesario identificar y delimitar segmentos de lenguaje que mostraban unidades de significado que se relacionaban con las percepciones, experiencias y necesidades de los participantes sobre la enseñanza del español en este contexto. Después, con la ayuda del software MaxQDA, enlistamos los temas que surgieron de los datos y los organizamos para su análisis. Como se verá en la siguiente sección, los temas de mayor prominencia indican las percepciones de los participantes sobre las fortalezas y necesidades de la enseñanza del español en este contexto.

Resultados

En general, los datos que se recolectaron muestran diversas perspectivas de los participantes sobre la enseñanza del español. Por un lado, sus perspectivas muestran algunas fortalezas que pudieron identificar sobre la situación del español en este contexto. Por otro lado, era evidente que varias de sus contribuciones durante las entrevistas apuntaban a varias necesidades las cuales nosotros describimos como contextuales. Por último, y con base en las necesidades que comunicaron, los participantes compartieron algunas sugerencias para mejorar y promover la situación de la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera en esta institución pública.

Fortalezas

Durante las entrevistas, los profesores mencionaron estar satisfechos con las clases de español como lengua extranjera y los apoyos que ofrece la institución en cuanto a becas, instalaciones y apoyos. Esto lo corrobora Juan quien menciona lo siguiente:

En la institución hay muchos programas de becas. Se me hace que cada vez hay más posibili-

dades de becas para los alumnos y también el programa de tutoría académica para extranjeros. Eso también es una forma para que los alumnos tengan una forma de apoyo individual. En su desarrollo académico si piden apoyo existe esta herramienta.

Juan

Los docentes que dan clase a los estudiantes extranjeros son jóvenes y novatos quienes cuentan con mucho entusiasmo para enseñar la lengua, lo que los lleva a innovar en las clases y a afrontar cualquier obstáculo que se les presente en beneficio de sus alumnos extranjeros. Por otro lado, otra fortaleza que se mencionó en las entrevistas fue la planta docente y su relación con los estudiantes, como se detalla abajo:

Son profesores muy responsables, amables y profesionales. Los estudiantes se sienten cómodos. Es una planta docente joven, eso ayuda. El mayor logro, pues es tal vez el desarrollo de los estudiantes.

Rosa

Damos un buen seguimiento con los temas y tenemos tiempo... Bueno, nunca es suficiente tiempo para generar o ayudar a que el estudiante realmente pueda adquirir, ¿no?

Tanya

Como se puede ver en estas contribuciones, se describe a los profesores como profesionales “responsables, amables y profesionales” (*Rosa*) y, como también lo menciona esta participante, estas características de los profesores impactan en el desarrollo del aprendizaje de los estudiantes y a su vez en los indicadores. Lo interesante de esta afirmación es que los profesores coincidieron que ellos mantienen una relación positiva con los estudiantes.

Por otro lado, los profesores mencionaron que reciben apoyos de materiales y recursos tecnológicos para impartir sus clases. Esto, para ellos, es otra fortaleza de enseñar el español en este contexto:

Sí, recibimos materiales. Se nos apoya con todos los materiales que vayamos necesitando: hojas de colores, hojas blancas, rotafolios, marcadores, tijeras, *resistol*. Todo eso lo proporciona la promotora.

Lisa

Tenemos los equipos de cómputo también en las oficinas. Entonces, tenemos designado algunos equipos y hay algunos que comparten.

Tanya

De forma general, se puede señalar que la universidad cuida que los extranjeros que reciben tengan muy buena atención académica y personal durante su estadía para aprender la lengua. Sin embargo, como detallaremos a continuación, los participantes mencionaron un número de necesidades que percibieron en cuanto a la enseñanza del español en este contexto. No es el propósito de este artículo presentar y discutir una lista extensiva de las necesidades; sin embargo, nuestra intención es enfocarnos en aquellas que creemos que son de mayor relevancia para mejorar la enseñanza de la lengua en este contexto.

Necesidades

Falta de materiales para la enseñanza

Durante las entrevistas con los profesores, era claro que utilizan diversos recursos para poder realizar sus prácticas de enseñanza de la lengua. Por ejemplo, algunos profesores aseguraron lo siguiente:

Me gusta tomar actividades en las que ellos desarrollan competencias. Siempre les gusta competir a los estudiantes. Entonces trato de involucrarlos en esas cosas, redacciones, lecturas, comprensión. Tengo algunos libros de ejercicios y los utilizo. Realmente yo creo mi material, o sea hago mis oraciones.

Rosa

Trato de utilizar diferentes tipos de medios. También utilizo internet porque por el momento es lo que más tenemos a la mano. Libros como tal utilizo varios. Incluso hay libros que no son realmente como para profesores de enseñanza de español como lengua extranjera, pero los adapto para que los alumnos pues tengan un poquito más de material con el cual trabajar. También, imágenes para que sean como más visual, por esto de las estrategias de aprendizaje.

Aranza

Sin embargo, una de las mayores necesidades identificadas por los profesores es la falta de materiales didácticos que los obliga a desarrollar sus propios materiales para cada clase. Algunos profesores comentaron lo siguiente:

Creo que esta parte de los recursos es algo que sí complica un poco porque encontrar cualquier material en internet... no puede agarrar uno cualquiera y es muy complicado eso. Hay que revisarlo bien. Los recursos que tenemos en la escuela no sirven.

María

[Crear material] es un poco cansado porque de hecho en línea no hay mucho material disponible o sea solamente esta, o sea hay material, pero es de, del español, pero no de México.

Aranza

Entonces, vemos que una de las mayores necesidades que enfrentan estos profesores es el acceso a recursos didácticos que les permitan enseñar el español. Como lo mencionan, el contexto donde enseñan no cuenta actualmente con materiales suficientes para enseñar el español de México (*María*). Esto hace que busquen materiales en internet o bien diseñen los propios; sin embargo, como lo asegura *María*, la selección de materiales de internet no es una tarea fácil. Entonces, para facilitar la enseñanza del español en este contexto, y quizás otros en México, sería importante contar con el diseño y recursos de materiales que les permitan a profesores realizar sus prácticas de enseñanza con base en sus principios pedagógicos.

Contratos y carga laboral de profesores

Otra necesidad que se mencionó durante las entrevistas se relaciona con la estabilidad laboral en este contexto. Por ejemplo, *Beatriz* explica lo siguiente:

Cuando se nos contrata sabemos que somos de contrato y no hemos recibido mucha información sobre qué hacer para obtener definitividad [permanencia laboral]. Lo único que sé es que por ser cursos de educación continua es complicado porque necesitas tener estudiantes continuamente y como estos cursos realmente no aseguran.

Beatriz

En esta contribución, podemos ver la perspectiva de la profesora con respecto a la estabilidad laboral y la falta de posibilidades para ser contratados de forma definitiva. Esto a su vez deja entrever la necesidad de los profesores de ser contratados de manera permanente. Por lo tanto, podemos inferir que en este contexto a los profesores de español como lengua ex-

tranjera se les contrata bajo contratos temporales. La misma profesora asegura que los contratos definitivos no pueden ser posibles por la inestabilidad en cuanto a la matrícula de estudiantes que reciben en estos cursos. Como veremos más adelante, el número bajo de extranjeros interesados en tomar el español como lengua extranjera influye asimismo en las oportunidades que estos profesores tienen para recibir contratos frecuentemente.

Por otro lado, tres de los participantes mencionaron que experimentan sobrecarga de trabajo y que esto a su vez impacta en la calidad de su enseñanza:

Yo hago como ochenta. Yo trabajo todos los días. Llego a mi casa y sigo trabajando hora y media revisando trabajos. Esto influye en cómo enseñamos.

Tanya

Sí, soy profesora de tiempo completo. Entonces imparto N materias por semestre y tiene sus lados positivos y negativos. Cada semestre me toca dar nuevas materias. Entonces es mucho tiempo de preparación la verdad y no es lo mismo como dar una materia de la cual eres un especialista.

Irasema

Porque tengo alumnos de tesis ahorita, tengo alumnos de servicio social profesional, servicio social universitario que estoy apoyando también, organizamos eventos académicos, hacemos investigación.

Aranza

Como lo muestran estos extractos, los profesores señalan que experimentan una carga excesiva de trabajo en este contexto. La relevancia de esto es que los profesores argumentan que la carga de trabajo que experimentan influye en la calidad de su enseñanza, como se aprecia en “Esto influye en cómo enseñamos” (*Tanya*) y “es mucho tiempo de preparación la verdad y no es lo mismo como dar una materia de la cual eres un especialista” (*Irasema*).

Baja matrícula de estudiantes extranjeros

Otra necesidad que los profesores mencionaron en las entrevistas es la matrícula decreciente de estudiantes extranjeros en los cursos de español por razones contextuales que a continuación se presentan.

Creo que anteriormente había más extranjeros. Últimamente ha disminuido el número. Sí me había tocado antes observar clases y había mínimo unos veinte estudiantes. Entonces sí ya ha bajado mucho.

Juan

Yo creo que sí son muy pocos estudiantes. Me han comentado que hace algunos años, venían muchos más estudiantes que ahora. Entonces, ahora pues en cada grupo, tenemos máximo seis estudiantes y antes los grupos me comentaban que eran incluso de veinte, veinticinco estudiantes.

Beatriz

Los profesores perciben como una necesidad que debe atenderse es la matrícula decreciente de estudiantes extranjeros en este contexto. Esto, para ellos, se traduce en la necesidad de incrementar el número de estudiantes para así incrementar sus oportunidades laborales. Como lo veremos más adelante, los profesores aseguran que el número bajo de estudiantes en cursos de español se debe mayormente a la inseguridad y a la pandemia sanitaria que vivimos actualmente. Los profesores por lo tanto hacen un llamado para darle mayor difusión a los cursos para incrementar sus posibilidades de enseñar el español como lengua extranjera.

Inseguridad en México y el COVID19

Como se mencionó anteriormente, los participantes percibieron la matrícula baja de estudiantes como una necesidad que debe atenderse. Asimismo, durante las entrevistas se discutieron dos de las razones de la matrícula baja que a continuación se presentan en esta sección.

Por lo de la COVID, tuvimos así un bajón terrible, terrible. Les pidieron a nuestros chicos de Estados Unidos que se fueran y se fueron a la mitad del semestre

Tanya

Sí, notamos a partir de ahí un descenso, especialmente en estos estudiantes de Norteamérica.

Aranza

Como vemos en estos extractos, los participantes expresan que la disminución de la matrícula de estudiantes extranjeros ha sido causada por la pandemia de coronavirus que se vive actualmente en el mundo, como se muestra en “Por lo de la COVID tuvimos así un bajón terrible” (Tanya). Sin embargo, los participantes asegu-

raron que la inseguridad en el Estado de Guanajuato también ha influido en la disminución de la matrícula de estudiantes extranjeros, como lo muestran los siguientes segmentos:

Esto es por la violencia que existe en México y más en el Estado últimamente. Hemos visto que está muy afectado por el narcotráfico. Entonces, aunado a eso, bueno pues ya vimos el COVID.

María

Si ha disminuido... los estudiantes que vienen a estudiar español pues han disminuido ¿no? Por esta razón... porque muchas veces no quieren venir porque piensan que es muy peligroso.

Aranza

Desafortunadamente, el escenario de la inseguridad y que en las últimas fechas Guanajuato se ha visto con focos rojos a nivel internacional porque tenemos delincuencia y este tipo de cosas. En la ciudad como tal no existe tanto, pero en las noticias dicen Guanajuato como Estado y la gente creo que es el municipio ¿no? Entonces, eso nos ha hecho mala publicidad, honestamente.

Rosa

De forma general, es evidente que las opiniones de los participantes sobre cómo la inseguridad que se ha vivido en el Estado de Guanajuato ha impactado en la matrícula de estudiantes que anteriormente se tenía. Al utilizar adjetivos como “afectado” (María), “peligroso” (Aranza) y “mal publicidad” (Rosa), los profesores dejan entrever sus perspectivas negativas hacia esta situación. Es probable que los participantes hayan mencionado la disminución de la matrícula como una necesidad a atender porque la matrícula baja se traduce en menos oportunidades de trabajo para estos profesores. Durante las entrevistas, fue interesante escuchar las propuestas de los participantes para atender la matrícula baja a causa de la inseguridad. Por ejemplo, Tanya explicó lo siguiente:

Para atraer a los extranjeros, hay que asegurarles que relativamente es una ciudad segura, que no existen los balazos en las calles o los secuestros como ellos piensan. Entonces, eso pues atraerá a los extranjeros como antes, pero lo que ha afectado al Estado, no sólo a la ciudad, pero al Estado es la ola de violencia que existe. Hasta que no mejore eso, no van a volver los extranjeros como antes ¿no?

Tanya

De acuerdo con *Tanya*, una medida que puede incrementar el número de estudiantes que reciben es la de cambiar la perspectiva que tienen los extranjeros sobre el Estado de Guanajuato. Sin duda, para lograr esto, es necesario que la Universidad de Guanajuato dé mayor difusión de los cursos de español. Una posible solución sería la creación de programas virtuales que les permita a los extranjeros conocer más sobre los cursos que se ofrecen en esta institución y la cultura mexicana con la finalidad de romper estereotipos negativos que se escuchan sobre la sociedad mexicana con respecto a la seguridad. Asimismo, sería importante que la Universidad de Guanajuato fortalezca los programas de seguridad para los extranjeros que vienen a la institución a recibir cursos presenciales.

Discusión y Conclusiones

Por lo expuesto anteriormente, los participantes comunicaron durante las entrevistas varias fortalezas con respecto a la enseñanza del español para extranjeros en esta institución. Asimismo, sus respuestas también señalaron varias necesidades que, desde su perspectiva, deben ser atendidas para poder mejorar la calidad de su enseñanza y por lo tanto el aprendizaje del español como lengua extranjera en este contexto. En los datos que fueron recabados las tres necesidades de mayor prominencia se centran en: 1) la escasez de materiales y recursos pedagógicos para enseñar el español y la variante mexicana, 2) la situación e inestabilidad laboral en el contexto y 3) la disminución de la matrícula a causa de la pandemia sanitaria y la inseguridad en el Estado de Guanajuato.

Estos resultados son consistentes con la literatura existente. En un estudio realizado por Velázquez-Vilchis y García-Ponce (2021) en el mismo contexto, pero en una licenciatura para formar profesores de español como segunda lengua, los autores encontraron que uno de los mayores problemas para formar profesionales es la falta de libros institucionales y recursos pedagógicos sobre la enseñanza del español. Con respecto a esto, Gómez et al. (2017) sostienen que “hay una gran área de oportunidad para las instituciones que apuesten por la calidad de materiales para la enseñanza de español” (p.197). Asimismo, haciendo referencia a materiales didácticos, artículos especializados en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera, recursos electrónicos y cursos de formación para profesores de español en México, Gómez et al. (2017) aseguran que son poco abundantes y de difícil acceso para personas interesadas en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del español como lengua extranjera en México. Para atender esto, Velázquez-Vilchis y García-Ponce (2021) proponen el diseño de materiales electrónicos que, según ellos, benefi-

ciaría las prácticas pedagógicas de los profesores y brindaría mayor visibilidad a la enseñanza del español. Por otro lado, similares a los resultados de este estudio, Velázquez-Vilchis y García-Ponce (2021) identificaron falta de estabilidad laboral entre profesores que se encargan de formar futuros profesores de español como lengua extranjera y, de acuerdo con ellos, esto “no permite que los docentes, sobre todo los de hora clase, se sientan involucrados con la universidad, ni vean un compromiso a largo plazo con la institución” (p.96). Finalmente, respecto a la disminución de matrícula, Suárez (2015) y Ángeles (2019) consideran que aún falta mayor promoción para atraer estudiantes extranjeros interesados en aprender el español y la cultura mexicana. Para Suárez (2015), la inseguridad y la baja competitividad educativa hacen que pocos estudiantes se interesen en venir a estudiar a México. Velázquez-Vilchis y García-Ponce (2021) aseguran que la inseguridad en México impide la llegada de más estudiantes extranjeros en el país. Sin embargo, Ángeles (2019) sostiene que México no había sido un destino de interés para estudiar, pero en los últimos años esto ha comenzado a cambiar. Por lo tanto, es necesario que se fortalezca la difusión de la enseñanza del español en nuestro país.

Asimismo, para atender las necesidades anteriormente descritas y otras que se mencionaron en las entrevistas, los participantes hicieron las siguientes sugerencias:

- Mayores oportunidades de capacitación pedagógica continua en áreas de la enseñanza del español (5 participantes).
- Mayor acceso a recursos digitales y pedagógicos para las clases de español (6 participantes).
- Elaboración y diseño de materiales de la variedad del español mexicano (todos los participantes).
- Trabajo colegiado y colaborativo entre profesores de español para fomentar la enseñanza del español (3 participantes).
- Mayor inclusión y presencia en actividades de la universidad (3 participantes).
- Apoyos para estudiantes (7 participantes).
- Contratos estables (5 participantes).
- Difusión de los cursos de español para extranjeros (6 participantes).

Desde la perspectiva de los participantes, estas sugerencias podrían atender varias de las necesidades que se viven en este contexto. Sería importante que de forma sistemática la institución gire esfuerzos para poder atender las necesidades y sugerencias que se han presentado en este artículo y así promover la enseñanza del español.

Con base en este estudio, podemos ver que el análisis de necesidades a través de un enfoque de medios (Análisis de los Medios) (Català, 2017) puede ser una herramienta útil para entender los aciertos y particularmente las necesidades que requieren atención en la educación de lenguas. Como vimos en este estudio, se pudo establecer las fortalezas y necesidades contextuales sobre la enseñanza (Català, 2017). El análisis de necesidades por lo tanto debe ser un instrumento que continuamente se utilice por instituciones de educación superior para identificar áreas de oportunidad. Asimismo, esta información podría ser de utilidad para diseñar programas de acción que aseguren la calidad de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje. La intención de este estudio no fue generalizar los resultados; en cambio, buscó identificar las perspectivas de profesores en cuanto a la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera y así saber cuáles son las necesidades que requieren atención para mejorarla.

En este estudio, se contó solamente con nueve participantes profesores. Para entender mejor las necesidades que se viven en este contexto, sería necesario incluir las voces de estudiantes. Asimismo, es importante que se continúe realizando más ciclos de análisis de necesidades en este contexto y con otros enfoques (por ejemplo, aquellos centrados en el aprendizaje y objetivos lingüísticos) para tener una mejor perspectiva de las necesidades de no solo profesores sino también de estudiantes. Esta información permitirá tener una mejor perspectiva de la situación de la enseñanza y del aprendizaje del español y una toma de decisiones más adecuada para potencializarlos en esta institución. Finalmente, sería interesante conocer de manera longitudinal las necesidades que se han identificado en este contexto y cómo de manera dinámica se comportan desde la perspectiva de los involucrados en la enseñanza y aprendizaje del español como lengua extranjera.

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AN ACTION RESEARCH INTERVENTION TO PROMOTE REFLECTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN ELT MEXICAN PUBLIC BASIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the importance of becoming reflective teacher and the implications to professional development in an English language Teaching Mexican program in Basic Education. In this research, teachers' professional development is seen as result of accompaniment processes promoted by the guidance of a supervisor to enhance reflective teaching (Johnson, 2009; Orland-Barak, 2010). Particularly, the research explores the basis to provide guidance to five English elementary school language teachers who were requested to write reflective narratives without previous experience and formation in writing reflectively. An intervention workshop was implemented using Burns' (2005) and Griffiee' (2012) action research model, which involved exposing teachers to a series of guided practices to enhance reflection through journal writing. Overall, the results show the changing perspectives teachers developed towards reflective teaching practice, and mainly their professional growth. In other words, teachers' professional development in this article considers the construction of opportunities for educators to discuss, think, try out, and shape new practices through reflective teaching and journal writing.

Key words: professional development, reflective teaching, workshop, action research, intervention.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta la importancia de convertirse un maestro reflexivo y las implicaciones para el desarrollo profesional de los docentes en un programa de enseñanza del idioma inglés en educación básica de México. En esta investigación, el desarrollo profesional de los docentes se ve como resultado de procesos de acompañamiento promovidos por la orientación de un supervisor para mejorar la enseñanza reflexiva (Johnson, 2009; Orland-Barak, 2010). En particular, esta investigación explora las bases para brindar orientación a cinco maestros de inglés de escuelas primarias a quienes se les solicitó que escribieran narrativas reflexivas sin experiencia previa y formación en escritura reflexiva. Se implementó un taller de intervención implementando el modelo de investigación de acción de Burns (2005) y Griffiee' (2012), el cual implicó exponer a los docentes a una serie de prácticas guiadas para mejorar la reflexión a través de la escritura de diarios. En general, los resultados muestran las perspectivas cambiantes que desarrollan los docentes hacia la práctica de enseñanza reflexiva y en su desarrollo profesional. El desarrollo profesional de los docentes en este artículo se ve como fue la construcción de oportunidades para que los educadores discutan, piensen, prueben, y den forma a nuevas prácticas a través de la enseñanza reflexiva y la redacción de diarios.

Palabras clave: desarrollo profesional, enseñanza reflexiva, taller, investigación acción, intervención.

Introduction

As far as literature is concerned, there has been a growing interest in studying how reflection is promoted in the English language teaching community in Latin-America in the last decade (Alirio & Jaime, 2010, 2020; Garcia, 2015; Roux, 2012; Saavedra-Jeldes &

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Campos-Espinosa, 2019, among others), However, there are still few studies that address how language teachers in Mexican Basic Education develop reflective teaching, especially when English teachers are required to write reflectively journals addressing any issue that occurs in their classes. Richards (2007) states that a teacher “who has a more extensive knowledge and deeper awareness about the different components and dimensions of teaching is better prepared to make appropriate judgments and decisions in teaching (p.3).” However, in the English language programs in Mexican Basic Education (ELTMex), there has been little or no guidance and monitoring that identifies whether teachers reflect about their teaching practices or not, as well as little or no follow up to identify the process teachers undergo in developing their reflective skills.

In this particular context, a group of more experienced English language teachers known as ‘evaluators,’ was created to lead their colleagues’ teaching process. These evaluators’ duties were mainly revising lesson plans, observing, evaluating the development of the lessons, and discussing the results of the evaluation or any challenging situation with the teachers. As a matter of fact, the kind of activities and responsibilities that evaluators develop in this specific ELTMex made them play a role of a *supervisor*. In addition to the evaluators’ duties, authorities of the ELT program implemented an activity that would promote reflection among teachers. This activity consisted of a series of written reports which were called *Bitácoras*. The *Bitácoras* are very similar to a diary, as they are written texts in which people keep record of events and experiences. They differentiate from diaries, as they are not personal and rather than kept by the writers, they are requested by an authority in a job. In order to avoid misunderstanding, the term “reports” is used throughout this research to refer to the *Bitácoras*.

Since evaluators serve as guidance for English teachers, they must monitor the development of the reports written in their diaries. Unfortunately, the reports were very descriptive with little or no reflection that could have informed teachers’ progress and growth. Therefore, as an evaluator of this ELTMex program, I became interested in identifying the key features of these diaries and implemented an intervention in the form of action research to change teachers’ conceptions about diaries and promote reflection within the written reports.

