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**English language teaching in public  
elementary schools in Mexico:  
Expectations vs Reality**

Ensayo

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# Abstract

Living in a globalized world has interconnected countries increasingly. Commerce, internet information, job opportunities they are all rocketed these years. However, to fully profit them, English language is needed. Our government, aware of this, decided to help each Mexican kid to take part of the globalized era by adding the English language to their school curricula.

Learning a foreign language is not as easy as it seems, it requires time, motivation as well as resources. This paper analyses what is expected in an English class on public elementary school according to the governments guidelines; the reality in the Mexican context and a proposal to take advantage of the strong points our system has to overcome the weaknesses and improve the quality of English classes in elementary schools in Mexico.

# Resumen

Vivir en un mundo globalizado ha interconectado a los países cada vez más. El comercio, la información en internet, las oportunidades laborales se han disparado en estos años. Sin embargo, para realmente aprovecharlo, se necesita el idioma inglés. Nuestro gobierno, consciente de esto, decidió ayudar a cada niño mexicano a tomar parte en esta era globalizada al agregar la lengua inglesa en su currículo escolar.

Aprender una lengua extranjera no es tan sencillo como parece, requiere de tiempo, motivación, así como recursos. Este ensayo analiza lo que se espera de una clase de Ingles en las primarias públicas de acuerdo con los lineamientos gubernamentales: la realidad en el contexto mexicano y una propuesta para tomar ventaja de los puntos fuertes que nuestro sistema educativo tiene para contrarrestar las