Language teachers’ training to become reflective practitioners

Reflective teaching is framed by a social-cultural view of professional learning, where knowledge development is socially constructed into social and cultural practices

(Bereiter 2002, Wenger, 1998). Scales (2013) adds that reflection in the professional setting is deliberate, purposeful, and structured. It should link theory and practice, promote learning, and cause change and development. In other words, practitioners should become reflective teachers. Scales (2013) points out that most people spend time thinking about what we do and the effects that our actions can have on others. But not everyone always takes a step further towards reflecting on the actions and making plans to do things differently.

As stated by Moon (2004), reflection comes as a mental process which people use to accomplish a purpose or achieve some anticipated outcome. It is implemented to achieve better understanding of relatively problematic ideas. Reflection relies on processing and understanding knowledge and emotions that people already have. Therefore, a reflective practitioner is a person who looks analytically at what he or she did and thinks of what went right or wrong during certain activity. This practice consists of coming up with a possible solution to an identified phenomenon and testing that solution.

Reflective journal writing

Research in English language teacher education (Black et al, 2000, Ho & Richards; 1993, Knapp, 2012) sees journal writing as an opportunity for teachers to explore themselves and describe their teaching context and practice. In other words, a reflective journal is a written record of good or bad events during teaching time that is complemented with a proposal to solve problems or keep implementing certain techniques. When writing a reflective journal, it is important to follow an order, which, according to Ghaye (2011), basically consists of four steps. The first one is to appreciate, and it has to do with describing the event. The second is to inform or give an interpretation of the events. The third one is to confront events, which relates to evaluating the experience or event, and the fourth step is to reconstruct or plan ahead, based on how the information from the previous three steps can be useful for teaching practices or programs. These steps were used to plan and develop a more complete reflective model during the workshop and guided journal writing. Having learnt how to reflect and keep records in reflective journals can not only help the reflective practitioner but also the supervisors or mentors to provide with guidance to the development of reflective teaching techniques, which may lead to a professional growth.

Group-based learning in teacher education

Reflective teaching and journal writing can have different implications for individual and group professional

development. The importance of group-based learning practices relies on the value of dialogue and collaboration (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; & Orland-Barak, 2010), which is stressed in the reciprocal relationship between the supervisor/ mentor and the practitioners, with common cultural and educational concerns that are “legitimized and acknowledged” (Orland-Barak, 2010, p. 19). In this process, sharing experiences, listening to others, and providing feedback on the reflective journals created a sense of collaboration. Through sharing experiences, many solutions or pieces of advice may arise and can be useful for every member of the group. In group work, knowledge acquired through experiences can be expanded and when they are shared, people may learn from themselves or their own lives.

Supervision and Mentoring in the ELT context

Supervision, mentoring and teachers’ professional development has been gaining attention over the past decade (Flecher & Mullen, 2012; Delaney, 2012; Encinas & Sánchez, 2015), mainly due to educational reforms around the world driven by historical influences. Among these influences, internationalization and the emergence of new technologies are found. In the ELMex context, the role of supervisors is traditionally defined as an experienced teacher who observes class practices and provides an evaluative view or feedback to help teachers realize what they are doing well and what they are missing or doing wrong. However, other conceptions emerged based on a more formative role of the supervisor. For example, Bailey (2009), and DiPaola and Hoy (2008) refer to teaching supervision as a dialogic process of overseeing the ability of teachers to meet academic goals with the purpose of improving teaching and transforming teachers.

Mentoring, on the other hand, has been “traditionally equated with expertise, reflected in the mentor’s capacity to guide, instruct, protect, and challenge the novice protégé” (Orland-Barak, 2010, p. 2). Similarly, Pitton (2006, p. 1) defines mentoring as “an intentional pairing of an inexperienced person with an experienced partner to guide and nurture his or her development”. In other words, mentoring is a relationship between teachers and mentors with a shared desire of professional development. Mentor and teachers must share their goals and objectives. In the context of this research, a mentor program must be clearly established by designing an action research that would be implemented to help teachers raise awareness of reflection, the benefits of reflective journals, as well as the different roles mentors can assume. Malderez and Bodóczy, (1999) mention that a

mentor should be a model, an acculturator, a sponsor, a support, and an educator. He or she should know and take responsibility of his/her role in the mentoring relationship. Mentors’ duties include guiding teachers and helping them solve and overcome difficult situations. Mentors must inspire and help them to get used to the professional culture. Although it is impossible to manage all the issues that may arise in the classroom, mentors can also learn from their teachers’ reflective journals. By these means, mentors would be able to provide reliable advice based on similar real-life situations, and consciously create appropriate opportunities for the teachers in order to achieve professional learning objectives.

Starting from the viewpoint that teachers cannot solve all classroom problems alone, and that they develop professionally through live experiences, it is very important to have a more experienced person who support and guide them. For most English Language Teaching programs, it is important to lead teachers to obtain better teaching results. The goal implies that “practicing teachers are key to the transformation of schools and that in order for teachers to lead the reform efforts, they need to be offered expanded and enriched professional development experiences” (Dilworth & Imig, 1995 p. 2). For this research, both roles were considered since the Mexican context used them interchangeably.

Research design model

This research not only sought to improve teachers’ reflective practice, but also to take the researcher to a facilitator role, by implementing an intervention which was organized based on an action research model (ARD) (Burns, 2005; and Griffiee, 2012). That is, the researcher used the steps of the ARD cycle to identify the overall needs of a particular group of teachers to plan an action that would enhance the development of reflection in the teachers’ reports. Effects of the intervention were analyzed in the light of the impact on and the application of teachers’ reflective journals.

It is worth mentioning that action research was chosen as it provides opportunities to promote both professional development and reflection (Nunan, 1993, Wallace, 1998,). The action research model used in this study was suggested by Burns (2005) and Griffiee (2012) who display a research design model (ARD) with two main purposes: the investigation of a specific classroom or teaching problem for renewal of the curriculum, and the promotion of professional development. This ARD model suggests a cycle of seven elements: **initial awareness, exploration, initial response, creation of a plan, realization of the plan, evaluation, and report**, as explained below.

- **Initial awareness.** The first stage happened when ELT elementary school teachers were requested to write reports of their most significant moments of their teaching practices in a notebook known as “*bitacoras*”. At that time the researcher of this study was not only an English language teacher from this institution, but I also performed the role of supervisor. The researchers’ main concern was the lack of guidance through the implementation and writing of these reports.
- **Exploration.** As a researcher, it was necessary to read and get informed about the purpose of these reports. The program coordinator, who requested those writings, emphasized the need to make the teachers reflect on their teaching practice and identify the most meaningful events in their everyday practice for their evaluation. Other teachers’ concerns also emerged at stage regarding the size of the reports, the topics addressed, and the very limited time to learn how to write reflectively since the “*bitacoras*” were used for their evaluation. Consequently, a questionnaire (see Appendix A) was given in order to know more about teachers’ perspectives and previous experience regarding reflective writing. As the teachers had never received any training on how and what to write during one school year, the reports’ writing became just a requirement without meaning for them.
- **Initial response.** The researcher reviewed the existing teachers’ reports (Appendix B) in order to know the type of writing they were producing. It was clear that teachers were not completing a reflective cycle and most of the writings were descriptive and too general, the reports were not accomplishing the expected goal.
- **Creation of a plan.** A workshop that addressed reflective teaching and journal writing was designed. This intervention was important to guide and provide teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge to develop reflective teaching and journal writing skills. Otherwise,

teachers would had not be able to write the expected reflective teaching journals.

- **Realization of the plan.** The workshop was implemented at this stage. Since there was little time before their evaluation, a two-day session of three hours each intervention was planned. During the sessions, teachers shared many of their teaching stories, so that they would feel more confident, and a sense of collegiality could be promoted. They also shared their reports and identify key situations to discuss. Then concepts such as teachers’ professional development, reflective teaching, journal writing among others were reviewed and discussed. Teachers were also instructed to review and understand the reflective model adapted from Ghaye’s (2011) initial strengths- based reflective framework, Burton, Quirke, Reichmann, and Peyton (2009) reflective writing typology, and complemented with Gibbs (1988) model of reflection. Teachers were guided through the identification of each part of the model. They had the opportunity with the researcher’s guidance to practice reflective writing. After a number of tries they completed their first reflective journal.
- **Evaluation.** In this stage, teachers shared the reflective journals (Appendix C) and received feedback from the other as well as from the researcher. Then they completed two more reflective journals, which were collected and analyzed, looking for evidence of reflection and overall management of the reflective cycle already explained. Also, teachers express their perception and views about this intervention by means of a focus group.
- **Report.** The last stage showed the data result which is reported further in this paper

Participants

The participants were 5 English Language Teachers from elementary school level with the following characteristics:

Table 1. Teachers’ information

Participants	Age range	Gender	Education level	Graduated from	Teaching level	ELT experience	Number of target groups	Number of students per group
T1.	25-30	Female	BA	UDAL	Elementary School	3 years	12	30-40
T2.	25-30	Female	BA	BUAP	Elementary School	3 years	8	30-40
T3.	25-30	Female	BA	BUAP	Elementary School	5 years	8	40-50
T4.	30–40	Female	BA	BUAP	Elementary School	3 years	8	40-50
T5.	30–40	Female	BA	BUAP	Elementary School	3 years	8	40-50

Source: authors’ own creation

As can be seen in Table 1, all teachers share the same level of education and similar work settings. It is important to point out that all of the teachers were women and they all worked in elementary school level. All 5 teachers had a bachelor's degree in English language teaching, but Teacher 1 graduated from the *Universidad de America Latina* (UDAL) and teachers 2, 3, 4 and 5 graduated from *Benemerita Universidad de Puela* (BUAP).

Data Analysis: Interactive Model

Bernard, Russell and Gery's (2003) data analysis model was used to analyze the information of the reports and the journals. The analysis of the data revealed three characteristics of the themes: they are visible and therefore discoverable. They are manifested in expressions, which are culture-specific, and finally, they establish a relationship between the importance they have and how often they appear in the text. Bernard et al (2003) describe twelve observational techniques that serve as a guide for how to look for themes in the data. In our study we used **repetition** to find topics that occurred frequently within each teacher report; **similarities and differences** to compare units of data across the teachers' entries; and **cutting and sorting** to create the categories. It is important to emphasize that since the participants' reports were written without any guidance, we found the three mentioned techniques as the most appropriate and workable for the initial stage of this research.

Results

Results are presented in a sequential mode, as they share a relationship and complement with each other. In the analysis we adapted the reflective model (Ghaye, 2011), and complemented with the reflective writing typology (Burton et al, 2009; Gibbs, 1988) implemented during the workshop.

Factual, Behavioral, and Attitudinal Information

The information gathered from the questionnaires served to explain some of the characteristics of the teachers' reports. The questionnaires were analyzed following Dörnyei and Taguchi's (2010) factual, behavioral, and attitudinal characteristics. The former illustrates information about age, gender, race, residential location, level of education, language learning history, teaching context, amount of time spent in L2 teaching environment. These characteristics are illustrated as explained in Table 1.

The second section of the questionnaire conveys behavioral information about respondents' knowledge and frequent use of reflective writing as a professional development tool. Data revealed that two of the teachers had received a training course on reflection, without a detailed

review, while the remaining three had not received any type of reflective training. For the initial written reports, only one teacher received specific instructions from her coordinator, and although most of them did not receive any formal instruction for writing personal reflections, they all had some notion of the purposes of a reflection, which led them to incomplete fulfillment of the reflective cycle. For example, T1 and T2 could recognize the phenomenon at the descriptive stage while T3 reached the action stage, reflecting on ways for improving her teaching, and T4 tapped on stages one and five, as she identified the phenomenon and created a plan of action to solve classroom issues, and T5 embraced the evaluation stage because she weighed the different activities implemented during her teaching lessons.

The attitudinal questions included the teachers' beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and interests towards reflective journals. Teachers' replies provided valuable insight that helped understand why the reports were presented in a narrative rather than reflective format. Four of the teachers felt that writing reflective reports represented an extra work, as it was hard to write, especially given the little time they had to cover the planned activities. Some teachers also expressed frustration at the beginning because they did not know how to complete the reports nor the expected length. Overall, they felt under the pressure and handling of the lesson plans, students' projects, teachers' portfolios, and reports' entries. One teacher was especially angry because she did not have enough time to write her entry, nor did she know how to do it. Teacher 2 expected to have an explanatory meeting, which would clarify purposes, steps, and specifications for the writing activity, yet never happened.

Initial Reports' Characteristics

The five teachers' reports were written in small size paper notebooks (about half of letter size paper). The small size is relevant because the teachers' written entries were surprisingly smaller. Each teacher started writing in September. They were supposed to continue writing until the end of the scholar year in July but not all of them accomplished it. Even having a complete month to write, most of their written entries were no longer than two paragraphs with no more than 6 lines each.

Each teacher report was analyzed in terms of length and classified into five broad stages of reflective cycle suggested by Gibbs, (1988): description, feelings, evaluation, conclusions, and action. Also, the most recurrent and emerging themes were analyzed using Bernard and Gery's (2003) flow chart. Table 2 and 3 illustrates the results of the reports' entries according to these two classifications.

Table 2. Reports' Entries

Participants	Total Number of Entries	Description	Feelings	Evaluation	Conclusion	Action
T1	21	21	0	0	0	0
T2	87	87	2	0	0	0
T3	81	81	4	1	0	4
T4	25	25	1	0	0	0
T5	20	20	4	20	1	0

Source: authors' own creation

Teachers' reports showed a similar format. All started with the date at the top of the page or at the beginning of the entry, which facilitated the count. Each entry was reviewed several times to find out examples of the different stages of the reflective model. Even though, teachers wrote very little, sometimes they followed one

or two stages. Unfortunately, none of them used the five stages. It is worth mentioning that the recurrent stage was description which suggested that teachers' reports did not go beyond an initial stage. Yet there was important information in the written reports such as expressing their emotions.

Table 3. Salient Themes in Teacher's reports

Themes	Theme samples
First time talking to the principal	T1: I went to my school to talk to the principal and gave him the document " <i>hoja de presentación</i> " to sign it out. T2: I give my presentation sheet to the principal. T3: The first day I gave the " <i>oficio de presentación</i> " to the principal
Greetings	T1: I went to the classroom and say hi to my new fourth grade students P3: Sixth graders practiced greetings even when they are in sixth grade
Routine exercises	P1: I like to do the exercise routines
Previous students' knowledge	P1: I did activities with my first-grade students to keep checking their English knowledge. P:2 I tried to make a little evaluation about speaking P2: I applied the diagnostic exam for the first grades P:4 I decided to monitor if students really remembered some of the units... I evaluated if my students really had a meaningful learning.
Helpful games	P1: The fifth-grade students started telling me vocabulary they learnt last year with the game tic-tac-toe P3: Students liked the hot potato game. P4: I started with the vocabulary through a game P5: I started playing tic-tac-toe and making questions related to the lesson.
Successful teaching practices	P1: Group A felt stressed and only 5 students wanted to participate but I encouraged them to pass, and they won a lollipop P1: I started asking children for object in the classroom and thanked them, so they heard the words thank you several times P5: It was a great idea to ask students to choose one animal and go to the front of the class to make the representation P:5 He was afraid of performing the animal, so I pretended to be a frog and she followed me ... you will act and model what you want your students to do.
Establishing rules	P2: The material must be with the full name and in a good presentation. P:3 I talked to the principal about some rules. P:5 Students are waiting for an opportunity to make a mess so first I set up the rules

Useful material	P2: I ask students for the material that we are going to use during the course P3: We are going to use as a notebook and a bilingual dictionary. P4: We were working with flashcards and some photocopies P5: I asked students to bring newspapers and old magazines that they did not use anymore.
Control and discipline	P1: I had to speak in personal way with some students P2: There were some problems or difficulties to get the control about discipline.

Source: authors' own creation

The information obtained from the theme analysis revealed that teachers considered essential the communication with the principal of the school as well as the greeting to students, which develops routine and practice of previous knowledge. Other concerns were the implementation of games and materials such as flashcards and photocopies in the classroom, as well as managing discipline and establishing rules for the teaching lessons. The reports also focused on students' previous knowledge and teachers' successful practices.

As the teachers did not have any guidance for the development of their written reports, the length and details varied from one report to the other. However, the categorized information was useful because it represents the concerns and most relevant issues for their teaching practices and contexts. Teachers shared similar issues and challenging situations in their different school sites. Results also show how the language program is working in Puebla. Similar to the analysis of the stages,

teachers' written reports are limited to the description of their teaching routines.

Journal writing workshop.

During the workshop, teachers were step-by-step guided to write a set of three reflective journals. They also were instructed about the concepts and purpose of professional development, reflective teaching and journal writing. While at the beginning of the workshop, teachers had some ideas of the purposes of professional development, reflective teaching, and journal writing but they did not know much about these concepts, they did not handle solid, accurate and complete definitions. For example, they mentioned that teaching journal is a written paper where they write what they do. At the end of the workshop, teachers were able to define professional development, reflective teaching, and journal writing in a thorough manner, showing that they understood their purposes, importance, and characteristics. as illustrated below in Table 4.

Table 4. Teachers' Meanings of Concepts Samples

Concepts	Before intervention	After intervention
Professional Development	We improve what we are doing every day.	It is the knowledge acquired through the experiences in the classroom. We apply according to the students' needs, and we can change based on different situations and specific goals.
Reflective teaching	Learning from the students results (diagnostic).	This process follows specific steps that make teachers understand better the context and the students, also helps teacher to analyze evaluate, plan, modify and implement different teaching strategies
Teaching journal	It is a tool in which we can write the things we do in our schools.	Keeping this record can be very beneficial for the teachers' professional development because they learn from themselves and reflect about what they did right and wrong during their teaching lessons.

Source: authors' own creation

The teachers' final definitions were more specific and straightforward. Moreover, teachers took less time and were less hesitant to complete their definitions. During the intervention, teachers were guided by a reflective journal sample and earned to identify each stage of the reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1998). Underlining the reflections was very useful for the teachers, who engaged in a discussion to explain why they had underlined the information with specific colors, and justified their decisions. Table 5 shows some of the segments and the corresponding classifications given by the teachers according to the reflective cycle stages.

Table 5. Identified Reflective Samples

Reflective Cycle		Underline examples
T1	Stage 1: Description	I started teaching at this school this September, part time, as I am still on maternity leave. I have spent three weeks here, so far, I have been able to get acquainted with the atmosphere and pupils a bit.
T2	Stage 2: Feelings	In the other classes, everything has been going pretty well so far but in 6AB I have been struggling from the very beginning.
T3	Stage 3: Evaluation	I find this annoying as it takes me a long time to get to the class I teach, and it is physically quite demanding!!
T4	Stage 4: Conclusions	Fortunately, there should be a new language classroom ready at the end of September so I won't have to move so often and far but will have my own classroom right next to my office.
T5	Stage 5: Actions	Luckily, I have enough extra materials at home, we will see if it will be possible to buy something later.

Source: authors' own creation

As stated above, the underlined reflections were compared and discussed among the teachers so that they could share their arguments regarding their decisions. It was noted that involving teachers in discussing their views triggered their understanding and learning of complex concepts such reflection and professional development. After several rehearsals and discussions, teachers recognized the reflective cycle's stages successfully and were ready to write and complete their three journals addressing specific topics which were selected by the researcher and teachers, and which emerged from their initial reports. These were: 1) a significant moment/ situation as the classroom teacher, 2) a significant moment/situation within the school context, and 3) a significant moment/situation with colleagues, parents, staff, or any other school member. The guided reflections were analyzed following the same patterns used for the unguided initial reports. Table 6 illustrates a sample of the reflections in the first journal.

Table 6. Journal 1
Significant Moment/Situation in the Classroom for Me as a Teacher

Themes	Sampling entries
• Students' bad attitude.	• I realized one of my best students was playing and distracting his team during the activity, but his attitude was aggressive, it was very odd because he's a hard- working student.
• Head teacher support.	• The head teacher supported me, telling them they would not have a break the rest of this month because they were playing and not paying attention in my class.
• ELT teacher support to children.	• I decided to take him out of the classroom and ask him what was happening. I talked to him about his situation and tried to support him. After a while, we came back to the classroom. Omar tried to work in a better way.
• Students' family problems	• He told me he had a family problem and that he didn't know who he wanted to live with because his parents were separated.

Source: authors' own creation

As it can be seen in Table 6, the recurrent theme in this first journal were: students' bad attitude, head teachers' support, (the head teacher is the teacher in charge of the instruction of all the curricular subjects, except for English, P.E and Arts, head teachers spend most of the time with the students and keep records of all their grades). The other two relevant themes were teachers' emotional support to children. The evidence in this journal shows that after the intervention, teachers could go beyond a descriptive stage by using words and phrase such as *I realize, I decided, work in a better, I tried to support*.

Table 7. Journal 2
A Significant Moment/Situation within the School Context

Themes	Sampling entries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A problem came when a person of the "initial education" program started working in the teacher's room, she also took her material to keep it there, but she moved mine.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place for English class material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My school is small, and it is impossible to have my own classroom for the English classes, I try to adapt myself.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I realized I needed a place where to leave them because in the classrooms I could hardly put my bag on the table.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No respect for the English class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The situation was that students from the different groups were going for breakfast at different schedules and it was a big problem because sometimes there were going out during my class time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher didn't care that I was teaching. After the situation I was upset.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now, I think that it wasn't as bad as I had thought. It was just lack of communication among the school community.

Source: authors' own creation

In this second journal, themes were more varied as the teachers' entries were longer, more specific, and detailed. Table 7 shows that sharing a classroom was the most important concern. That is, teachers described the challenging situations that took place when moving from one classroom-to the other. This issue turned even more complicated because some of the teachers did not have a place to keep their teaching materials safe. Aside from sharing the classroom, there were periodical interferences, such as different breakfast times for different groups, which cause that the English lessons were interrupted several times. In other school, parents went into the classroom to talk to the head teacher and their conversation disrupted the English lesson or distracted the students. Very importantly in this second journal was that their entries turned into longer discussions. This kind of problematic situations induced teachers into deeper reflections.

Table 8. Journal 3
A Significant Moment/Situation with Colleagues, Parents, Staff, or any Other School Member

Themes	Sampling entries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Then, I decided to talk to the teacher to ask her as a favor work quietly or maybe in a different place outside the classroom, but her reaction was negative.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No head teachers support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...her reaction was negative. She told me that she was accustomed to work in that way and she couldn't work in any other place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of head teachers' perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...she realized my job was good and during one Christmas recital that I organized she came up to me and told "I like your job". Up to now I work with her group and she only smile at me and sometimes make positive comments about the students or the class.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...the head teacher used to work with students and talk with parents which were interfering in my lessons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...this teacher commented she disagreed with the number of hours of English class that her students had.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other teachers support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On my first day I met the other English teacher, who was very kind to me. For the next week I met the rest of the teachers, they welcomed me really nice, for me it is hard to have a conversation with people that I don't know, they did it easy to me.

Source: authors' own creation

These teachers became more reflective through the practice. Their journals became longer and more detailed, covering all stages of the reflective cycle. Table 8 shows the most important themes which were: importance of communication, lack of head teachers' support, it demanded a major effort to make head teachers change their perspective towards ELT jobs. Teachers expressed how some head teachers did not like them as they started, but gradually ELT teachers gained their respect because of their good work.

"Schedule issues" and "Other teachers' support" were also relevant themes in the teachers' reflections. It is interesting to learn about the different teaching contexts and teachers' emphasized topics expressed by the time they completed their reflections. The procedure used gave teachers freedom to choose the topic of reflection, framed by significant moments. The "significant moments" made easier the data classification as well as the interpretation of the results. Finally, the most salient themes served as a guideline for discussions held in smaller groups, point at the need for a reflective practice not only to learn and develop professionally, but also to provide others with suggestions rooted in real educational experiences.

Reactions towards a guided reflective journal

Initially, teachers had animosity or were reluctant to write the reports. After teachers were explained the importance of this practice and the impact that it could have in their professional development, as well as through the series of reflective samples shown and analyzed during the intervention, the teachers' perspectives changed. To better understand the change of perception, a focus group was carried out. Yin (2011) underlines that a focus group or sharing group is formed by a determined number of people who are gathered because of previous common experience or common viewpoints. In our case, the focus group was implemented as a final step of this research to gather outcomes and give validity to the data drawn from the questionnaires and journals. The discussion was led by the topics emerged from the reflective journals, such as the feelings, emotions, moments of change, times of decision making, and perspective changes.

Most of the teachers' answers were positive towards the implementation of the reflective teaching and journal writing. All agreed on the usefulness of the workshop, as they realized how reflective practices can develop in organized manners. Teachers also recognized, that although reflective journals do not constitute an easy

practice, they become easier with scaffolded guidance.

Teachers found that the reflective cycle and the guiding questions adapted from Ghaye's (2011) and the reflective framework adapted from Burton et al, (2009) and complemented with Gibbs (1988) were the most useful contribution. By following the cycle's stages and answering the questions they found that their final reflections grew and were very different from what their initial entries.

The teachers highlighted that all this information was new for them. Therefore, all the materials and resources used during the workshop were very meaningful and practical for them. For example, T1 mentioned in the third session that there was a problem with some students and that the principal of the school asked all teachers who were working with these students to write a report describing students' behavior, learning process, grades, and attitudes, as well as the different activities and techniques implemented by the teachers and their action plan.

At first, T3 did not know how to write the report, but she found reflective journal writing appropriate for the development of the written paper. She shared this experience during the focus group. Teachers started identifying the strengths of the reflective journal practice since the first session of the workshop.

Table 9 states that teachers were able to identify more strengths than weaknesses both in the workshop and reflective journal writing. As stated in the previous table, the workshop provided useful materials, was very well organized and, more importantly, it provided guidance and made teachers change from negative to positive perspectives regarding reflective teaching and journal writing. The weaknesses of the workshop pointed at the implementation rather than the process, material, and activities offered during the sessions. Similarly, teachers emphasized the strength of the guidance for the reflective journal writing and the usefulness of techniques for the professional development. Among the weaknesses, teachers observed lack of time and willingness to develop reflective practices

Teachers of the focus group first evaluated how much they had learnt and were able to reach out throughout the reflective sessions. They also reflected on their own growth and provided feedback based on how much they had improved, learnt, and developed through the reflective journal writing. The focus group served to better understand teachers' concerns, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and interests regarding reflective journal practices.

Table 9. The Intervention and Journal Writing Contributions

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workshop was very well organized. • The topics reviewed during the workshop are very relevant for our working environment. • The workshop was very dynamic and made reflective practice look easy even though it is not. • The information was very clear and easy to manage. • The video presented during the workshop helps a lot to think about the different problems that we have in our school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This workshop should be implemented since the beginning of the scholar year. • Every teacher should take this workshop. But there is not enough space for to do it. • Willingness to participate in the workshop can be a problem. Some teachers would just attend if they were required to do it.
Reflective journal writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every English teacher should participate in the workshop because it was very well organized, and all the information reviewed is very important for our professional development. • The reflective journal serves a record of what that happens in the school and the actions taken. It can be used to evaluate the progress that we as teachers are having and the progress of the students. • Keeping a reflective journal is very useful to remember what exactly happened in any situation and the actions that teachers take. • It is easy to do by following the reflective cycle. 	<p>It could be the lack of time to do the reflections. It is very common that English teachers don't have a classroom for themselves or an office in their school and probably finding a place to write the reflections could be one of the things that limits this practice.</p> <p>Commitment to carry out this practice because sometimes we as teachers do not take the necessary time to reflect on the things we do until somebody ask us to do it.</p> <p>To include this practice as part of our daily activities</p> <p>Willingness to develop the reflections and being organized are essential for this reflective activity.</p>

Source: authors' own creation

Conclusion

This research focused on teaching reflection through journals, as one specific area of professional development. The implementation of the reflective writing practice could not have been done without understanding the specific context. Using an action research model helped the researcher identified teachers' need and background knowledge, in order to establish accurate goals and steps for the intervention as suggested by Burns (2005) and Griffie (2012).

Within the English teaching community in Puebla journal writing seemed to be an activity which lacks of guidance and academic support as it was evident that English language teachers did not have the opportunity to master reflective skills in writing. The current research was motivated by the need for finding daily

teaching solutions within the community of teachers. In other words, the reflective teaching procedure was implemented to provide teachers with the opportunity to identify major concerns, feelings and emotions, as well as to evaluate the literature, draw conclusions, and decide an action plan. Initially, the research pursued two goals: instruct teachers on implementing reflective journals and provide the foundation for future interventions and/or syllabi that include reflective learning and professional development.

Teachers' initial reports showed that it took teachers longer than expected to write down their reflections, they just wrote isolated sentences, with accurate but incomplete definitions. In contrast, by the end of the intervention, teachers were able to write in less time concise definitions and complete reflections Using Johnson

and Golombek's (2002) perspective on teachers' narratives, the initial journals offered a basic level of teachers' pedagogical and environmental knowledge, whereas final journals presented a complete corpus of ideas, well supported by solid definitions about professional development, reflective teaching, and journal writing. Above all, the new definitions were based on the new knowledge acquired during the intervention and mainly base on their discussions among them. They certainly changed their perspectives as they showed evidence of writing a complete reflective cycle.

As it was illustrated in the discussion of the results, the intervention not only served as a learning opportunity for the teachers, but also for the researcher. That is, the role of the researcher was also a supervisor or mentor who guided teachers in their understanding and learning as reflective practitioners. In other words, the researcher's overall purpose was creating a scaffold intervention to promote teachers' transformation and professional development.

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Appendix A

Reflective writing background Questionnaire

Section A.	
Participant's full name: Claudia Corona Hernández	
1.- Are you... 25-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 30-40 <input type="checkbox"/> years old 40-50 <input type="checkbox"/>	2.- Sex Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>
4.- Where do you live? Puebla Other _____	5.- How long have you lived there? For 31 years
6.- Level of education a) High school ___ b) University c) Masters d) Other: _____	7.- If you attended to university, where did you attend? at BUAP 8.- What was your major?
9.- Where did you learn English? High school Trade school Correspondence Night school Training seminars Business school University Any other	10.- Please explain: what was your purpose of learning English? Use it in other activities, for example: travel abroad
11.- For how long have you been studying and learning English?	12.- Since when did you started working as an English language teacher?
13.- How many groups do you provide English lessons to? 8 14.- What grades are they?	15.- What is the average number of students you have in each group? a) 10-20 ___ b) 20-30 ___ c) 30-40 ___ d) 40-50 ___
16.- What kind of students do you have? Male ___ Female ___ Mixed groups ___	17.- How much time do you spend with each group? 3 hours per week
Section B.	
18.- Have you ever received any reflection teaching course? Yes ___ No ___ If yes, please provide details	
19.- Have you ever been trained to write a <i>bitácora</i> ? Yes ___ No ___	20.- If yes please explain where, how and when you received this training.
21.- Did you receive specific instructions of how to write the <i>bitácora</i> ? Yes ___ No ___	22.- Do you know what is the purpose of writing a <i>bitácora</i> ? Yes ___ No ___ If yes please write it down
23.- Do you know what are the parts of a reflection? Yes ___ No ___	24.- If your answer was yes, explain the main part of a reflection.
Section C.	
25.- How did you feel when authorities asked you for a written <i>bitácora</i> ?	26.- How often did you write in your <i>bitácora</i> ?
27.- Do you think the <i>bitácora</i> helped you improve your teaching practices? Yes ___ No ___	28.- If your answer was yes please, explain how or give example.
29.- Do you think the <i>bitácora</i> became just a requirement rather than a learning tool? Yes ___ No ___	

Adapted from Dornyei & Taguchi's questionnaires in Second Language Research: construction, administration and processing. (2010)

Appendix B

Teacher's sample of the initial written reports.

I applied the diagnostic test in 4th grades and 5th grades A and B. I haven't worked with these kids from 4th grades so, they are new for me.

I applied the diagnostic test on 5th grade C and Sixth grades. Also, I started to work on classroom rules on fifth grades A and B.

I worked on the classroom rules because it is very important to establish the rules since the beginning to avoid misunderstandings. I realized that my groups are very large.

Appendix C

Teacher reflective journal sample

TEACHER'S DOMAIN: Significant situation with teachers that interact with me in the school

Stage 1. Description

This situation happened last September 2014 in the first Professional Development Day (*Consejo Técnico Escolar*) when the principal asked each teacher to share their experiences and progress with the students during that month. A teacher of 5th grade commented about the problems in her group; but the trouble situation for me came up when this teacher commented she disagreed with the number of hours her students had the English class; she said the English classes were good for her students, but she needed more time to cover the syllabus of other subjects such as Math or Spanish, where her students had learning problems.

I commented I had to cover this number of hours and my schedule was done according to the computer and sport classes; in that moment other teachers suggested they wanted more English classes for their students if the 5th grade teacher didn't want all my classes for her group. As a result, after the comments done by teachers the principal said the 5th grade teacher and I should talk to reach an agreement about the English hours, and he said it would be a good idea, cover other groups as it had been suggested.

Stage 2. Feelings

This situation happened at the begging of this course, so I was relaxing, but when the situation arose, I felt a little bit confused because I didn't imagine the teacher disagreed with the English hours. I have a good relationship with most of teachers in my school; I think that is why they were disconcerted by the teacher's comment.

After this situation I was worried because I thought I would have to change the schedule with that group, and I will probably have less time to work with them.

Now I think this situation helped me to know in my school most of teachers are satisfied with my work with the students, I think that because they reacted positively to the comments.

Stage 3. Evaluation

The positive point in this situation was the way other teachers talked about my job and how they proposed a possible solution if the 5th grade teacher disagreed with the number of hours for her group; but the negative was the polemic created between teachers for the hours that children should have the English classes, I think this polemic bothered a bit the teacher.

Before this situation, the principal proposed once again the hours of my classes for other groups, and I said it would be a good solution although that group would not advance so much as the other one.

Stage 4. Conclusions

I consider this situation would have been more positive if the teacher and I had spoken before the meeting (Professional Development Day) because we would have reached an agreement with the schedules and I would have reorganized my days with other groups; I think in this way, we would have avoided an inconvenient moment for both.

If I faced the same situation as I mentioned, I would try to reach an agreement with teachers before I set the schedules and days of classes. I think I need to improve this part, consider the organization with teachers and their groups before I plan my schedules or even with activities.

Stage 5. Action

In this case I was punctual to start and finish the classes with that 5th grade group, in order the teacher uses better her time and she could cover all her program.

In future situations, I will consider the teachers' time to plan better my schedules and days of classes.

SPECIALIZATION AND DIVERSIFICATION OF PROFESSORS' WORKLOAD AT A SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES IN THE STATE OF VERACRUZ

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Abstract

This article focuses on the impact of specialization and diversification of professors' workload at a school of languages. There were two objectives of this study: to discover why many BA level professors have specialized in one or two courses whereas others teach a wide variety of subjects; to find out whether the participating students believe it is better to have professors who are specialists or, on the contrary, they feel that having professors covering an ample range of courses suits their development. Interviews and a survey were used to collect the data. The interviews were carried out with the participating teaching staff. The survey was applied to the collaborating students. The findings indicate that many of the professors tend to diversify their workload due to financial reasons, whereas those who have specialized do not feel either comfortable or well prepared to teach different courses. Students notice a difference in teachers' performance when they teach courses from different areas but have mixed feelings about this: while some believe that taking different courses with the same professor may be positive, others expressed their belief that teachers should be specialists, as trying to cover many areas may be detrimental to the quality of teaching. Thus, it can be safely concluded that work-related conditions may be harmful to both, teachers' practice, and students' performance.

Key words: professors' workload, specialization, diversification, ELT.

Resumen

Este artículo se enfoca en el impacto de la especialización o diversificación de la carga académica de los profesores de una facultad de lenguas. Dos objetivos guiaron este estudio: descubrir porque muchos profesores de licenciatura se han especializado en uno o dos cursos mientras que otros enseñan una amplia gama de materias; averiguar si lo estudiantes participantes creen que es mejor tener profesores especialistas o si, por el contrario, tener profesores que cubren una amplia gama de cursos favorece su desempeño. Se utilizaron entrevistas y una encuesta para coleccionar los datos. Las entrevistas se llevaron a cabo con los profesores participantes. La encuesta se aplicó a los estudiantes que colaboraron. Los resultados indican que algunos maestros tienden a diversificar su carga por motivos económicos, mientras que aquellos que se han especializado no se sienten cómodos o preparados para impartir cursos diferentes. Los estudiantes notan diferencias en el desempeño de los profesores cuando enseñan cursos de áreas distintas, pero tienen sentimientos encontrados. Mientras muchos creen que tomar cursos diferentes con el mismo profesor puede ser positivo, otros expresaron que los profesores deben ser especialistas, ya que intentar cubrir muchas áreas puede ir en detrimento de la calidad de la enseñanza.

Palabras clave: carga de trabajo, especialización, diversificación, Enseñanza del inglés.

Introduction

This research was carried out at a school of languages of a public university in Mexico. The school offers a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in English, accredited by the Interinstitutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education (a.k.a. CIEES) and the Council for the Accreditation of Educa-

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tional Programas in Humanities (a.k.a. COAPEHUM). The B.A. in English covers a wide range of academic areas such as Linguistics, Culture, Literature, Research, Teaching, and Translation. The mission of the B.A. is to educate students to be competent in English teaching and translation. When the students graduate, they must have a competent level of English, which should allow them to be able to work as English teachers or as translators in the public and private arenas. The faculty members that teach at the B.A. are professors who hold different academic degrees: B.A., Specialist, Master of Arts (M.A.), and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D). Some other professors who also teach there are working on their M.A., and Ph.D.

This research study focuses on specialization and diversification at the B.A. in English of the university. Many professors of the B.A., seemingly, have specialized in just one or two areas of the program, teaching only certain subjects pertaining fields as diverse as translation, culture, literature, English, linguistics, and research. Apparently, these professors are qualified enough to have concentrated on a few courses only, as their field of expertise is in some of those subjects mentioned above. On the other hand, other professors have a rather diversified workload. This diversification means that the range of subjects they teach every semester is wider, covering different courses in the same semester or switching to different areas every school term.

It must be highlighted that the courses that professors teach do not necessarily depend only on their area of specialization, but also on many factors to be considered. The different elements to be considered when evaluating the suitability of a professor may be area of specialization, experience, years of experience, academic profile, academic production, and other qualifications that the teacher needs to have in order to earn subjects or hours every semester.

Research Questions

Considering the stated above, the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

Do the participants see themselves as specialists or do they consider they should be able to teach any course in the B.A.?

What are the effects of specialization and diversification in the students' academic development?

How do students perceive the fact that some professors specialize in a few courses whereas others teach a wider range of subjects?

Objectives

One of the main objectives of this research study was to find the reasons why many teachers of the B.A have specialized in just a couple of courses of the degree in English language whereas others teach a wide variety of courses. Specialized professors focus on only certain subjects. Non-specialized lecturers, however, teach courses from these different areas.

Another objective was to find out was how specialization and diversification of the professors' workload are perceived by the students that participated in this study, whether they believe that it is much better to have professors who are specialists or, conversely, they feel that a having professor covering an ample range of courses is better for their academic development.

The ultimate aim of this study was to shed light on how these specialized or diversified professor profiles and careers are perceived by the professors themselves, how this can affect or benefit their students, as well as their perception of the issue, whether they feel more comfortable with the former or the latter, and the reasons for this.

Literature Review

Current tendencies in professional associations such as TESOL describe the field of ELT as a professional activity that requires specialized training. As an example of this, the above-cited school offers a B.A. in English Language, a B.A. in English Language Teaching, and an M.A. in English Language Teaching. Additionally, the teaching staff are encouraged to participate as speakers in national and international conferences, to carry out research and seek to publish papers coming out of research so that they can get points for productivity and earn bonuses. Taking on all these teaching related activities is often seen as a must if one is to make a career as a university teacher and wants to make a competitive living. Teaching at the basic education level tends to not offer the same kind of status, rewards, and benefits as those received by a university lecturer. On this note, Johnston (1997) points out that:

Teachers in many national contexts, some would say in most, tend to be underpaid and overworked, often operating in difficult physical and psychological conditions. The occupation of EFL/ESL teaching lacks the status of the established professions such as medicine and law. Many teachers work without job security or benefits. (p. 682)

Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover is not something new to either schools, teachers, or students. Every school period, different subjects can be taught by different teachers, and even new teachers can be chosen to teach a subject or several. Every semester, new teachers may be hired or fired. Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) point out that one of the factors that is often believed to contribute to high teacher turnover early in their career, especially in schools with impacted populations, and that hinders attempts to enhance the quality of education is the unique structure of teacher labor markets. Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) point out that the teachers who leave are frequently considered the more productive, which is why high teacher turnover is generally thought to be intrinsically bad.

When well-qualified teaching staff chooses not to stay any longer, it is always the school's, and therefore, the students' loss. Guin (2004) argues that high teacher turnover should be a legitimate cause of concern for all involved because of the negative impact it has on schools. Even though it is not well known how this happens and to what extent it affects them, it is likely, Guin (2004) points out, all the stakeholders will suffer due to a loss of organizational productivity, a decrease in quality of service and an increase in direct economic and other intangible costs. Additionally, teacher turnover also harms students as they struggle to improve their learning (Guin, 2004). According to Ronfeldt et al (2011), "researchers and policymakers often assume that teacher turnover harms student learning. There are many reasons to think it would, as institutional memory is lost, and resources are spent on the hiring process" (p. 1).

Every semester, some subjects have no teacher assigned and this causes the school to look for someone who is qualified enough to do the job. They can spend days or even weeks trying to find the right person. In the meantime, students have no teacher and cannot start learning from him or her. By the time someone is hired, students have already missed many classes and they are behind schedule.

According to Ingersoll and Smith (2003):

The teaching occupation suffers from chronic and relatively high annual turnover compared with many other occupations. Total teacher turnover is evenly split between two components: attrition (those who leave teaching altogether); and migration (those who move to teaching jobs in other schools). (p. 2)

High turnover is something that often appears as a consequence of teacher shortages. When a new teacher cannot be found or those who apply to get the job are not prepared enough to give the class, a teacher who is already teaching another subject or other subjects can be also the teacher of a new class. In the region where this study was carried out, there are countless schools, both public and private, and the demand for English teachers is always higher than the offer. Advertisements of schools looking for English teachers are common. Thus, when a teacher can get a better-paid job somewhere else, they will simply seize the opportunity and move on (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) once their contract expires, or even earlier.

Job Satisfaction and Performance

It is commonly assumed that the more someone enjoys their job, the better they will perform. Performance is also enhanced by motivation, which consequently will lead to job satisfaction as the two concepts are closely related (Viseu et al, 2016). Spector (1997) states that "job satisfaction can be seen as an indicator of emotional well-being or psychological health and that job satisfaction can lead to behaviours that can have either a positive or negative effect on organizational functioning" (p. 2). Spector (1997) mentions, as an example of this, that teachers' sense of satisfaction can have a strong impact on the way they connect with students and with other teachers. Nevertheless, other factors that have to do with the teacher's personality, the students' characteristics, and the teaching context also affect performance. According to Chamundeswari (2013), teacher performance depends mainly on six factors:

- The teacher characteristics: knowledge base, sense of responsibility, and inquisitiveness.
- The student characteristics: opportunity to learn, and academic work.
- Teaching factors: lesson structure, and communication
- The learning aspects: involvement and success.
- The classroom phenomena: environment and climate,
- Organization and management.

Professional Development

González (2007) argues that "the professional development of EFL teachers represents a challenge for teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers in the

accomplishment of better standards in education (p. 1). While this is factual, it is also true that teachers' professional development is often considered a valuable element in any school environment as it allows staff to grow and improve as teachers. At the same time, this results in teachers being in a better position to help students learn effectively as well. Diaz-Maggioli (2003) defines professional development as "a permanent process in which teachers engage voluntarily in learning to adjust their teaching to their students' needs" (p. 1). In addition, Johnson (2000, as cited in González, 2007) defines "teachers' learning as a permanent process that initiates when they are learners in classrooms and schools and continues when they are participants in teacher development programs, and when they learn from their experience teaching in their own schools" (p. 310).

Perceptions of Effective EFL Teachers

When students are asked to talk about their teachers, there are many things they can mention: their relationship with their teachers, how they are taught, how their teachers make them feel in the classroom, and so on. However, the most important question must be how good their teachers are at teaching and why they are so good, since, for all students, the effectiveness of their teachers is the key to meaningful learning (Vallori, 2014; Richards, 2008). According to Day (as cited in Kwangsawad, 2017), the most important feature of quality education for learners is teachers' effectiveness. In the context of this research work, this is not the exception; how effectively a professor performs is the most important thing. This is what they ask when they have to choose a professor to take a certain subject because they want to make sure that they have chosen the best option. They want to learn from a well-qualified person who makes them want to know and learn more. According to Sanders, Wright, and Horn, effective teachers seem to be able to make a positive impact on all students' achievements in their classroom, even if there is a wide range of ability levels. Giovannelli (2003) claims that "effective teaching consists of five components: the composite of effective teaching, classroom management, instructional behavior, classroom organization, and teacher expectations" (p. 1).

Teacher Shortages

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) point out that:

In recent years, researchers and policymakers have told us again and again that severe teacher shortages confront schools. They point to a dramatic increase in the demand for new teachers resulting from two converging demographic trends: increasing student enrollments and increasing numbers of teachers reaching retirement age. Shortfalls of teachers, they say, are forcing many school systems to lower their standards for teacher quality (p. 1).

It is well known that teacher shortages have been a problem for many years and many schools in many parts of the world (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Because of this problem, institutes and schools have had to lower their hiring policies in order to be able to find teachers as fast as possible. Many schools allow students to start working as teachers even before graduating and without a training course or any experience.

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) state that:

States, districts, and schools have instituted a wide range of initiatives to recruit new teachers: career-change programs designed to entice professionals into midcareer switches to teaching; alternative certification programs to allow college graduates to postpone formal education training and begin teaching immediately. (p. 1)

It seems to be getting harder to find new teachers nowadays. Unfortunately, this school of languages has to face the problem of teacher shortage every school term and the students seem to be the most affected. Ingersoll (1999) states that "substantial numbers of schools with teaching openings have experienced difficulties finding qualified candidates to fill their positions" (p. 28).

Methodology

For the development of this research, a mixed method was applied; that is, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments. Owuegbuzie et al (2010) state three reasons to use quantitative-qualitative data collection tools:

- Enrichment of the sample: a mixed approach allows exploring different angles of the research problem
- More reliability of the instrument
- Optimization of the results. This makes it easier to identify the perspective of data, interpretations, and the utility of the findings.

According to Schulze (2003), since quantitative research offers an overall picture of a situation, it is pertinent to both theory testing and developing universal statements. Schulze (2003), in discussing postpositivistic views on the nature of validity, points out that quantitative research studies produce results that are generalizable across different contexts, even though the reality of the situation may be neglected. Kothari (2004) states that “quantitative research is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. It is applicable to phenomena that can be expressed in terms of quantity” (p. 30). Bearing this in mind, a survey was designed to be applied to students of the seventh semester of the B.A. that participated in the study. Additionally, school documents were accessed to track the workload of all the professors working at the school of languages.

As for the qualitative angle of the study, one of the reasons for also including this type of data collection tools in this study is put forward by Schulze (2003), who states that:

Qualitative inquiry provides the researcher with in-depth knowledge, although this is usually not generalizable, qualitative research is more useful for exploring phenomena in specific contexts, articulating participants’ understandings and generating tentative concepts and theories that directly pertain to particular environments (p. 12).

Additionally, as Sampieri et al, (2010) point out, qualitative research provides depth to data, interpretative richness, contextualization of the setting or environment, details, flexibility, and a unique experience. In this sense, it contributes a fresh, natural, holistic point of view of a specific organization, event, or topic that is being researched. This is precisely one

of the goals set for this piece of research. Thus, interviews were conducted with the teachers of the school of languages. The interview allowed the researcher to obtain data about the reasons to become specialized or diversified.

Context

The school where the study took place offers a B.A. in English, accredited by CIEES and COAPEHUM. The B.A. in English covers a wide range of academic areas such as linguistics, culture, literature, research, teaching, and translation. The school wants students to be critical and creative. It also wants them to achieve and a high level of English corresponding to level C1 of the European Reference Framework for Foreign Languages, well-qualified to perform in different areas where English is the principal element. Students are not only supposed to learn English, but they must also have certain abilities which allow them to be as professional as possible in their field (Universidad Veracruzana, 2019).

As for the school staff credentials, five professors hold a bachelor’s degree; four hold a specialization in language teaching; 11 are working on their master’s degree and have not graduated yet; 38 hold a master’s degree; six hold Ph. D.; and four are currently registered in a Ph. D. program.

In order to get a job at the school, a professor must meet the requirements and the specific academic profile. The qualifications and requirements that need to be met are usually: certified command of the target language (CII, CI, or BII, at least); and an M.A. degree in EFL, ESL, education, cultural studies, or literature. Naturally, a Ph. D. is always advantageous, as long as it is in any field mentioned above. Professors with many years of experience are often preferred. Nevertheless, graduates fresh out of college are often welcome to apply. A candidate who has a master’s degree, many years of experience and a suitable academic profile, (e.g., publications) may have a better chance of being hired.

Staff working at this B.A. program are hired under diverse types of contracts; these are full-time, part-time (or permanent), and by six-month contracts. Table 1 shows the three types of positions and their characteristics:

Table 1. Teaching positions.

Type of position	Working hours per term	Teaching hours per term	Working Conditions	Hiring process	Duties
Full time	40	16 to 20	A secure full-time job until retirement or resignation. Better salary than that of part-timers or contract staff	Examinations and interviews	Teaching Research Tutoring Management
Part time	30	30	A secure part time job until retirement or resignation.	Examinations and interviews	Teaching
By contract	Variable, depending on the course	Variable, depending on the course	The contract is only for six months. Salary is the same as that of part-timers but there are fewer benefits.	Review of résumé by the school board. Fewer requirements for application and for extending a contract.	Teaching

Source: author.

Flexible Integrative Educational Model

The school follows the so-called Flexible Integrative Educational Model (a.k.a. MEIF). This educational model has two main characteristics: it is holistic and seeks to foster intellectual, professional, social, and humanistic education across the different areas of curriculum. It is also flexible in terms of course scheduling, space, and contents. Within certain limits, it allows students to adapt their school trajectory to their needs and interests. This flexibility means that the student will be able to:

- A. determine their time of permanence in the educational program through three school trajectories:
Minimum: students take the minimum number of courses (1) per term they can.
Average: they take an average (4-5) number of courses.
Maximum: they take the maximum (7-8) number of courses.
- B. Students may take courses in different schools and institutes, in different learning modes: that is, classroom-based, at-distance, mixed, and autonomous.
- C. Students may select the courses they want to take each school term, based on their choice of trajectory, availability of courses, disciplinary training area, and course characteristics.

Even though a holistic, flexible approach is the trademark of this model, in reality, courses cannot always be integrated, and scheduling is not flexible. While many students are able to create their schedule every term, adapting it to their needs, in many other cases,

they cannot take their classes the way they want, with the professor of their choice, due to a shortage of courses. Classes for every subject fill up fast as in every class a limited number of students (25) is admitted. For every course, there are usually two to four different classes. For example, there can be four different advanced English classes, two in the morning and two in the afternoon. In an ideal world, 50% of the students would choose to study in the morning while the other 50% would opt for the afternoon classes.

However, reality does not work like that and it is quite possible that 75% of the students want to take morning classes. Thus, there will be some complications as afternoon classes will be half-full, while morning classes will be full to the brim. The result is that a good number of students will either be forced to take classes at a very inconvenient time, in conflict with other courses they also want to take, or will not be able to take some of the classes they had planned to take, because they are already full. This scheduling conflict makes it difficult for students to be able to adapt their school-planned trajectory to their needs and interests.

Zepeda and Mayers (2006) claim that “findings in the area of block scheduling have been inconsistent and sometimes flawed to the degree that little information has been provided that would allow practitioners to make data-based decisions” (p. 138). This inconsistency could be due, in part, to the fact that scheduling cannot be as easily adjusted to meet everchanging demand as fast and readily as necessary.

Participants

The participants in this research project were twenty-seven 7th semester B.A. students of English as a for-

eign language. There were seven males (25.9% of the sample) and 20 females (74.1% of the sample). The school has always had a predominantly female population. The main reason they were chosen was that they were about to graduate. This means that they know all the professors who are currently working at the B.A, as well as the different areas of the curriculum. These students had enough experience to talk about the different professors with whom they have taken all the different classes of the B.A. program. Participation was voluntary.

The other participants were four professors who have been working at the school for at least ten years, where 50% of them were the most diversified and the other 50% were the most specialized. They were available and accepted to be interviewed. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms have been used instead of the professors' real names. The most specialized professors were Sancho and Flavio. The most diversified ones were professors Gemaro and Merelia. Gemaro is a full-timer and has been working in the School of Languages Faculty for over 20 years. Merelia is not a full-timer and is relatively new as faculty. In the case of the specialized professors, neither Sancho nor Flavio are full-timers. Sancho has worked for the university for much longer than Flavio.

Data Collection Instruments

This research was carried out by using an interview and a survey. The interview was designed to be applied to the participating professors. It consisted of sixteen questions for diversified professors and eleven questions for specialized professors. The most relevant questions we asked the participating professors were a) whether they had taught different classes of different areas, b) why they had decided to teach different area courses, c) whether they felt comfortable teaching different classes, d) whether they were full-timers, and d) which subjects they taught were part of their permanent workload. We also wanted to find out if e) they considered themselves experts in any field, f) if they felt they performed poorly in some of their courses, g) if a rather varied workload affected the quality of their classes, and h) the reasons for a diversified (or specialized) workload.

The survey was created using Google Forms and was administered online. The participating students were asked a) if they had taken different subjects with the same professor, b) what subjects and what professors they had taken the different courses with, c) if they thought that the quality in teaching of one professor was

different in every subject they taught, d) if they taught that a professor should be able to teach different subjects, and e) their opinion about having either a specialist or the same professor for different courses.

The English Language Department of the school kindly provided the academic program options for the four years prior to the study. This allowed the researchers to carefully examine the careers of all the teaching staff. These documents were key in the design of the study as they made it clear that, while some professors had been focusing on one or two courses throughout their academic careers, others had been teaching practically anything they managed to get hired for.

There were two reasons for looking into the past four years only. The first one was rather arbitrary. It was thought that four years would provide enough insight into the professors' teaching record at this BA. Four years is the considered standard time that it takes a student to finish all their courses, although they often take six or twelve more months to finish their final paper and graduate. The second reason had to do with the fact that the English Department of the school had to put in a considerable amount of time to provide us with the records and we did not wish to put a heavier burden on the person in charge of doing this, as that would mean a distraction from other duties. It must be highlighted that the academic program options are public documents that contain no sensitive information at all.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The information was gathered in different stages. First, a list of all the professors and their workload (academic program options) was requested and provided by the English Language Department. In the case of the students, a group of twenty-seven were selected to take the survey, previously uploaded to Google Drive. Secondly, four professors were chosen from the lists to be interviewed. These four professors were selected based on the following criteria: two of them stood out the ones with the most diversified workload in the four previous years, the other two also stood out as the ones with the most specialized workload within the period of time. After this, permission was obtained to administer the survey to the student participants. The students who were willing to participate were asked to answer the survey online. At the end, only twenty-seven students answered the online survey and, as stated above, the four teachers selected were interviewed.

A content analysis procedure was used to analyze the data. The data were categorized and classified to

present them coherently. The information was scanned carefully, similar opinions were grouped, and the data were organized into different sets. The objective was to connect patterns, draw comparisons focusing on similarities and differences, and connect categories so that the findings could clearly address the objectives and answer the research questions. Finally, the data were prepared for presentation. All the coding and processing of the data were done manually.

Findings

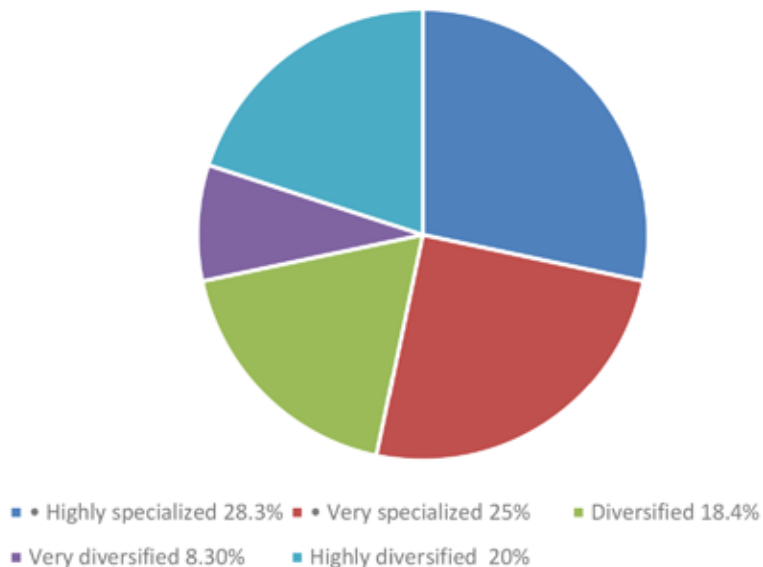
The data show that at least 60 professors have worked regularly at the BA in English language for the last four years. There are about 20 professors more that have also taught at this program at one time or another or that have been teaching here for a couple of terms, besides the ones considered for this study. These were not considered for the purpose of this study, as one of the objectives was to analyze whether the professors tended to specialize in one or two subjects or to cover several different courses from different disciplinary areas. We concluded that teaching only one or two school terms was not enough to show a tendency in either specialization or diversification of the teachers' workload. Professors were categorized into four different groups listed below, depending on the course or courses that they have been teaching throughout the past eight terms.

- Highly specialized: they only teach one same course always.
- Very specialized: they teach only two different courses.
- Diversified: they teach three different courses from different areas.
- Very diversified: they teach four different courses from four areas.
- Highly diversified: they teach five or more different courses from areas.

Table 2 shows that highly specialized professors account for 28.3% of the teaching staff while those that are very specialized account for 25%. Together, they make up for 53% of the total number. On the other hand, those that are diversified amount to 18.4%; the ones that are very diversified represent only 8.3%; and those that are highly diversified constitute 20% of the

total number of professors. That is, 46.7% have shown a tendency, for the past four years, to teach a wide range of subjects.

Table 2. Teaching staff and their type of workload



Source: author

It must be clarified that each term takes approximately six months. Each term is divided the following way: about three months and three weeks of instruction; three weeks of exams, which include the final exam as well as the second opportunity and third opportunity examinations, and the summer or winter break. Thus, there are two terms per year: the first one stretching from February to July, and the second one, which starts in August and ends in January.

The courses that most teachers have taught at one point or other at this school of languages, over the period of study, are Research Report, Research Report Writing Workshop, Social Service, Teaching and Learning English, and Foreign Language Learning Strategies.

On the other hand, there are the courses that very few teachers teach or have taught. For instance: Teaching English through Literature, Literature Written by Latino Authors in the U.S., ICT Applied to Translation, and Technology Applied to Foreign Language Teaching and Learning. What these courses have in common is that they are optional courses. Another course, Translation Science, has been taught by only two professors. Translation of Technical and Scientific Texts, Culture of English-Speaking Countries, Compared Literature in English and Spanish, and Teaching Practice have been taught by only three professors along these four years that the study covered.

A total of 6.6% of the teaching staff have taught between eight and thirteen different courses. This means that four professors alone have taught 39 of the 42 courses that are part of the degree in English Language. On the other hand, 16% have specialized in only one course that they have been teaching for years.

The students' perceptions

Twenty-seven students were interviewed in order to find out what they think is better: one teacher teaching multiple courses or one teacher teaching only one or two course they are specialists in. All the participants confirmed that they had taken different courses with the same teacher. Some of the courses they mentioned were Teaching Practice, Final Paper, U.S. Culture, Introduction to Literature, Teaching Practice Planning, English Literature, Teaching and Learning English, Linguistic Systems, Foundations of Contemporary Culture, Foundations of Linguistics, Advanced English, Introduction to Research, Methods and Approaches. Practically, every course in the curriculum was mentioned by the participants.

The data also indicate that 53.8% of the participants claim there is no difference in quality between two or more courses taught by one same professor whereas 46.2 they perceived differences in the quality of the professor's performance.

A different picture seemed to emerge when the participants were asked to focus on the teachers they had taken classes with and to rate their courses in terms of quality of teacher performance. On average, the participants have taken classes with total of 17 professors. The participants claimed that only 29.5% of the professors they have taken classes with perform equally well no matter what course they teach. Likewise, they shared that 29.5% perform poorly in at least one of the courses they are in charge of. Finally, they pointed out that 41% of them perform much better in one course than in other. In other words, in the participants' view, 70.5% of the professors they have had performed well in all their courses, and even better in some of them.

This is backed up by 73.1% of participants who believe that taking several courses with the same teacher has a positive impact in their learning whereas 26.9% believe the impact is negative. Nevertheless, 52% of the participants shared that they believe that, ideally, professors should specialize in one aspect of language teaching whereas 48% claimed that it would be better to have teachers who can teach all types of different courses.

As for the reasons several professors teach different courses, the participants seem to think that this is because they have to supplement their workload (16%); they are experts in different fields (32%); there is a shortage of teachers (44%); and the requirements to be a professor at this school of languages are not very strict (8%). Conversely, the participants believe that several professors teach only one or two courses because they are experts in only one area of knowledge (24%); they were not trained to teach different courses (12%); they do not meet the requirements (32%); and they are full-timers and do not need to bother themselves with other courses (32%).

The Teachers' Perceptions

Four teachers were interviewed to find out the different reasons why they specialized in one area or have a diversified workload. The participants were three men and one woman, two of them confirmed that they teach different courses of different areas while the other two confirmed that they have specialized in one single area or course.

The two professors with a diverse workload confirmed that they have taught different courses of different areas; one of them has even taught subjects that do not exist in the B.A. curriculum anymore. These two diversified professors were asked if they considered that there is a difference on their quality of teaching in different subjects from different areas. Professor Gemaro, who has been working in the school of languages for more than 20 years, shared that even though every subject has different aims, he tries to encourage the use of ICT in each of them:

I make a point of connecting every experience to the use of ICT. Every course has their own objectives but I try to foster the use of technology in each and every one of them.

Professor Merelia, who has also taught practically every course of the curriculum differs. She claims that there is a difference in quality when teaching different subjects since each of them focuses on different areas and requires different skills:

Yes, of course. Because it's not the same to teach a course that is related to English than to teach a course that focuses on linguistics or literature, because of the different competencies it requires.

In the same way, they were asked if there was a specific subject in which they do not consider themselves specialists. While Merelia quickly mentioned the name of one subject in which she does not consider herself expert, Gemaro pointed out that he considers that a teacher can be specialist in every subject, even if he or she does not know much about it, because it depends on his or her professional ethics. This is what Gemaro shared:

It's not that we are not specialists; the reasons of the professors also have to do with professional ethics. If you're assigned a course, that gives you the experience so that you can say you can teach that. But you have to be prepared to teach that course.

When they were asked why some professors decide to specialize in an area while others (like themselves) decide to teach different areas of subject matter, Merelia replied that she thinks that when a teacher teaches different classes, the main reason is that they need money:

I think the reasons have to do with employment because, at the end of the day, we have to eat, and we have to take whatever is available.

On the other hand, Gemaro, who tries to encourage the use of technology in every class he teaches, considers that when a teacher is in charge of diverse courses it is due to the fact that they are new as teachers:

Those who don't specialize, I think it's because they are just starting.

Professors with a very specialized workload are those that have taught different courses but from the same area. Two specialists were interviewed: Professor Flavio and Professor Sancho. Flavio's specialization area is culture, whereas Sancho has been working in the School of Languages for over 20 years teaching English courses. When asked what subject area Sancho considered himself an expert in, he shared that he does not consider himself a specialist:

I don't think of myself as a specialist, not even in those courses I've been teaching for so many years. I think that you never stop learning.

Professor Flavio was also asked to name a subject in which he considered himself an expert. He clarified

that he prefers to say that there is a subject he considers he can handle better, but he does not consider himself an expert.

Both participants were asked if they considered themselves able to teach subjects from different areas. Professor Flavio claimed that he could try but, at this moment, he could not do it:

I could do that but I'd need to prepare for it. It's not that I think it's hard, but at the moment I don't consider myself competent enough because I don't have the experience or the training.

Professor Sancho whose specialization area has always been teaching English does not even consider trying:

Absolutely not. It's not my thing and as a consequence I won't get involved in something I don't know.

Both professors were also asked if they thought that teaching different classes from different areas would harm their performance. Flavio considers that as a possibility:

It's not unlikely! I think that you can get the hang of it; given enough time, you can do it well. For a professor, I think it's better to just stick to some subjects but I don't think it'd be impossible, nor that you'd do a bad job if you diversified.

On the other hand, Professor Sancho shared that diversifying would be harmful and exhausting. However, he thinks some teachers have to do it because of the money:

Yes, because that would mean diversifying and, when you diversify, you wear out, both physically and emotionally. I understand that sometimes you've got to do it because of financial reasons.

Finally, both professors were asked why they thought that some professors taught different courses from different areas. Flavio agrees that it must be for financial reasons; however, Sancho is of a different mind. He seems to think that it must also be because they believe that they have the ability to do so:

Well, if they think they can do it, go ahead with it!

As a final comment to what the interviewees shared, they all agreed that neither specializing nor diversifying is wrong or right. It is just a matter of teacher priorities.

Discussion

The data show that tendencies towards either specialization or diversification are quite even on both sides of the spectrum with slightly over 50% of the teachers specializing in one or two courses, and a little under 50% of the teaching staff teaching a variety of subjects. The difference between both groups is only 6.3%. The courses that have been taught by the largest number of professors mostly require that teachers supervise the students' work and keep track of their progress. Social Service, for example, is all about paperwork. The students do not actually take any formal classes but must do voluntary work at a public office, school, or institution. This is seen as a way to pay off their debt to society for footing the bill for their education; public universities in Mexico are supported with taxpayers' money and are almost free if you compare them with private schools or universities in the U. S.

The teacher in charge of Social Service must keep track of who is working where and file the students' reports until they complete the number of hours required. It is not strenuous work at all, which probably helps to explain why so many teachers feel they might be qualified for a course like this. It can be considered that, overall, this kind of courses demand less from professors than other courses that call for a deeper knowledge of specialized subject matter or a proficient command of the target language.

One more element that might explain why some courses tend to be taken by many teachers is that neither a language level certification nor a master's degree is necessary to teach them. On the other hand, courses like English Language can only be taught if applicants have these above-mentioned qualifications. This reduces substantially the number of candidates that are well suited to teach them. Getting certified is not always a matter of having a sound command of the language. International language certifications can be expensive and someone who has recently graduated and is on the hunt for a well-paying job in a university might not have four or five thousand pesos (200 to 250 USD) to pay for certification. The same holds true for getting a master's degree.

Regarding the least popular courses, as mentioned in the previous section, there are some that are

optional for students. They may or may not take any of these, depending on whether they have any interest in the subject. Because of low demand, optional courses are only offered every other semester and are usually taught by only one professor. They are normally part of a full-timer's workload and new teachers hardly have any access to them. Practically, the only way to get to teach an optional subject is if the teacher in charge takes personal leave, sick leave, or if they retire.

Another reason that helps explain trends in diversification is that, because of a shortage of teachers, the school is often forced to lower standards for hiring professors for these courses. There are high standards for hiring full time teachers. However, these standards are lowered substantially when hiring teachers to work on six-month contracts. For example, for all of the English courses, teachers are required to show evidence of having attained C1 level, at least, in order to even be considered as a candidate for a full-time position. Nevertheless, for a part time, six-month contract position, the level required is B2. There are two main reasons for this: the first is that there are very few teachers with a certified C1 level applying for this kind of temporary jobs. The second is that temporary positions need to be filled immediately as courses are about to initiate or have already done so, in some cases. It is quite common to see whole classes go without a teacher for several weeks because no one can be found to do the job.

The students' perceptions

The data indicate that the concepts of quality of teaching and teacher performance are not interchangeable for the participating students. Perhaps they consider quality as some rather overall characteristic of the teaching staff in general, while performance is something more tangible that can be perceptibly experienced in class every day. The rationale behind this assumption lies in the fact that performance and quality were rated differently by the participants.

On the subject of teaching quality, their perceptions are divided almost equally, as a little more than half of them believe that quality remains the same no matter what a professor teaches, whereas a little less than half of those interviewed are of a different mind. However, there was a significant variation in teacher performance as only three out of ten teachers were labeled as equally good. Conversely, three out of ten were deemed poor in terms of performance, and four out of ten were considered superior in one of their courses. In other words, no

professor is perceived as keeping the same level of quality when teaching across the curriculum.

At the school, for most of the courses, except those having to do with teaching Spanish, teachers or candidates are required to have a master's degree in teaching English as a foreign language. There seems to be the belief, on the part of the school authorities, that holding this type of degree is enough to be able to teach courses having to do with areas as diverse as research, English, culture, translation, English literature, and others, with the same degree of quality. The data suggest that it would be sensible to have experts holding degrees in these particular fields in charge of these courses. A degree in a specific area of knowledge does not make the holder suitable to teach across the curriculum.

The Teachers' Perceptions

The professors who were interviewed agree that it is not possible for a teacher to handle different subjects the same way since nobody can be equally good at everything and neither can they. Even though many of them have taught rather dissimilar courses, they are aware that this is not the most desirable scenario. They graduated in one field of knowledge and, ideally, they would have to teach courses pertaining their area of expertise, i.e., they also consider themselves experts in one specific subject. Among all the courses they teach or have taught, there is one they specialized in; that is the one they like the most and they are best at, and it is the one they should teach and not others.

Furthermore, if they are asked, these professors can easily name one course they do not know much about but decided to give it a try. The reason for this is that such a course was available, and they met the profile required. They also point out that by being actively involved in teaching something they are no experts in, they gain valuable experience and enough knowledge to make up for any shortfalls they may have at the onset. In any case, the underpinning belief seems to be that teaching a course a professor knows little about may be difficult the first time they do it, but they will do it better the next time, and even better the next time, until they can consider themselves good enough. After all, the best way to learn something is by doing it, or as in this case, by teaching it.

The data indicate that professors who engage in teaching courses beyond their field of expertise see this as not only an intellectual challenge but also as an ethical issue. High ethical standards demand that they prepare well for teaching something they are not very fa-

miliar with, as one of the participants pointed out. Thus, the perception of this teacher is that an ethically-minded professor will probably get some books on the topic they do not understand well, ask other colleagues who are experts for materials and tips, take some course on the topic, and prepare well for the challenge.

On the other hand, the professors interviewed agree that teaching different classes from different areas harms their performance, as preparing for them is time-consuming. In addition to processing a large amount of material required for an unfamiliar course, they need to draft lesson plans for every class. This takes a lot of time if they teach different classes. Some highly specialized professors only teach one single course, Advanced English for example, and they have been teaching it for years. They do not even have to plan their classes because they know all contents and materials well. This gives them time to focus on the students, their needs and problems, their learning styles, new teaching materials and innovative teaching strategies, rather than having to worry about their own needs and limitations.

Teaching courses in which they are experts can be less stressing and more enjoyable. This may be one of the reasons some specialists interviewed do not even consider teaching something in which they did not major. Quite simple, they will not get involved in something they do not know well as it would be detrimental to their performance and overtaxing.

Three of the participating professors expressed their belief that it is due to financial reasons that some teachers get involved in teaching a variety of dissimilar courses. As one of them put it: they have bills to pay. Take the case of a professor who is an expert in translation and is assigned the only six-hour-a-week translation course available, but is also offered the opportunity to complement his or her workload by teaching other courses such as English Culture and Research. They might not have to think too much about it; one single course will hardly pay for rent, food, utilities, and transport, among other things. At the end of the day, it is all about money. If a teacher does well enough by focusing only on course or two similar courses, because they have full time or for any other reason, good for them. If they do not, they must find the way to supplement their income as they have to make ends meet.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research project was to find out how the teachers' workload affects their academic perfor-

mance; to explore the reasons the participating professors have decided to specialize in one single area while others have a more diversified workload; and how all this is perceived by the participant students as harmful or beneficial to their performance and achievements. The data suggest that many of the participants tend to diversify their workload mainly due to their financial situation. They have to teach courses of different areas to supplement their income since most of them are new teachers at the school of languages and need to cover a certain number of hours every school period. On the other hand, professors who only teach one or two similar courses do not feel either comfortable or well prepared to teach subjects of different areas. Although they may not be full-time teachers, they prefer not to get involved in diverse courses. They believe that it wears them out and that it is harder work as you must be prepared for every course and they all require different planning. They do not find it impossible, but they prefer not to do so. As for the students' views, it can be concluded that they have noticed a difference in quality in teachers' performance when they teach courses of different areas: not all courses taught by one professor are equally good. Even though most of them believe that taking different courses with the same professor has had a positive impact on their learning and performance along the B.A., they also expressed their belief that teachers should be specialized in just one area instead of trying to cover many of them, as this may be detrimental to the quality of teaching.

Finally, due to the teachers' shortage at the school of languages where this study was carried out, many teachers have to teach subjects from different areas. Students also believe that since many professors are full-time teachers, they do not need to teach as many different courses as other professors do because they need to fill up their workload every scholar period. On a final note, it can be assumed that work-related conditions may have an impact on both, teachers' practice, and

students' performance. However, all the stakeholders; that is, the school authorities in charge of hiring teachers every term, the professors in charge of the courses, and the students themselves, must adjust to the prevailing circumstances to make the system work.

Limitations

Although the aim of this research project was achieved, there were some limitations. First, school documents, an interview and an online survey were used in order to collect the information; however, using a broader variety of instruments could have yielded different or more specific results. Second, the number of participants was limited; if we consider that there are currently sixty-eight professors in the B.A. and every student generation has around two hundred and twenty students. The survey respondents were just a single group of twenty-seven students and the number of professors involved was only four. Due to these reasons, the results obtained through this research project cannot be generalized. This study was context-specific, with only a rather small sample of professors and students involved.

Implications for Future Research

Other methodologies and possibilities can expand the reach of this research. Since the number of participants in this research was limited, a study that includes a wider number of professors and students as participants would mean a step further in the understanding of the problem. Additionally, other types of analytic tools can help to optimize the findings. For instance, observing the professors' performance while teaching different classes could allow us to assess whether there are apparent differences in their quality of teaching. Secondly, a careful review of students' grades, especially of those who have taken different courses with the same teacher, might help determine if there are variations that could indicate a possible problem related to the professors' workload.

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PRE-SERVICE LANGUAGE TEACHERS' CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EMOTIONS AT A MEXICAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Framed within theories of high-quality teachers and emotional intelligence (EI), this article reports on a qualitative exploratory research study conducted at a public university in the southeastern region of Mexico. The research aimed to explore how students enrolled in an English Language Teaching (ELT) Program conceptualized and expressed their emotions which consequently shaped their emotional intelligence. Based on the Educational Model of the university in which the study took place, the curriculum in the ELT undergraduate program emphasizes the development of EI through its Competency-Based Education and Socio-formative approach. Findings revealed that preservice teachers were aware of their emotions and how important these are for developing and strengthening their emotional intelligence. Basic emotions, such as anger, happiness, sadness, and fear were the most salient ones reported as being conceptualized by participants as necessary to regulate their emotions. Finally, implications for language teachers and teacher education programs are also discussed.

Key words: emotions, emotional intelligence, socio-emotional competence, pre-service teachers, ELT.

Resumen

Enmarcado en teorías sobre profesores de alta-calidad y en la inteligencia emocional, este artículo presenta el reporte de un estudio exploratorio, cualitativo, que se realizó en una universidad mexicana en el sureste de México.

El propósito del estudio fue explorar cómo los estudiantes del programa de Lengua Inglesa (con formación en Docencia) conceptualizaban y expresaban sus emociones. Basados en el Modelo Educativo de la universidad, el Plan de estudios del Programa de Lengua Inglesa pone especial atención al desarrollo de la inteligencia emocional a través del enfoque Socio-formativo, basado en competencias. Los resultados de este estudio revelan que los maestros en formación eran conscientes de sus emociones y de la importancia de estas en el desarrollo y fortalecimiento de su inteligencia emocional. Emociones básicas, tales como enojo, felicidad, tristeza y miedo fueron las emociones más frecuentemente mencionadas. Los estudiantes reconocen la importancia de identificarlas para posteriormente regularlas.

Palabras clave: emoción, inteligencia emocional, competencia socio-emocional, maestros en formación, enseñanza del inglés.

Introduction

“Emotions and social relationships are at the centre of all human behaviour”
(Gkonou & Mercer, 2017, p.4)

Emotional and social competences are important components of teacher training and development. These have been acknowledged as particularly important for teacher effectiveness (Day & Gu, 2010; Dolev & Leshem, 2016; Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Mercer & Gkonou, 2017). Little work has been done in teacher training programs (Aspelin, 2019; Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Méndez López, 2020; Poulou, 2017); however, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest in implementing emotional intelligence and conducting research on the topic in teacher education (Aspelin, 2019). Sabol and Pianta (2012) state that “although most relationally-focused professional development opportunities are typically implemented during in-service, pre-service programs may be a particularly important place for re-

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lational training" (p.226). Aspelin (2019) declares that "socio-emotional competence is an important pedagogical competence and that it can be developed in teacher education" (p.164).

Scholars are more aware of the benefits of developing emotional intelligence. Some studies have shown that emotionally intelligent teachers are more able to create better classroom conditions (e.g., Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Nizielski et al., 2012), and such conditions might help increase students' motivation to learn, and to reduce student misbehavior (Nizielski et al., 2012). It has been claimed that emotionally intelligent teachers are able to create an effective learning environment (Dolev & Leshem, 2016; Ramana, 2013). Underhill (2013, p.204), for instance, claims that teachers' skills are a combination of "knowledge of the topic, skill with classroom methods and competence with inter- and intrapersonal relationships and the psychological learning atmosphere of the group". Furthermore, as Corcoran and Tormey (2012, 2013) declare that when teachers develop their emotional intelligence, they are in a position to acknowledge their own emotions as they experience them and are also aware of ways of coping with their anxiety and their students' anxiety. Aspelin (2019) recommends that both, teachers and pre-service teachers need to develop socio-emotional competence in order to "act sensitively and responsibly, to be emotionally present and manage feelings, to confirm students emotionally in the here and now, and to promote students' emotional development" (p.164).

In order to create an adequate emotional climate in the classroom, teachers and preservice teachers must first identify and then regulate their own emotions. Emotion regulation is critical because "across all educational contexts, including university, a teacher's ability to regulate his or her emotions can be as significant to teaching and learning as the experienced emotions themselves are" (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014, p.263). Hagenauer and Volet (2014) also believe that when teachers can manage their emotions, "emotion display can be applied instrumentally to achieve specific (teaching) goals [...]" (p.262).

In Mexico, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of developing emotional intelligence competences in schools. Based on new Education Policies in México, especial attention to the humanistic approach proposed in the new Educational Reform (2016, in effect from 2019) is being paid. The New Educational Reform establishes that teachers need to rescue the essence of being humans, provide quality and care in the relationship students-school, take care of the emo-

tional state of their student, and educate free, empathetic, responsible and emotionally intelligent human beings (Hernández-Cárdenas, 2017). This is also reflected in a document called *Marco de Convivencia Escolar en Escuelas de Educación Básica* (2018) (Framework for School Coexistence in Basic Education Schools). The former document represents a practical tool or guide, by providing recommendations to teachers to promote a favorable relationship environment within schools. The framework fosters a healthy, peaceful and inclusive coexistence, watching over the best interests of children. The purpose of this framework is to establish the basis for promoting an inclusive, democratic and peaceful school coexistence, that is, to contribute to the improvement of learning environments for learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. The framework, in its Article 3, indicates that the members of the school community shall conduct themselves in accordance with the values that are considered a priority for the school community and that regulate the actions of individuals, among which the following stand out: a good communication, empathy, reconciliation, equality, respect, solidarity, and tolerance. An important emphasis on the emotional stability and wellbeing of the students can be observed in both, the Educational Reform and the Framework documents. Therefore, the preparation of teachers and future teachers on emotional intelligence and socio-emotional competences has become a key element for the Mexican education authorities, especially higher education institutes which are responsible of the education and training of teachers. As Fried (2011) argues,

"a greater understanding of the role of emotions in the teaching profession can help in the training of teachers to be well equipped to tackle the demands of the classroom and achieve the goal of educating students who can take greater control of their lives" (p.8).

Student teachers or pre-service teachers need to develop their emotional intelligence from the early stages of their teaching practice, as part of their teaching training, so they can become socially and emotionally competent language teachers in the future. As Arizmendi Tejeda et al. (2016) explain, being emotionally intelligent is crucial in the teaching profession because it helps teachers build a positive and rewarding relationship with students. This, in our view, guarantees, in a certain way, a more effective learning and generates an adequate educational environment. Furthermore,

“Emotional intelligence allows teachers to motivate themselves in order to accomplish the goals they have established, such as helping students to speak in English, to acquire a good or adequate reading level, or simply to learn some vocabulary. Consequently, by motivating themselves, teachers also motivate their students.” (Arizmendi Tejeda et al., 2016, p.33)

From the perspective of teachers’ trainers and researchers, one of the first steps to develop emotional intelligence is to be able to identify our own feelings or emotions, as stated in the definition of Emotional intelligence by Goleman (1998, p.317), who describes it as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships”. This is supported by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) who have stated that:

“Socially and emotionally competent teachers have high self-awareness. They recognize their emotions, emotional patterns, and tendencies and know how to generate and use emotions such as joy and enthusiasm to motivate learning in themselves and others. They have a realistic understanding of their capabilities and recognize their emotional strengths and weaknesses” (p.494).

Similarly, Arizmendi Tejeda et al. (2016) acknowledge that, because teaching is a highly demanding profession, it is necessary for teachers to be able to recognize and interpret their emotions, hence they can create a good relationship with students. Otherwise, as Méndez López (2020, p.17) suggests, teachers experimenting negative emotions and not being able to regulate them “develop stress that is damaging for their teaching practice”. To our knowledge, we have not identified vast literature related to preservice language teachers’ emotional intelligence in Mexico. Little has been done in order to learn about what pre-service teachers know about emotional intelligence and what their perceptions on emotions are.

Rationale

The idea of conducting this research arose as part of a final project within a training course on emotions that some faculty members of the University of Quintana Roo received during the summer of 2020. It is important to highlight that by the time the matrix-survey on emotions (for this study) was compiled by the group of researchers (two of them herein) the world context of

pandemic was still on escalate. Thus, the main focus of the study was not necessarily oriented towards participants’ emotions in the context of pandemic, but instead, from a general point of view of emotions and how they deal with these on a regular academic basis. This, specially nowadays when the topic of emotional intelligence has gained more relevance as being in the core of the cognitive and learning process as various authors have demonstrated (see Johnson, 2014; Raju and Joshith, 2018; Roseman, 1984; Schweder, 2019; Schütz, 1998; Temouri, 2016). Since the times of Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis appearance in the 1980s, language learners’ emotions started being considered as a key element in the learning process, influencing important aspects of the learner such as motivation, self-confidence, anxiety and personal traits. The importance of emotions relies on the powerful these can be not only ‘to boost’ learner’s cognition, but congruently to settle him/herself as a functional member of society with the ultimate achievement of success (Temouri, 2016).

All in all, the focus of this study aims to determine, at an exploratory level, language teacher-trainees awareness on their emotions’ conceptualization and expressions. Thus, the research questions guiding this are the following:

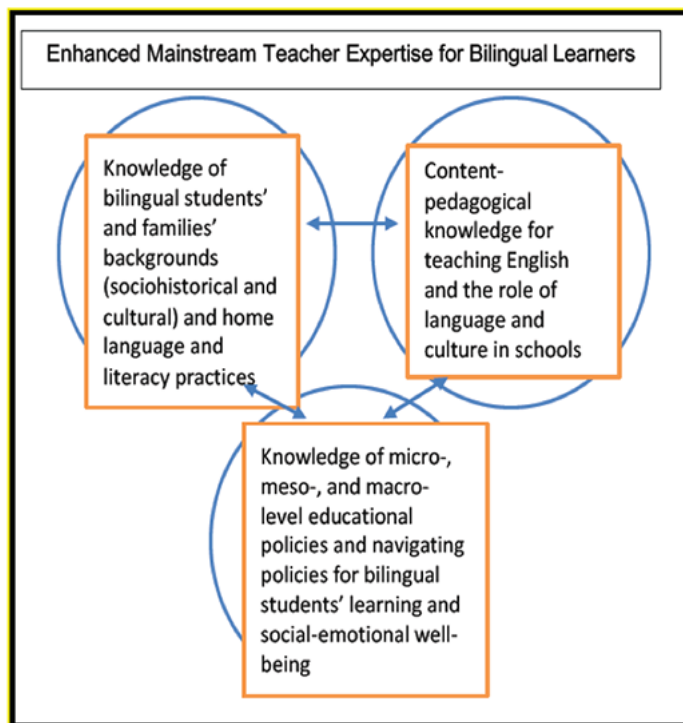
- RQ1. How do students enrolled in an ELT BA program in southeastern Mexico conceptualize emotional intelligence?
- RQ2. How do students enrolled in an ELT BA program in southeastern Mexico express their emotional intelligence?

Theoretical Framework

Framed within the lenses of *High-Quality English Language Teachers* (Coady et al., 2019) that conceptualize different types of knowledges that teachers need or should develop as an essential part of their professional development. Even though this framework originally focuses on bilingual learners, it could be easily applicable to teachers in general. In our case, we are adapting the framework to pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language. The framework includes (see Figure 1): Knowledge of bilingual students’ and families’ backgrounds (sociohistorical and cultural) and home language and literacy practices, content-pedagogical knowledge for teaching English, and knowledge of micro, meso, and macro level educational policies and navigating policies for bilingual students’ learning and social-emotional well-being. Content and pedagogical knowledge or skill are also considered by Brown (2007) as important char-

acteristics that English Language teachers should have. When describing the characteristics or skills teachers need to develop to be considered good English teachers, Brown (2007) focuses also on Technical knowledge, Pedagogical skills, Interpersonal skills and Personal qualities.

Figure 1. Coady et al. (2019) Framework



Enhanced mainstream teacher expertise for bilingual learners (adapted from de Jong et al., 2013).

As a complement to Coady and colleagues (2019) and Brown's (2007) proposals for High Quality English Language Teachers and good teachers, we are also embracing the principles of EI as key elements for teachers' training and development, and the main focus of this research. The concept of Emotional Intelligence can be traced back to the theory of multiple intelligences suggested by Gardner (1983). The theory of multiple intelligences includes a form of intelligence that Gardner refers to as "personal intelligences".

Analyzing Gardner's proposal of multiple intelligences, it is evident that this comprises "an intrapersonal element, which involves looking inward towards oneself, and an interpersonal element, which is more outward looking towards other individuals" (Mercer & Gkonou, 2017). Gardner (1983) argues that these are two distinct types of intelligences but "interdependent and partially overlapping" (p.255). However, Gardner's original conceptualization does not particularly outline the

role of the emotions (Hatch & Kornhaber, 2006). It was Salovey and Mayer (1990) who use the term "Emotional Intelligence" first, after investigating the factors underlying effectively functioning societies (Mercer & Gkonou, 2017). Although the term was first introduced by Salovey and colleague in the early 1990s, the term Emotional Intelligence became widely known or more popular through Goleman's (2012) bestselling book "Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ".

Goleman (2012) suggests five key components of emotional intelligence:

- **Self-awareness:** people constantly engaging in self-appraisals and critical reflection or their areas of opportunity and their strengths, with the purpose of knowing themselves better.
- **Self-regulation:** people manage their emotions and behave in appropriate ways.
- **Motivation:** people use hope and optimism in order to carry out a task or activity.
- **Empathy:** people's ability to think of someone else's feelings.
- **Social skills:** people's willingness to interact with others.

Gkonou and Mercer (2017, p.6), state that the notion of "social and emotional learning" (SEL) has gained prominence within general education, in the last decade. They state that:

"SEL suggests that a range of social and emotional skills such as recognising and managing one's own emotions, understanding the emotions of others and empathising with them, attending to relationships and generally managing life effectively and ethically, can be explicitly taught from childhood [...] with explicit instruction of relevant skills".

This exploratory research sheds light on the findings obtained from a qualitative research study conducted in a public university in the southeastern region of Mexico, in 2020. The research aims to explore how students enrolled in an English Language Teaching (ELT) BA program in southeastern Mexico conceptualize and express their emotional intelligence.

Methodology

This paper presents a report on an exploratory qualitative case study (Merriam, 2019) conducted in a public university in the Southeastern of the Mexican republic, in 2020. The research questions that guided this work were:

- RQ1: How do students enrolled in an ELT BA program conceptualize emotional intelligence?
- RQ2: How do students enrolled in an ELT BA program express their emotional intelligence?

A Phronetic approach (Tracy, 2013, 2018) was followed in order to proceed to collect and analyze data. An iterative component - that “refers to a systematic, repetitive, and recursive process in qualitative data analysis” (Tracy and Hinrichs, 2017, p.1), was integrated, with the purpose of focusing on real world concerns. Tracy (2018, p.62) indicates that Phronetic approach comes from the Greek term *Phronēsis* that “is typically translated to mean prudence or practical wisdom”. According to Tracy (2018) a Phronetic iterative approach is guided by theories (previously generated) and research questions, as well as qualitative data emerging from the instruments. Phronetic approach activities are interrelated to grounded theory, especially a most recent version explained by Charmaz (2014); but these juxtapose to the “purely inductive version of grounded theory introduced by Glaser & Strauss (1967) and the more positivist prescriptions recommended by Strauss & Corbin (1998)” (Tracy, 2018, p.62). “An iterative approach encourages reflection upon the active interests, current literature, granted priorities, and various theories the researcher brings to the data” (Tracy and Hinrichs, 2017, p.1). In an iterative approach, the data analysis may allow researchers to pinpoint the general idea of a problem and then address it from various perspectives (Tracy, 2018). An iterative approach makes use of both inductive and deductive reasoning (Tracy and Hinrichs, 2017).

Participants

This research was carried out at a public university in southeastern Mexico, with pre-service English language teachers from an undergraduate ELT program. There was a total of 40 participants from the fourth, sixth and eighth semesters, evenly distributed males and females, ranging ages 19 to 22 years old. The participants were all enrolled in various courses with the researchers at the time of the study, during the summer term of 2020. They were selected on the basis of probability and convenience sampling which made them available for answering the survey (Creswell, 2013). The researchers are full-time professors at the institution where the research was carried out.

Instrument

An online survey designed by a group of researchers in higher education was applied. The survey was part of the activities conducted on by the researchers of this study after attending a workshop on emotional intelligence.

The design of the instrument was carried out collaboratively with other teachers who attended the workshop. Although the instrument was crafted in generic terms; that is, thinking that it could be administered to students across diverse educational programs within the university; at the end it was ultimately applied to pre-service language teachers in our program. The team of researchers conducting this research oriented it towards the nature of the students in the Bachelor program of ELT aiming to identify the levels of acquaintance of participants regarding their emotional intelligence. See appendix 1.

For purposes of reliability, the instrument was validated by the 20 participants (all professors from the university) who provided feedback and which latter was incorporated within the instrument, drawing a total of 26 items. The comments generated were in terms of pertinence and adequacy of every item. Both open-ended and closed questions, addressed to learn about the participants' perception on emotional intelligence and how aware they were of their emotions and how they are expressed, were included. The survey was sent to 4 groups of pre-service teachers via Forms (Microsoft Office 365), from which only forty replied. The average answering time was 15 minutes, and participants were given one week to complete it.

Data analysis

MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 (Released 20.2.1) was used by the researchers in order to follow a systematic analysis. The decision to use it was based on the benefits offered by the software for the analysis of qualitative data generated from the survey, literature reviews, and automatically code large amounts of qualitative data, amongst others. Therefore it “belongs to the family of CAQDAS, the acronym for Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software.” (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019, p.1).

Both the open-ended and closed questions were analyzed. Complementary to the phronetic approach, some elements of the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were used to organize and interpret data, inductively and comparatively (Merriam, 2009). The coding process was primary cycle coding (Tracy, 2013; Tracy and Hinrichs, 2017; Tracy, 2018) also known as initial coding (Charmaz, 2006), Secondary coding (Tracy, 2013; Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017; Tracy, 2018) or Axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007), and the construction of categories (Merriam, 2009).

This first phase was done individually by the three researchers involved in this study. It began by examining data and allocating descriptive words or phrases that capture the essence of the data (Tracy & Hinrichs,

2017). This process allowed the creation of a “start-list” and “a brief definition and representative example of each [code] via a codebook [...] providing a shortcut to knowing the key phenomena that you’re finding and continuing to look for during the analysis” (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017, p.5). The latter authors have stated that codebooks are essential in collaborative data analysis because each researcher conceptualize “key phenomena” (p.5) similarly. The research team triangulated the data by comparing their interpretations at all moments. From this stage onwards, the Constant Comparative Method (CCM) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was applied, in order for the researchers to compare data applicable to the emerging codes, break them off and create new ones (Charmaz, 2006). This first cycle of coding generated a total of 2,569 answers from the participants (See Figure 2 for an example of initial coding generation per question in the survey).

Figure 2. Example of resulting codes (first cycle coding: initial).

Code	Count
Materiales lectura IE	47
Cursos tomados IE	99
Asociación película IE	98
Entendimiento IE	117
Significado empatía	100
Significado autoestima	94
Entendimiento regulación emociones	95
Palabras expresan emoción	373
Emociones básicas	193
Opinión terapia psicológica	119
Entendimiento-Función Miedo	143
Entendimiento-Función Tristeza	136
Entendimiento-Función Alegría	103
Entendimiento-Función Enojo	119
Respuesta-reacción Tristeza	115
Respuesta-reacción Enojo	141
Respuesta-reacción Alegría	141
Respuesta-reacción Miedo	110
Razonamiento Felicidad	94
Sentimientos Sobre Futuro	123

The last two phases of the qualitative data analysis included a Secondary-cycle coding -also named “hierarchical coding” in a phonetic iterative approach (Tracy, 2013; Tracy and Hinrichs, 2017; Tracy, 2018)- and the construction of categories (Merriam, 2009). During the Secondary-cycle coding, the researchers examined the codes that emerged during the Primary-cycle cod-

ing and proceeded to organize, synthesize, group, and categorize them, by finding patterns, connecting data to theories and models (a process called “prospective conjecture”), and relating them to the research questions, (Tracy and Hinrichs, 2017, p.6). Comparable to axial coding (Charmaz, 2006), this process comprises methodically gathering codes in hierarchical categories to make sense conceptually (Tracy and Hinrichs, 2017) (See Figures 3 and 4 for examples of the second and third phases).

Figure 3. Example of Second cycle coding or Axial coding.

Code	Count
Empatía	1
??	3
Aceptación de emociones propias	2
Tener actitud positiva para superar problemas	1
Empatizar con emociones de otros	2
búsqueda de equilibrio emocional	1
interiorizar, analizar emociones	2
Comprender emociones propias	6
identificación de emociones propia y de otros	17
Conocimiento de emociones	11
Manejo de emociones	9
Estabilidad emocional	1
Comprender emociones de otros	1
Control o gestión de emociones	19
Capacidad de demostrar sentimientos	1

Figure 4. Example of the third cycle coding: categories.

Code	Count
Empatía con emociones de otros	0
Comprender emociones de otros	1
Empatizar con emociones de otros	2
Empatía	1
Sensibilidad a emociones	0
sensibilidad emocional	3
Comprender emociones propias	6
Aceptación de emociones propias	2
interiorizar, analizar emociones	2
Conocimiento de emociones	11
identificación de emociones propia y de otros	17
Regulación de emociones	0
Tener actitud positiva para superar problemas	1
Capacidad de demostrar sentimientos	1
Control y gestión de emociones	19
búsqueda de equilibrio emocional	1
Estabilidad emocional	1
Manejo de emociones	9

Analysis and Discussion

In trying to answer both research questions leading this research, an array of categories appeared as shaping their emotions; the findings were the following:

RQ1: How do students enrolled in the ELT BA program at a southeastern Mexican university conceptualize emotional intelligence?

This question was answered laying out a spectrum of four main concepts, such as **fear**, **sadness**, **anger** and **joy**; which were lined-up as going from **positive (+)** to negative (-), followed by **duality (+/-)** and finally those having an **impact on their health (IOH)**. Each one of these concepts were conceived as having the different connotations as the following examples evidence. From the four main concepts identified, a number of mentions were generated indicating the frequency these were alluded to. Consequently, these numbers were taken merely as an indicator of the times in which they appear within each participants' conceptualizations about their emotions while describing them.

From the four different concepts reported as conceptualizing their emotions, **fear** reported the highest number of reactions/connotations (+), (-), (+/-) and (IOH). Fear was identified mostly as having a duality (+/-) connotation (N=72), followed by positive impact (N=10), negative (N=6) and for impact on their health (N=10). The following excerpts show examples of conceptualizations of fear and how these could have a (+), (-), (+/-) connotation:

- (+) “fear may help you to **develop yourself** as a person and to **move out of your comfort zone**.”
- (-) “fear makes people **scare**.”
- (+/-) “fear helps us to **move away** from unknown things that might cause us **harm**.”
- (IOH) “fear is a sensation that **accelerates our heartbeat**, it makes us alert and could give us a bad sensation.”

The first excerpt alluding to *developing the self* and *to move out of the comfort zone* encapsulates the self-awareness competency in the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) proposed by Boyatzis and Goleman (2007). This notion alludes to the fact that self-awareness enables teachers “learn from their mistakes and know where to improve their performance” (Shanmugasundaram & Mohamad, 2011, p.1793). This may suggest that preservice teachers are able to identify

and understand their emotions and use them for their professional benefit. The second excerpt resembles some of what Nguyen's study (2014) collected regarding the emotions preservice teachers in the research experienced during their practicum. That is, one of the participants reported constantly feeling anxiety for her English competence as she was **scared** of failure, and because her mentor was observing and assessing her.

The second reported conceptualization of emotions was **sadness**, which in a similar fashion to fear, had the four different types of reactions/connotations (+ N=31), (- N=24), (+/- N=26) and (IOH N=14). This may suggest that sadness is a type of feeling that is more indistinctly used, as its numbers were more even as opposed to fear, which weighted more on a duality connotation. The following excerpts show the reactions/connotations in which the feeling of sadness was encountered:

- (+) “Sadness is a short **momentum** in which we have the opportunity of **feeling bad** and the develop **compassion of ourselves** when needed”
- (-) “I think sadness is a sensation of **emptiness**”
- (+/-) “Sadness is that feeling that **every human being feels but denies it**. It serves for both **positive and negative purposes**. Positive to make us stronger and negative –if you know how to control it, it won't harm you”
- (IOH) “Sadness is feeling **hopeless, pessimistic** and in a **down mood** for a given event or reason”

Our findings resemble in part to those of Putri et al. (2012) in two of these approaches: “the positive approach, containing sad moment as life lesson, self-reflection, motivation, and lastly as a spiritual lesson, and the negative approach which are viewing sad moment as a disruption, life's obstacle, and memorable moment” (p.33). That is, feeling bad and developing compassion is similar to self-reflection or motivation. Emptiness, hopelessness, and pessimism fit into the category of life's obstacle, whilst the excerpt expressing duality can be related to a memorable moment, or life lesson.

The third reported conceptualization of emotions was **anger**, which slightly different to the previous two concepts of fear and sadness, only reported (+ N=8), (- N=32), and (+/- N=39) connotations with no impact on health allusions. The following excerpts exemplify some of them:

- (+) *"Anger is a very **normal** emotion which **we all have** and it serves the purpose of **taking out accumulated frustration**"*
- (-) *"Anger is an **unpleasant** feeling which could be **difficult to control** because sometimes people release that feeling through **banging** and **punching** something or someone. I think it serves the purpose of **letting know others** that **we are not feeling any good** or that thinks that something is wrong"*
- (+/-) *"Anger is a feeling of **helplessness**; of not being able of doing or saying anything; it serves the purpose of **letting flow and take out all** that useless negative energy"*

The first and third excerpts regarding anger and how this emotion may fit a multiple purpose, i.e. to release frustration, to let others know that one is not feeling good, resemble those reported by participants in Deng's et al. (2018) study. These alluded that anger served the purpose of taking out all the frustration participants could encounter during their practicum, which was considered normal and a natural part of the process of learning and gaining experience both in life and in the arena of teaching.

Joy was the fourth conceptualization of emotions participants reported experiencing, and contrastingly to the previous three. It only had two types of connotations: positive (+ N=58) and impact on health (IOH N=5). Some examples of these are the following excerpts:

- (+) *"Happiness is one of the **best sensations** a human being can experiment; it represents all **positive** emotions, it makes you feel **special**, with good attitude and **energy**"*
- (IOH) *"Happiness is a type of emotion that gives us **peace of mind**"*

What we found on the allusion to joy, confirms much of what has already been witnessed throughout vast empirical studies (see for example Haidt, 2000; Van Cappellen, 2019; Watkins et al., 2017;) in that joy is a type of emotion that is associated to positive attitudes and boosting goals either personal or professional to become attainable. According to Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2017), having a positive mood may lead teachers to a better and more productive performance (p.93). This suggests that experiencing strong positive emotions, such as joy, allows learners and, in this case preservice teachers, to

gain confidence enhancing their self-esteem contribution to strengthening their emotional intelligence.

From these two excerpts we can infer that joy is not merely perceived as material possessions but rather related to attitudes and well-being. This finding is similar to those in Watkins et al. (2017) since they found that "there is clearly a spiritual dimension to joy" (p.14). Some of the participants expressed feeling blessed or amazed at the things they have received (in a spiritual sense), which could be related to **feel special** and having **peace of mind**. This can also be confirmed with Páez et al.'s (2013) study, in which participants' emotional regulation was correlated with attainment of adaptive goals. The result was that:

"Seeking emotional and informative support, spiritual activities, and humor were associated with adaptive outcomes in the anger and joy episodes. Altruism, distraction, passive physiological regulation, venting and confrontation regulation were related to attainment of adaptive goals only in the episode of joy" (Páez et al., 2013, p.10).

RQ 2: How do students enrolled in an ELT BA program in southeastern Mexico express their emotional intelligence?

The second research question leading this investigation aimed to identify the way in which participants expressed their emotional intelligence, that is, if any of the previous conceptualizations of their emotions (*fear, sadness, anger and joy*) were either interiorized (I) or exteriorized (E). **Fear** was the emotion with the least interiorization (N=36) and exteriorization (N=34) expressions; some examples of these are the following:

- (I) *"When I experience fear, I **hide** what I feel and think again".*
*"I **avoid** anything that causes me fear"*
- (E) *"I **speak to someone**". "I **react in different ways**, sometimes I feel how my blood stream travels through my body, I get cold, some other times I feel my heartbeat rapidly"*

These two excerpts resemble in much to the findings by Hagenauer and Volet (2014). The authors claim that "the communication of emotions or their masking in particular situations helped them [preservice teachers] maintain a productive and effective learning and teaching environment." (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014, p.275). As

for avoiding the situation that causes fear, there is similar finding in Arizmendi Tejeda et al. (2016). Preservice teachers in this research used preventative strategies, such as selecting a situation to regulate their emotions. According to Arizmendi Tejeda et al (2016), “By regulating our emotions, we become aware of them and are capable of controlling them” (p.7).

Similarly to fear, **sadness** reported a number of expressions for both types, interiorized (N=38) and externalized (N=37) respectively. The following excerpts provide some insight on how participants described the expression of these emotions:

- (I) *“I almost always **hide these feeling for myself** because I **don’t like to be seen like that, so I keep calm and stay quiet**”*
- (E) *“I normally **exercise myself or practice some type of sport**. These days I look to **eat**”*

As stated above, it seems that for some participants, hiding or expressing negative emotions may be a choice in terms of privacy to not show their feelings depending on the context. It is important to bear in mind that, as Haganauer & Volet (2014) suggest, “the total suppression of negative emotions without internal regulation can also be maladaptive in nature” (p.276), which may be worth paying attention to, as it could result potentially counterproductive. The authors highlight the importance of paying attention to remain working on the negative emotions side as this may reduce the intensity of the learning-teaching experience. From the key components that Goleman (1998) proposes, two of them, i.e. *self-awareness* and *social skills* are clearly present in the excerpts above, as participants seem to be conscious of not wanting “to be seen like that” and prefer to stay “calm and quiet”.

In contrast with the previous two emotions, **anger** reported a higher number of expressions as opposed to fear and sadness, with N=42 for interiorization: and N=59 externalization. Some examples of these are:

- (I) *“I get angry very few. When I get angry, I just **don’t do anything**. Instead, I **wait until I get over it**”*
- (E) *“Sometimes I **cannot control myself** and I **hit/bang** random things, or **say harmful things** to other people”*

Both interiorizing and externalizing their emotions, particularly in the case of anger, were slightly sim-

ilar in allusions. These excerpts suggest that anger is a feeling that sometimes, and according to the context, may be hidden or shown by the person. The excerpts alluding anger presented here, although having more of a negative connotation, invite to reflect upon what Haganauer and Volet’s study (2014) draw. The authors found out that hiding anger or expressing it in a positive way may serve as an assertive strategy in the context of teaching and learning. As for the externalization of anger in the second excerpt, this attitude can be explained as a lack of “in action” reflection, which is related to the actions taken when some situations come up, as suggested by Casteñada-Trujillo and Aguirre-Hernandez (2018). Gross et al.’s study (2006) also found that some learners can regulate their emotions by changing their thinking in order to reduce the negative emotion. This matches the findings in the present study, as participants here manifested interiorizing their emotions as a strategy of waiting until they felt calm to give a second thought to the situation.

Joy had the same number of expressions as anger in general. However, for interiorizing the feeling there were only N=4 allusions, whereas for exteriorizing it there were N=97. The following excerpts provide some insight about these:

- (I) *“I like to **keep joy for myself**”*
- (E) *“I **let these emotions flow**, I **spoil myself**, read books, **watch** movies, **laugh out loud** and **show much love** to the people around me”*

These findings suggest that joy is perhaps the most salient emotion as it satisfies and nurtures emotional intelligence and in due course strengthens self-esteem. This is aligned with Onen and Ulusoy (2015), who state that there is a significant relation between self-esteem and emotional intelligence. On the same line of thoughts, Feng-Teng’s findings (2017) show that positive emotions such as pride and joy, derived from the students’ self-awareness, “helped the pre-service teachers to monitor their own feelings and emotions” (Feng-Teng, 2017, p.130). The findings also confirm that positive emotions tend to be more expressed rather than interiorize (Haganauer & Volet, 2014).

Conclusions

In trying to identify how participants conceptualized their emotions and how they expressed them, data shows that participants were clear about four of the most salient emotions. That is, participants were able to recall *fear*, *sadness*, *anger*, and *joy* as the most salient

emotions for which they were aware identifying and self-regulating. From these, some were more recurrent in number of appearances which allowed the researchers to have a closer look at how participants cope with their emotions and how these delineate their Emotional Intelligence. The identification of these emotions drew on the core components of emotional intelligence which are *self-awareness*, *self-regulation*, *empathy* and *social skills* Goleman (1998) as being present in every trace of mentions from the participants.

Another aspect we were able to identify amongst participants' responses, regarding emotional intelligence, was the presence of the concepts of social and emotional learning put forward by Gkonou & Mercer (2017), i.e., Recognizing and managing one's own emotions and understanding the emotions of others and empathizing with them. This seems quite encouraging, as it suggests that the pre-service teachers in our research seem to be aware and be able to cope with their emotions, which eventually taken into their pedagogical practice could contribute positively to the enhancement of it (Aspelin, 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Nizielski et al, 2012; Dolev & Leshem, 2016; Ramana, 2013).

Interiorization and exteriorization of the emotions were also traced on participants responses, serving the purpose of knowing how they would respond to given situations, either letting out their feelings or retraining themselves from showing them. The idea of interiorizing or externalizing them, encompasses with the notion of recognizing and managing or regulating their emotions, which seen present among pre-service teachers may be encouraging. On this line of thought, joy and anger seemed to be the most frequently externalized emotion –by a very subtle difference– whereas fear and sadness on the other hand were the most interiorized. The universal principle of knowing when and how to show or hide their emotions seem to be clearly present in the way participants laid out their feelings. We all know that for any teacher, awareness and control of his/her emotions is paramount as Twenge and Baumeister (2002) point out

“the human ability to regulate oneself and alter a person's own responses is one of the most powerful and adaptive capacities that people have and is probably responsible for the immense diversity and flexibility of human behaviour” (p.57).

Pedagogical implications and further research

Pedagogical implications and directions for further research from our part are in line with what other authors have previously suggested (see Coady et al., 2019) in that it is mandatory that teacher educators should be fully alert of all educational policies concerning their institutions and districts, and of course aware and sensitive enough of their students' social and emotional wellbeing.

It is important that all players of the educational arena, from educational authorities, administrators, teacher educators, and teachers bear in mind the importance of including explicit instruction related to emotional intelligence (self-development and of others). Previous research has emphasized that explicit instruction can help individuals develop their emotional intelligence (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017). Thus, we believe a good strategy could be the inclusion of courses or workshops on the topic of emotional intelligence for actors at all levels of educational contexts, specially targeting in-service and pre-service teachers and learners. Further longitudinal research in the form of action-research may contribute to fill the gap about misconception or null familiarity of teachers and learners about self-awareness and control of their emotional intelligence.

Amongst the limitations of the research, the sample may have been small as we only gathered a sample of 40 participants of and ELT bachelors' program. Therefore, results may not be applicable to other contexts beyond the scope for what it was aimed to. Nevertheless, we hope it can serve as reference for stimulating more research on this topic specifically in the context of Mexican education. Another possible constraint to generalize the findings of this research is the fact that emotions are on the scale of the subjective ideas of the human psyche, as these may vary over extended periods of time, becoming difficult to trace longitudinally. As concluding remarks, we would like to re-state that this research aimed to illustrate the response of our students on their emotional intelligence, hoping this would shed light on how to better prepare learners who are sensible and aware of their own emotions; be able to regulate their emotions; and be empathetic of other people's emotions in general.

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Appendix 1: Survey

Encuesta sobre las emociones en estudiantes universitario

El objetivo de esta encuesta es identificar el conocimiento y las habilidades socio-emocionales que has desarrollado. Tu participación en esta encuesta es voluntaria. La información proporcionada es completamente anónima y con fines educativos. Muchas gracias por tu participación, que es de vital importancia para este trabajo.

Elige o escribe la respuesta, según corresponda

1. ¿Has leído algo sobre inteligencia emocional? * Sí No
2. ¿Qué material (i.e. libros, revistas, artículos) has leído y sobre qué temas de inteligencias emocional? *
3. ¿Has tomado algún curso y/o taller sobre educación emocional (i.e. autoestima, habilidades socioemocionales, etc.) * Sí No
4. ¿Qué curso(s) y/o taller(es) has tomado? *
5. ¿Asocias alguna película con la inteligencia emocional? En caso de que sí, escribir cuál(es) *
6. ¿Qué entiendes por inteligencia emocional? Explícalo con tus propias palabras. *
7. Explica con tus palabras lo que significa empatía*
8. Explica con tus palabras lo que es autoestima*
9. ¿Qué entiendes por regular emociones? *
10. Escribe el mayor número de palabras que expresan una emoción (i.e. enojado, triste, alegre...) *
11. De estas que acabas de mencionar, ¿Cuáles consideras son emociones básicas? *
12. La inteligencia emocional se aprende*: Falso Verdadero
13. ¿Qué opinas de las personas que toman terapia psicológica? *
14. ¿Qué es el miedo y para qué sirve? *
15. ¿Qué es la tristeza y para qué sirve? *
16. ¿Qué es la alegría y para qué sirve? *
17. ¿Qué es el enojo y para qué sirve? *
18. ¿Reflexionas sobre las emociones? * Sí No
19. De las siguientes emociones, ¿cuál es la que experimentas con mayor frecuencia en estos momentos de pandemia? * Tristeza, enojo, alegría, miedo
20. ¿Cómo respondes y/o reaccionas cuando sientes tristeza? *
21. ¿Cómo respondes y/o reaccionas cuando sientes enojo? *
22. ¿Cómo respondes y/o reaccionas cuando sientes alegría? *
23. ¿Cómo respondes y/o reaccionas cuando sientes miedo? *
24. ¿Eres feliz? * Sí No
25. Explica tu respuesta a la pregunta anterior. *
26. Cuándo piensas en tu futuro, ¿Cómo te sientes? *

**obligatorio*

FOSTERING AUTONOMOUS VOCABULARY LEARNING WITH THE VOCABULARY.COM APP: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Lexicon is the main element to learn English as a foreign language because rich vocabulary improves communication, listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. Most importantly, the learners' knowledge expansion of words will allow them to access new and meaningful information to construct their schemata. The purpose of this paper is to identify if the Vocabulary.com application promotes autonomous learning of lexicon in a virtual context based on the subjects' perceptions. In that sense, a descriptive quantitative approach took place on a sample of 40 subjects from the ET Bachelor at BUAP during Fall 2020, obtaining these results: students perceived that the app did develop autonomous vocabulary learning due to its characteristics which allowed them to choose their method to practice, establish goals, provide intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, develop responsibility to organize time, apply cognitive, metacognitive and support strategies to learn virtually with the app, use either organizational, learning, and self-management skills or general competencies to pace their learning. They recognize it as an alternative self-directed way to learn lexicon autonomously according to their learning styles following *ad hoc* reinforced practice. In conclusion, the study provides positive insights to learn vocabulary autonomously.

Keywords: vocabulary, vocabulary learning, applications, autonomous learning, virtual environments.

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Resumen

El léxico es el elemento principal para aprender inglés como lengua extranjera porque el vocabulario amplio mejora las habilidades de comunicación, comprensión auditiva, lectura, escritura y expresión oral. Lo que es más importante, la expansión del conocimiento de las palabras por parte de los alumnos les permitirá acceder a información nueva y significativa para construir sus esquemas. El propósito de este estudio es identificar si la aplicación Vocabulary.com promueve el aprendizaje autónomo del léxico en un contexto virtual basado en las percepciones de los sujetos. En ese sentido, se realizó un estudio cuantitativo descriptivo en una muestra de 40 sujetos de LEI, BUAP durante el otoño de 2020, obteniendo estos resultados: los estudiantes percibieron que la aplicación sí desarrolló un aprendizaje autónomo de vocabulario debido a sus características, las cuales les permitieron elegir su método para practicar, establecer metas, proporcionar motivación intrínseca y extrínseca, desarrollar la responsabilidad de organizar el tiempo, aplicar estrategias cognitivas, metacognitivas y de apoyo para aprender virtualmente, utilizar habilidades organizativas, de aprendizaje y de autogestión o competencias generales para autorregular su aprendizaje. La reconocen como una alternativa autodirigida de aprender léxico autónomamente acorde con sus estilos de aprendizaje siguiendo una práctica reforzada *ad hoc*. En conclusión, el estudio proporciona ideas positivas para aprender vocabulario de forma autónoma.

Palabras clave: vocabulario, aprendizaje de vocabulario, aplicaciones, aprendizaje autónomo, ambientes virtuales.

Introduction

Lexicon is the main element to learn any language since its final purpose is to communicate. However, if a person does not have enough vocabulary baggage, they will face problems understanding someone else or express their ideas. To this respect, Gifford (2013, p. 18) mentioned that "a person having more breadth and depth of vocabulary has wider competence to communicate and

to understand a communication and is to be considered intelligent”. Talking about English as a foreign language, students perceive the lack of enough vocabulary as the main obstacle to speak the language. Remembering or learning vocabulary in English, expressing it orally or in writing, generates their fear of making mistakes, preferring not to participate in the activities, and letting gaps and doubts in their learning process. Thus, looking for new techniques, methods, strategies, or devices to match students’ vocabulary learning needs with the appropriate difficulty and suitable learning styles is a duty to contribute to their autonomous learning of a foreign language.

Considering that they are learning in a digital era under a contingency that pushes education to migrate to a virtual environment, and being digital natives, it is essential to use technology and applications which help them learn vocabulary. According to Izquierdo et al (2017), technologies and applications are tools used to expose students to a foreign language thanks to their wide range of production and comprehension activities. However, concerning foreign language teaching-learning processes, Izquierdo (2008) points out that success depends on a suitable pedagogical model based on the principles of autonomous learning.

Because of those reasons, the objective of this study is to identify if the Vocabulary.com application develops autonomous vocabulary learning in a virtual context based on subjects’ perceptions.

Literature review

The following lines describe essential concepts regarding the phenomenon.

Vocabulary

A vocabulary is a group of morphemes from a language that conveys a determined meaning. Depending on the context, this word can have a meaning by itself, or in combination with more, meaning is attributed. Thus, the more knowledge of the lexicon a person possesses, the more interaction occurs in communication between two or more individuals. Folse (2004, p. 25) argues that “without vocabulary, no communication is possible” because vocabulary knowledge is essential for emitting and understanding messages. It means that without words, the coding and decoding of meaningful sentences could not take place. For the present study, vocabulary is “the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning, the way individual words do” (García, 2017, p. 1).

Vocabulary Learning

Regarding this process in L2, it is fundamental to learn enough vocabulary baggage to establish successful interaction and communication. According to Alqahtani (2015, p. 22), “in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL), learning vocabulary items plays a vital role in all language skills”. Thus, one of the most fundamental features of acquiring fluency to speak, write, listen or read in English is the knowledge of the vast possible vocabulary. The literature suggests various processes to improve vocabulary learning. For instance: (a) Practice by associating words with their mental representation (Alvarado et al, 2016; Burbat, 2016). (b) Practice vocabulary with exercises based on images, explanations about its use and function, which allows improving the knowledge and acquisition of new words. For that reason, it is suitable to practice with exercises in different contexts where the lexicon learned is established and reviewed because the learning process requires repetition and reinforcement to refresh said words.

Another suggestion to learn lexicon is vocabulary learning strategies, defined as “actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary” (Cameron, 2001, p. 92). They are techniques students apply to learn lexicon based on cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies (Anderson, 2002; Harris, 2003; Griffiths, 2008). The first one lets students improve their way of learning through repetition, monitoring, and comprehension. The second helps learners find and evaluate information stored in their memory and retrieve it to solve problems or face situations where that information is needed. The last one deals with motivation, effects, and attitudes to provide self-control or promote conditions for learning.

Some other strategies are sketching the words or using visuals, applying target words, semantic mapping, using context clues, and defining words within context (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Nagy, 2005; Wasik & Iannone-Campbell as cited in Douglas & Frey, 2014; Baumann et al, 2003; Nagy & Scott, 2000).

Other authors recommend technology or applications elucidating that we are living in a digital era and under virtual or distance education due to the world pandemic. Besides, Fajardo et al (2016) claim the college classroom are full of digital natives. Then, this advantage lets the implementation of mobile learning, which Ozurcun and Tabak (2012) define as an educational model that provides students with learning materials anywhere

and anytime using mobile devices and the Internet. In this respect, there is an essential component to succeed with learning from apps virtually that consists of developing autonomous learning.

Autonomous learning

Kaur (2013, p.10) postulates that the main objective of education is “to produce lifelong learners who are able to learn autonomously”. Nonetheless, developing autonomy is not something easy, but it must be an ability to foster on students, so they take charge of their learning process, acquiring a potential capacity to perform in different learning situations. It means they will decide how the input is internalized by keeping in mind some aspects like their goals, making decisions about suitable activities, and discarding those that do not show desirable results. In other words, they will be “able to monitor their own learning” (Posada, 2006, p. 56) by manipulating knowledge at their convenience, pace, and necessities.

Besides, Morales and Ramos’s (2009) indicate crucial ideas for the autonomous learner like establishing the syllabus to study and selecting material, time, and activities. Moreover, Nunan (1997) states several factors to encourage a student to follow the autonomy path, namely cultural, institutional (mission and vision from school), personal aspects, and goals.

Then, a complete definition for learning autonomy is “the capacity students have for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action” (Little, 1991, p. 56). Consequently, when reflecting on goals by considering external and internal context, they establish their learning process, strategies, and methods, leading to autonomy. Another element that fosters autonomy is technology, which gives users a way of unlimited access to a variety of information where “once students are more confident in learning processes, they can develop the capability to apply and transfer knowledge while using new technology with efficiency and effectiveness” (Ballén, 2014, p.14). As a result, it will provide them with a significant learning process due to its designing, application, evaluation, and discard strategies.

Finally, some authors (Rodríguez, 2019), Aoki, 2000; Sinclair et al. 2000; Scharle & Szabó, 2000) point out the following elements to develop autonomous learning when working with applications: learn on your own, establish goals, select methods, practice enough, develop

responsibility and motivation, have an alternative way of learning which fits different learning styles, and contribute to the development of competencies, skills, and strategies.

Learning virtually

Nowadays, technology provides different applications thanks to the monumental use of ICTs and Language Knowledge Technology (LKT), especially in these times, when education has migrated to virtual spaces in different modalities and with vast resources. One of them is an e-learning platform or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

Lanchero et al (2012, p. 7) define these platforms as “softwares and servers to administer course content and communication between students and teachers in a virtual learning environment”; thus, digital technology is another possibility for sharing and exchanging information between users (students and teachers) in such spaces. These platforms could work synchronously or asynchronously, which enables teachers to use them as spaces to embed complete courses or as a tool to have virtual face-to-face classes (Herrera, 2017).

It is worth mentioning that different studies support the use of platforms to teach and learn (Flores-González, 2020; Georgsen & Lovstad, 2014; De Melo et al, 2015). They remark that both virtual learning environments and e-learning platforms met the quality requirements users expect by offering the opportunity of supervising and sharing a learning experience with easy-useful tools as Sneha and Nagaraja’s research (2013) does.

Furthermore, Herrera (2017) points out that the main objective of these VLEs is to present teachers and students with a unique and innovative educational experience different from the one inside of traditional classrooms. That is why, the crucial advantages of a VLE are offering students not only the class but also multiple content resources to reinforce their learning processes and the teacher’s feedback, which could be either synchronous or asynchronous (Beluce & Oliveira, 2015). Furthermore, a “VLE also allows file exchange between students and instructors, the ability to schedule educational activities and monitor the progress of students of a course” (Santana-Mancilla et al, 2019, p. 2). Finally, it is vital to remark that virtual learning requires some characteristics from users like responsibility, organization, commitment, and autonomy.

Apps to learn vocabulary

According to Pérez and Millán (2015), the constant development of applications (apps) for any smart device in the last years has increased the way users manipulate devices and learning with the Mobile-Assisted Learning approach (MALL).

Educational apps cope with the technological revolution, having several educational resources, tools, and modalities like e-learning, virtual or blended learning. Moreover, the number of apps to learn a foreign language and even a mother tongue has increased significantly. Indeed, some of them allow working on the four skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. On the contrary, others focus on a specific part of the language; for instance, vocabulary, grammar rules, syntax, reading comprehension, listening, or proficiency. Due to the reasons above, Gunter and Fidelis (2018, p. 8) state that “mobile devices enable flexible and on-the-go learning experiences and are capable of supporting new teaching and learning alternatives in both formal and informal learning contexts”. Another factor of apps usage lies in the free access to download and install them on devices to learn with flexibility regarding place and time. As it is known, there are lots of apps to learn languages and especially vocabulary, the main objective of this study. The following lines describe some of them.

Busuu. It is an app that fosters the learning of vocabulary, and at the same time, motivates users by rewarding correct answers, pointing out their mistakes, and giving them practice. As a result, the users’ autonomy, skillfulness, and proficiency level to relate the app content with the real-life use of the language improve meaningfully. It is worth mentioning that the app lines up to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and users could start at a basic level and get into higher ones with the practice.

Moreover, all lessons are related to a specific topic where first, the user identifies the vocabulary; then, grammar rules and pronunciation. Finally, he practices the four skills concerning the theme to have a complete development in the language. Each lesson tries to reinforce every aspect learned with the reviews and feedback stages, and the minimum score is 75 in each one to continue on the next section, having the possibility to repeat the lesson to achieve a better score (Busuu, 2021).

Word to Word: Fun Brain Games, Offline Puzzle Game.

This app is a word association game where English vocabulary is the key element. There, users manage simple

puzzles with no time limit. One of its most outstanding advantages is that learners could play in offline mode and individually, with the family, among friends, or just for educational purposes.

The app also includes several vocabulary games and hundreds of puzzles locked until completing previous levels (MochiBits, 2021).

Magoosh Vocabulary Builder. It is a digital application that centers on test preparation for different courses like the GRE (Graduate Record Examination), GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test), TOEFL, SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), and ACT (American College Test). It provides users with vocabulary quizzes to learn the essential lexicon for the GRE test (Magoosh, 2020). The app also contains expert content regarding vocabulary classified in elementary, intermediate, and advanced sections, audio pronunciation, definitions, and example sentences.

The way the app works is that levels get unlocked according to the user’s progress. In that way, the words learners found hard to dominate will continue appearing in the quizzes until they overcome them. An outstanding advantage is the user’s practice administration, which takes a few minutes according to their level and necessities (Magoosh, 2020).

Little words. It is a project based on the exchange of bracelets with inspirational words on them. Its dynamic consists of purchasing bracelets from Little Words containing a determined code that users could register on the website to read stories or information from other people who have the same word on their bracelets. Then, one might be in a group with the same vocabulary (Little Words, 2021).

Once the user is ready to pass their bracelet on, someone else will have the opportunity to wear it and benefit from the inspiring word. Basically, the new users will now have access to the community to share their connection with that word. Since the bracelets are interchangeable, the users are in touch with vast meaningful lexis.

Penny Dell Crosswords. It offers the best puzzles from Dell Magazines and Penny Press, displayed on computers or mobile devices. The game makes the user learn the meaning of vocabulary on different levels, from the easiest to the most difficult. In this case, the game provides hints, and there is no time limit to answer (PuzzleNation, 2021).

Vocabulary.com. According to Thinkmap (2021), this platform constantly improves to make users continue learning new vocabulary in a motivational environment. The games in this app go from the most elemental to the most advanced vocabulary copying with the users' progress as it follows real-life dynamics to learn and acquire vocabulary easily. Finally, thanks to its design, learners gain motivation and autonomous learning to develop reading, writing, and thinking skills.

Before continuing with the methodology, it is necessary to clear out the study is only based on the Vocabulary.com app because of its design, which matches students' devices to host the program.

Methodology

Research methodology

Since the objective is to identify if the Vocabulary.com application promotes autonomous vocabulary learning based on subjects' perceptions, a descriptive quantitative approach was accomplished. The selection was due to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009), who consider the quantitative approach permits collecting data and doing numerical analysis to describe and characterized a phenomenon based on perceptions. Concerning its research design, it is a cross-sectional one done during fall 2020.

Another element in the quantitative approach is the instrument to gather data. In this respect, it is a 40-item questionnaire with a combination of 5-point Likert-type scale questions of agreement, from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). Each item requires students to explain why they chose that option or answer to enrich subjects' perceptions descriptions and conclude if the app develops autonomous learning. The 40 items grouped into nine dimensions constitute the analysis model based on the criteria to foster autonomous learning in a foreign language according to Rodríguez, (2019); Aoki, (2000); Sinclair et al., (2000) and Scharle and Szabó, (2000) (see the model below). Thus, the questionnaire establishes subjects' perceptions details like whether the app promotes self-directed learning, successful practice, motivation, goals setting, selection of method or alternative ways to study, development of responsibility, competencies, strategies, and skills related to their learning styles. Moreover, to support students' perceptions and have the necessary information to corroborate or refute their insights, they took a standardized exam, which measures their vocabulary level before and after they had worked with the app.

Subjects

The sample consisted of 40 subjects, whose ages are 19 to 24 years old, from the English Teaching Bachelor at *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla* (BUAP). All are in an extracurricular activity that consisted of using the app to learn vocabulary by themselves. Besides, they share common characteristics like studying English virtually, having the necessity to enrich their vocabulary baggage, and learning in a flexible space.

Data collection and analysis

At the end of the term, the questionnaire was distributed online (google forms) to the forty subjects after they have worked with the app for four months. All students received the same questionnaire, and participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The analysis of the data was according to this model:

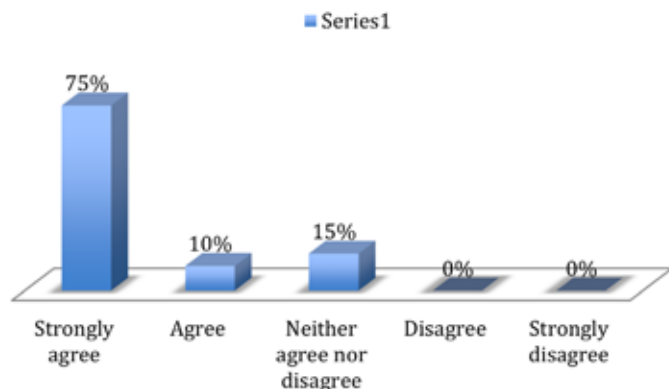
Table 1. Analysis model. Features to learn vocabulary autonomously with Vocabulary.com app

Dimensions:	Items
Learning by oneself (autonomously)	3, 17, 24, 31
Practice	4, 12, 22, 34
Establish learners' own goals	5, 18, 30, 36
Learn with learners' method	6, 14, 23, 33
Motivation	1, 11, 19, 27, 40
Responsibility	2, 13, 21, 29
Search for information as an alternative way of learning	7, 16, 26, 35, 38
Materials according to students' learning styles	8, 10, 25, 32, 39
Development of skills, competencies, and learning strategies	9, 15, 20, 28, 37

Source: Rodríguez, 2019; Aoki, 2000; Sinclair et al. 2000; Scharle & Szabó, 2000.

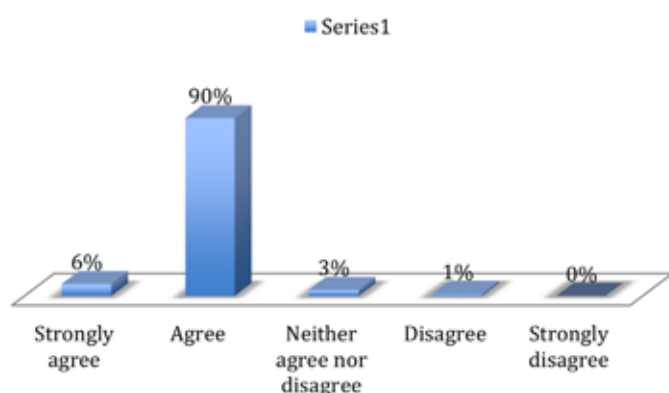
Results

The results are shown below, taking into account the nine dimensions of the questionnaire which determine the students' perceptions of the Vocabulary.com app for promoting autonomous vocabulary learning in a virtual environment.

Dimension 1. Learn autonomously**Graph 1.** The app requires learning autonomously.

As the graph shows, 75% of the sample strongly agree, and 10% agree with the item, respectively. They express to be responsible for their learning process and determine the level of intervention in their own learning process when establishing their objectives, procedures, self-evaluation, activities, phases of learning, devoted time to each one, and their roles.

Besides, 15% neither agree nor disagree with the same item. Participants mentioned they had personal problems and a lack of time to explore the tool to give opinions.

Dimension 2. Foster practice**Graph 2.** The app fosters practice.

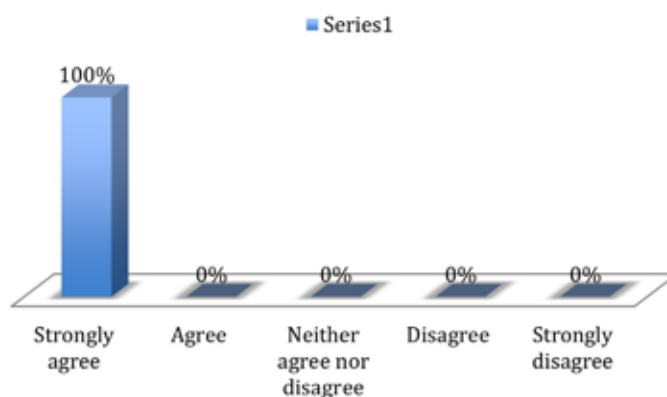
As observed, 96% of the subjects agree and state that the app does foster practice. In this dimen-

sion, they justify their choice by pointing out that the app helps them dynamically face learning by answering questions and activities. They also learn new lexicon systematically through mental representations and meanings of a specific word in varied contexts.

They highlight a characteristic that contributes to their learning process in long-term memory because once they get proficiency level on determined vocabulary, the app provides more reinforcement to continue practicing those words in future activities.

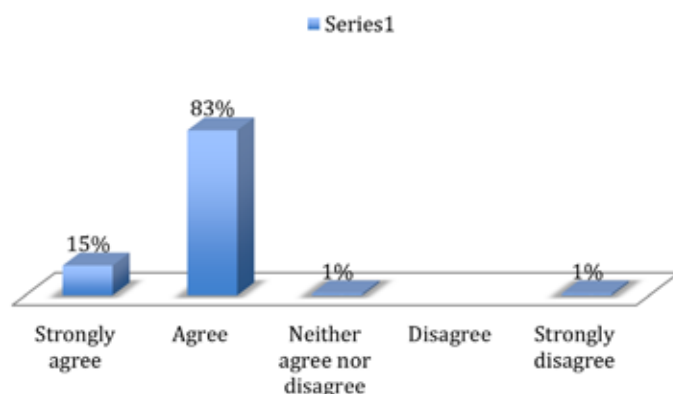
The most outstanding positive feature of the app is the word selection in practical activities, which is in the program with explanations and exercises.

On the contrary, 3% neither agree nor disagree because they feel more work is required to explore the app, and 1% disagree since they consider it has too many exercises to fulfill, making it difficult to concentrate their attention on the meaning of a word.

Dimension 3. Establish own goals**Graph 3.** The app requires learners to establish goals.

100% of the sample strongly agree this app requires them to be clear about their aims, vocabulary to study and exercises to choose. Even though the app will get to know them by working on the playing section, they need to make choices based on objectives, necessities, prior knowledge, and self-management strategies. In their explanations, they conclude that users develop autonomous learning to establish and achieve tangible goals.

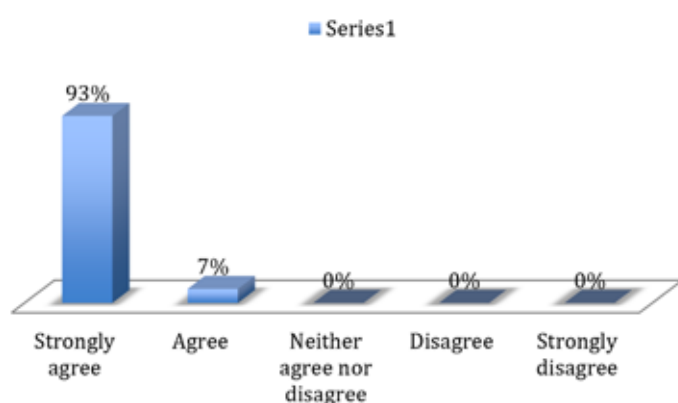
Dimension 4. Choose a method to learn



Graph 4. The learner chooses a method to learn with the app.

98% agree that the app stimulates an alternative culture of learning English lexicon according to their learning styles, prior knowledge, and priorities. Indeed, they state it lets them choose from different learning techniques and methodologies given by a written guide. As a result, users could pace their learning and establish their goals in a virtual space.

Dimension 5. Provide motivation

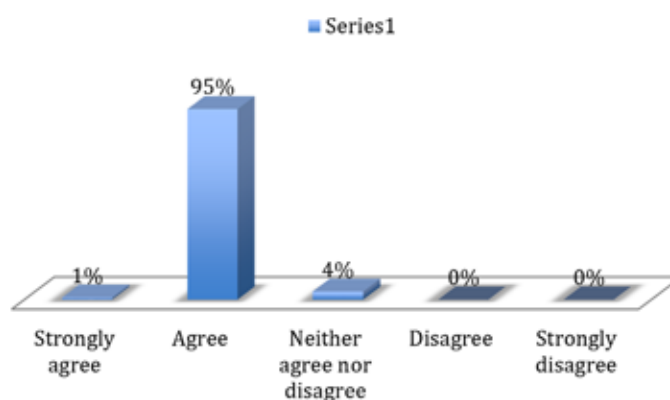


Graph 5. Learning vocabulary with the app provides motivation.

The results (100%) demonstrate that the application motivates subjects to learn and improve their vocabulary learning through practice, making their

process easy and innovative. They mention that the app motivates them because of its attractive interface design to provide rewards (extrinsic motivation), new levels, feedback, and explanations to make them improve accurately every time. Moreover, the monitoring tools of the app develop intrinsic motivation by providing information about their progress which makes them have the interest, desire, and pleasure to continue learning. In addition, their perception of the program is high and well accept because it focuses on their needs and weaknesses to enhance. Finally, they remark that the app is a virtual space to center on learning vocabulary individually, which is almost impossible in face-to-face sessions due to the large size of classes.

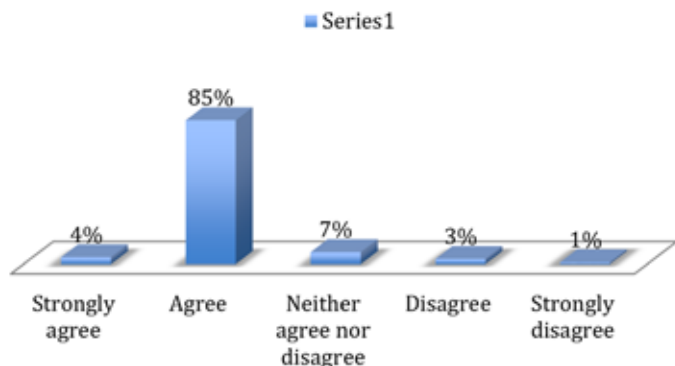
Dimension 6. Demand responsibility



Graph 6. Working with the app demands responsibility to learn.

Regarding this, 96% of the sample emphasizes that the application centers attention on students by demanding responsibility for organizing times and practicing challenging activities. In their explanation, they consider themselves autonomous since, during the performance, they act independently of the teacher; instead, the application guides them. Nonetheless, 4% of the subjects are still valuing if the app is helpful, saying it is too hasty to know whether the application develops autonomy or not.

Dimension 7. Provide an alternative way of learning



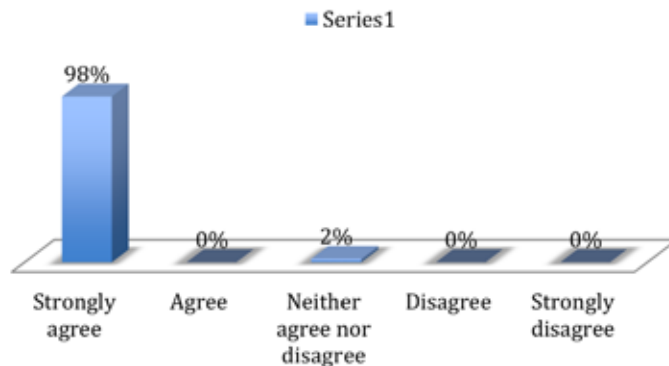
Graph 7. The app is an alternative way for learning vocabulary autonomously.

89% agree to have a new alternative way to build their knowledge by assuring that searching for information in the app matches their needs and objectives. They explain how sharing and exposing content in real-life situations or representing information in a determined context with high interactivity in the app are contributing to perceive it as an innovative and potential option for learning vocabulary rather than a traditional classroom where participation from everybody is difficult due to schedule, size of the class among others.

However, not all the sample agrees with this dimension. Then, some subjects perceive the app as not helpful at all (3%) because of the lack of guidance and supervision from teachers, which are essential factors. They mention having a more effective learning process if the teacher transmits knowledge as in a traditional class. On the other hand, 1% disagrees with the app because it demands too much time to carry out exercises without the teachers' help, and 7% neither agree nor disagree without giving any specific reason.

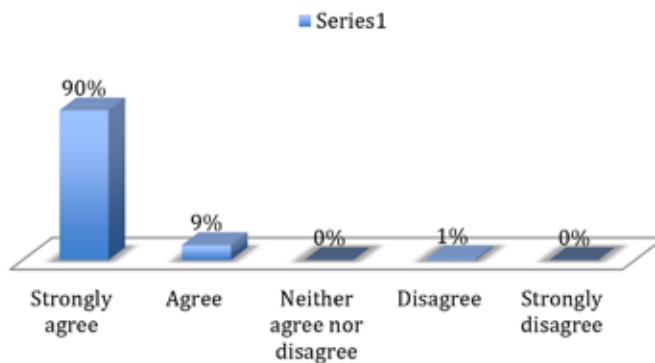
In the dimension 8, 98% confirm that the variability of activities and type of exercises from the app follow their different learning styles, providing an ideal virtual environment for learning vocabulary, arguing that there is no need to sit in a traditional classroom because characteristics like accessibility, interactivity, and flexibility allow them to pace their learning autonomously by accessing authentic contextualized resources. Moreover, they could choose how to learn, and decide how to monitor and assess their learning process, thanks to the application design, which is adequate for different learning styles.

Dimension 8. Satisfy different learning styles



Graph 8. The app satisfies students' different learning styles.

Dimension 9. Develop learning strategies, competencies, and skills



Graph 9. The app develops learning strategies, competencies, and skills when learning vocabulary.

According to subjects' perceptions, the findings reveal the application allows to build out competencies, skills, and learning strategies to process the information. 99% identify learning strategies, competencies, and skills used in this virtual learning modality as potential tools to improve their English vocabulary proficiency, being accepted as a thrilling experience.

Regarding their explanation, the strategies they develop are those for making the appropriate decisions to improve their study and performance (cognitive), strategies for reflection on the learning process (metacognitive), and to the self-control of effort and persistence, or to promote conditions that affectively facilitate the study with the app (support).

Besides, they specify that the app offers the opportunity to connect previous to new knowledge, thanks to organizational, learning, and management skills. They expound that in organizational skills, the app helps them stay focused on time to accomplish tasks, in learning skills, they identify and apply study skills to get the established outcomes; and in management skills they make the right choices and pace their learning process.

Regarding competencies, they mention that this app promotes autonomous learning and critical thinking for choosing answers and explaining their selection. Nonetheless, 1 % disagree and specify that the tool demands plenty of time to learn because there is too much information, which requires time to process, understand and learn. Intending to have evidence to support subjects' perceptions of whether the Vocabulary.com app promotes autonomous learning in a virtual environment, the following table presents the results of a standardized exam regarding their vocabulary level before and after working with such an app.

Table 2. Subjects' vocabulary level

Before		After	
Subjects	Proficiency level	Subjects	Proficiency level
22	A2	12	A2+
		10	B1
13	B1	8	B1+
		5	B2+
5	B1+	3	B2
		2	B2+

The findings from the standardized test reveal that the app does promote autonomous vocabulary learning in virtual environments.

Discussion

From the results of this study, certain inferences are derived that indicate the importance of the use of applications in higher education, especially to learn vocabulary since technologies have changed not only students' ways of communicating and socialize, but also possibilities of learning autonomously a foreign language, in virtual environments as these findings are consistent with other research carried out (Blake, 2015; Cascales, Martínez-Segura & Gomariz 2016; Gunter & Fidelis, 2018).

Concerning the results above, this study registers high positive perceptions from the sample, showing that the Vocabulary.com app promotes vocabulary learning autonomously. Regarding the first dimension that corresponds to the autonomous learning feature, 85% of the sample agrees with the idea of developing that type of learning. It means that such an app allows subjects to learn self-managed by applying their cognitive structures without the help of a specific pedagogical intervention, guidance, or supervision. These results match with conclusions of some studies (Morales & Ramos, 2009; Nunan, 1997; Little, 1991), which confirm that in an autonomous scenario, the learner is in charge of choosing the desired content, invested time, material, tasks, and the level of difficulty. Besides, as Posada (2006) states, this type of learning requires responsibility, making decisions, and training in an *ad hoc* context. In this point, Vocabulary.com is helpful to develop autonomy due to its ease of setting time and syllabus (Gunter & Fidelis, 2018).

In the second dimension, subjects confirm the app promotes the practice, an essential element for autonomous and meaningful learning (Rodríguez, 2019). Regarding this, subjects remark practical activities, contexts, and mental representations, which are consistent with previous conclusions of studies (Alvarado, Coelho & Dougherty, 2016; Burbat, 2016) based on developing autonomous learning. This triad of factors has a significant impact on students causing them to become aware of the environment, potential learning, transfer of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and reinforcement cycle of the app (PuzzleNation, 2021; Cameron, 2001).

In the third dimension, the sample perceives the app as an autonomous learning tool to establish and achieve goals. It means it promotes self-management of knowledge in distance education so that the learner educates himself, identifying his strengths and weaknesses, developing areas of action for the appropriation of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, which favor the mastery of vocabulary (Rodríguez, 2019). Then, based on those results, they set or reestablish new goals for their vocabulary learning process.

Another fundamental characteristic of autonomous learning is the possibility to select a method according to students' learning styles, interests, life experiences, cultural identities, and personal challenges equitably and uniquely (as subjects declare in dimension fourth). In this respect, different authors corroborate those findings. For example, Ballén (2014) and Little (1991) mention that meaningful autonomous learning

happens when learners feel independent and confident to choose their learning methods.

As it is known, technology and applications by themselves seem to offer high motivation to learn a foreign language autonomously, taking into account different data (Vocabulary.com, 2021; Fidelis & Gunter, 2018), and the present study ratifies those results. In fact, in the fifth dimension, subjects state the app develops both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation; two essential aspects that Biggs (2006) points out by featuring motivation as a factor to promote deep autonomous learning since a motivated student will have more success in their academic, personal and work life.

In the sixth dimension, responsibility is another key for developing autonomous learning (Rodríguez, 2019; Aoki, 2000; Sinclair et al., 2000; Scharle & Szabó, 2000). Here, subjects admit the necessity to acquire responsibility while working with the app by participating actively in making decisions for their learning, goals, practice, and schedule. These corroborate Little's statements (1991) about learning autonomously, highlighting independent actions and responsibility as clues for such achievement.

Other findings are high perceptions towards the Vocabulary.com app as a new alternative way to learn vocabulary autonomously in a virtual space. This data vividly proves that Mobile Assisted Learning (MALL) provides plenty of resources to grasp lexicon by exposing learners to authentic material in different contexts and personalizing their learning experience where autonomous decisions are essential to avoid wasting time (Morales & Ramos, 2009).

In dimension eight, there is a common denominator that guides towards learning styles and motivation as aspects to consider in the development of autonomous learning because this requires the student to identify how he learns best, what his weaknesses are, which he can only distinguish by knowing what his learning style is. Indeed, subjects confirmed that the app fulfilled different learning styles due to its structure, resources, and methodologies, having an ideal virtual autonomous learning experience different from a traditional classroom. These findings are related to a study (Morales & Ramos, 2009) in which the sample sets up the material, methods, and activities to foster autonomous learning.

In the last dimension, the findings demonstrate that the Vocabulary.com app does develop autonomous learning by promoting strategies, skills, and competencies, which previous studies have suggested. Regarding De Miguel (2006), this type of learning is composed

of cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies, as the subjects assure in the present study. About skills, the sample points out three main ones (organizational, learning, and self-management skills), the same as Little et al's study showed. Ultimately, students indicate the app fosters autonomous learning and critical thinking for choosing answers and explaining their selection, general and technical competencies. According to Baran and Correia (2014), these competencies contribute to autonomous learning in a virtual or distance class.

Through the theoretical framework described in this research, the influence of applications in the educational field is noticeable, and according to the students, the Vocabulary.com app is a suitable tool for learning lexicon autonomously. In the same way, students consider that its use expands and increases the possibilities of learning the language (Blake, 2015; Rico & Agudo, 2016). In the light of the data obtained and analyzed, it is clear that Vocabulary.com is a very suitable application to promote autonomous vocabulary learning in hybrid or distance modalities only if there is an appropriate selection of activities in the application, where the main goal is to favor the practice of vocabulary to achieve the learning objectives.

In this way, the research provides a new vision on the relevance of including the Vocabulary.com application to learn English vocabulary, considering emerging technologies as facilitating means of the teaching-learning process. Finally, the research had limitations because it focused on a specific profile of students, virtual context, and extracurricular course, which has conditioned the sample. It would be interesting to extend this study to more participants and modalities to corroborate, refute or complement the description of the phenomenon.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are described based on the previous analysis. First, the objective of the present research is covered, and the results can contribute to a better understanding of those factors that influence the autonomous learning of vocabulary in virtual environments with applications in Mobile Learning. This inquiry provides a new vision on how effectively address the challenge of using the Vocabulary.com app in virtual or distance learning at university, and in this way, integrate emerging technologies as facilitating means.

Second, the subjects' characterization concerning the app indicates that it fosters autonomous learning vocabulary by integrating general and technical com-

petencies, cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies, organizational, learning, and self-management skills, method selection, learning styles to practice with different difficulty level exercises, goal settings, a motivational environment, an alternative scenario to learn with responsibility. Finally, an app goes beyond time and space, a positive characteristic that could compensate students' schedules, duties, or contingency scenarios.

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FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: THE PATH TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO LEARN ENGLISH

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Summary

Motivating students to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) implies some challenges, especially in a country like Uruguay where English is mostly used in academic settings. Since students are mostly exposed to the target language during the EFL lesson, it is crucial to intrinsically motivate them to see the value of learning a second language as well as helping them being more self-efficacious and autonomous when learning it. At the same time, having prepared and motivating teachers is paramount; however, counting on modern adapted materials is vital. This way, *#livingUruguay* was created as a national attempt to create free EFL eBooks based on the latest theoretical trends and posing a lot of importance on a culture paradigm change, going from local to global. This change is meant to democratize the access to EFL materials and help learners realize the importance of sharing the local culture in a second language by using real-life situations. These eBooks include local people who needed to use English to communicate worldwide, focusing on communication and feeling proud of their ancestry, culture and accent.

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is an activity that has been linked to human history. The process of learning a language has implied various analyses and approaches. However, the analyses and approaches on language learning have been tied to other societal objectives such as becoming proficient in that language. Learning English as a foreign language is not the exception. Learning English not only involves learning the language but also learning the culture (Damen, 1987) around it, and to be even more precise, learning English is learning its cultures and why not, different Englishes (Crystal, 2003). This perspective responds to a global perspective which has influenced English as a foreign language (EFL) learning and teaching, however, the global perspective is not exclusive to this language.

This cultural global perspective has several connotations related to teaching practices, student motivation and students' mindsets. Related to the teaching practice, teachers have acted in two ways. First, they have to show students a foreign culture, sometimes a culture they are not acquainted with in their own context. In some Latin American countries, and more specifically in Uruguay, teachers learn English in the context of the country and the majority of EFL teachers have not been in an English-speaking country or in contact with its culture. Historically, books have portrayed some of those cultural aspects that ease the learning of a foreign language so learners can get their share of the target foreign culture. More modernly, internet has aided teachers by providing students with a more vivid understanding of the English culture and its nuances. Second, teachers have to make a cultural adaptation of the materials to make them meaningful to students. This way, materials may create a sense of belonging and proximity of the student with the culture. Rincón and Clavijo-Olarte (2016) have found that exploring students' local culture can also impact their language and literacy in the end.

This closeness of the student to the foreign culture and its local contextualization impacts on student motivation. In contrast, what would happen if instead of relying on teacher's adaptations, textbooks and programs focused on a local approach to the language? A local cultural approach to learning a second language would imply using the students' culture and context to "watch" the target language's culture. This perspective departs from concepts that are close to the students and opens the door to understand the foreign language. This approach may help learners develop a sense of belonging while the two cultures interact. Research has shown how belongingness and dialogical education (Shor, 1992) can promote student empowerment (Contreras-Leon & Chapetón-Castro, 2017).

The third connotation mentioned alludes to how this perspective impacts students' mindsets. Dweck's (2006) research has shown how "the view you adopt for yourself" (p. 6) affects your life. She has named that concept as mindset and she distinguishes between a fixed mindset, conceptualized as the perception that abilities and intelligence are fixed, and a growth mindset, which

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views abilities and intelligence as something dynamic that can develop and grow. The perception of ability and intelligence is deeply influenced by the experiences the person has during their lifetime. When the learner feels considered and included, they are very likely to develop a sense of belonging and this may lead to the development of a growth mindset which may lead to more persistent and grittier learners (Duckworth, 2016).

All these concepts are usually condensed in the type of textbook used to teach EFL. Most countries align with the global perspective to learn English as a foreign language. Research on the local perspective to teaching EFL is scarce. This article aims at studying the Uruguayan Middle School English program and the creation of local textbooks in an attempt to move from a global approach to EFL learning to a local one.

The case of Uruguay.

Uruguay is embarked in a project called “*Uruguay Plurilingüe 2030*”. As part of this project, English lessons have become compulsory from 4th grade onwards, the country passed a Framework of Reference for education (ANEP, 2017) and learning progressions for second languages (ANEP, 2019). This legal/administrative national framework demands changes in the EFL syllabi. This process started in 2018 and has continued until now. These syllabi changes have given the country the opportunity to discuss what EFL textbooks to adopt. This fruitful discussion included the analysis of multiple variables related to language learning, motivation, approaches to teaching and the inclusion of the local culture as part of students’ reality. In this context, ANEP (the institution that administers and regulates education nationwide) created an e-book called *#livingUruguay*.

The name *#livingUruguay* entails several characteristics of the material. First, it is an e-book and students can access it from any electronic device, including their cell phones or computers. Consequently, the book promotes a democratic access to learning EFL materials. Since the implementation of the Plan Ceibal in Uruguay, the country has developed a sustained access to connectivity and to devices. That is why, internet access is provided in all educational centers and public places, such as plazas, this allows for a high rate of connectivity. In addition, Plan Ceibal offers a computer or a Tablet to each child or teenager in the Uruguayan public education. Therefore, the conditions for children to use this material is guaranteed. The material also bridges the technological divide as the books contain links, videos and audios just one click away from the students. Second, it adopts a local perspective to culture. The inclusion of the word Uruguay in the name gives the idea that the authors depart from the local culture and see Ur-

uguay as the geographic place where learners live and study. *#livingUruguay* seeks to promote and create a sense of proximity and belonging for learners who could see the target culture as something meaningless. Third, the “#” wants to deepen this idea of proximity and closeness to the students by using language that is of high frequency among teenagers. Fourth, it is written in English and this shows how this book is not just about Uruguay and its traditions, but about learning English in the context of the Uruguayan public education system.

Even though there have been two previous attempts to create local EFL materials in the past 50 years, *#livingUruguay* has some distinctive features. The first one is the alignment with the use of technology for educational purposes. The design of the book follows the universal design for learning in the web (Rose, 2000) allowing any student to use it. The second one is the democratic participation English teachers had in the creation and design of the book. There was a call for contributions to EFL teachers from all over the country. Then, a nine-people team of designers assembled all the contributions and gave coherence to the different topics included. In addition, and due to the pandemic, more than 200 teachers around the country piloted the material, giving their feedback to make the final product more effective and useful for everyone. Once the material was approved, more than one thousand teachers and about 160.000 students started using it.

The result was a set of three eBooks to teach EFL in 7th, 8th and 9th. The topic throughout the books is Uruguay, its people, its cities, its culture and even its laws. From that standpoint, learners study and build knowledge about equivalent concepts in the target language. In addition, the English culture is portrayed not only in its most popular representations (the American and British culture) but also in some often not very well-known ones. The books contain some “Did you know?” sections in which adolescents can read extra information related to differences among the different Englishes, cultural hints and even stories and anecdotes.

Assessment of the material

As part of the implementation of *#livingUruguay*, teachers were consulted on their opinion about the book; they left their opinion on the book’s website. By means of an online survey, the teachers openly commented on their opinion about the book. About 20 percent of the total population of Uruguayan EFL teachers has answered the questions. The total number of participants agrees that this material has become a milestone in Uruguayan education.

“I liked the book a lot, the characters and the texts were interesting and easy to use” (*El libro me gustó*

mucho, los personajes y los textos, interesantes y fácil de aplicar). This phrase summarizes the general assessment teachers gave to the material. Educators highlight the fact that the characters, the topics and the texts are related to the Uruguayan culture. Moreover, the texts are easy to use and understand, mainly because they are close to students' realities. A teacher argued that it was time to have a quality and contextualized material, thought and made by teachers "It was about time to have quality material and contextualized according to teachers" (*Ya era hora que tuviéramos un material de calidad y contextualizado hecho por docentes*). There were some teachers who gave a more detailed evaluation. An example of this last group of teachers was when one of them said: "I loved the fact that we could finally have our books, they even match the seasons with the seasons in our country" (*Me encantó que por fin se concretara el tener libros nuestros que hasta coincidan las estaciones con nuestro hemisferio sur*).

Instructors and students have found the new material entertaining, which in more academic words this means that they have found it motivating: "I loved the books, they are very motivating and accessible" (*Me encantaron los libros, muy accesibles y motivadores*). This aspect of the material is a characteristic that might change the perspective students have about learning a second language. However, this implementation will be assessed in the years to come. Language students sometimes see learning the target language as a requirement more than something that could be useful for their future, personal growth, or that it has connections with their own language and culture. Some educators highlight how the books provide students with the right scaffolding; "It goes in a gradual way" (*Va en forma gradual*).

Finally, there is also a group of educators who acknowledge that this material might mean a change in scope as it implies a new paradigm. For example, some educators notice how the book contains audio material with diverse accents and dialects of the target language. This is a clear difference between the type of books educators used to teach EFL in the past and *#livingUruguay*. Others mention the idea that there is not a workbook and at the same time they realize how the book matches the students' reality: "This textbook was really interesting and I see it close to our reality" (*El libro me resultó muy ameno, y lo veo muy cercano a nuestra realidad*). Teachers also credit how students received and liked this material: "It is important to highlight the wide and good acceptance from the students" (*Destacar la muy amplia y buena aceptación de los libros por parte de los estudiantes*).

Conclusion

These preliminary results collected show that *#livingUruguay* represents the concrete representation of a long-wanted teachers' aspiration. It also shows how difficult it is for an educator, a country and an education system to move from one paradigm to stand from another one. A clear conclusion from the implementation of this new material is how educators and students wanted a more contextualized material that eased the flow of learning and how it impacts motivation and learning. This change of paradigm might serve as an example for other contexts similar to Uruguay as the countries where the target language is spoken are far and a close contact with the foreign culture is not easy to get. This alternative represents an opportunity to show the local culture in a quality textbook.

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Lenguas en Contexto

La revista Lenguas en Contexto de la Facultad de Lenguas de la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, México

CONVOCA

A todos los autores e investigadores en la didáctica de lenguas, cultura, lingüística aplicada y traducción, a enviar artículos para su probable publicación en el ejemplar número 20 en forma impresa con ISSN 1870-1671 y el número 13 con ISSN 2007-3038 en su versión digital correspondientes al período agosto 2022 - julio 2023 de nuestra revista a: lenguascontexto@facultaddelenguas.com

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Nuestra revista se encuentra indexada en el sistema Latindex y es una publicación sin fines de lucro. Deseamos promover la generación, aplicación y difusión del conocimiento, abriendo espacios de intercambio y de crítica constructiva, con el fin de participar de manera permanente en la mejora del proceso de enseñanza/aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras así como promover y potencializar la comunicación intercultural.

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Lenguas en Contexto published by the *Facultad de Lenguas* of *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla* (BUAP) Mexico, invites all teachers, authors and researchers in the fields of teaching and learning languages, applied linguistics and translation to submit their works for their probable publication in the issue no. 20 of the printed version (ISSN 1870-1671) and no. 13 (ISSN 2007-3038) in the digital version of *Lenguas en Contexto* corresponding to the period from August, 2022 to July, 2023.

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La revue *Lenguas en Contexto* de la *Facultad de Lenguas* de la *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla* au Mexique lance un appel à contributions pour son numéro 20.

Cet appel, adressé aux auteurs et aux chercheurs dans les domaines de la didactique des langues et des cultures, de la linguistique appliquée et de la traduction ou domaines connexes, les invite à soumettre leurs contributions, pour publication dans le numéro 20 pour la version imprimée (ISSN 1870-1671) correspondant au numéro 13 pour la version électronique (ISSN 2007-3038) à l'adresse électronique suivante :

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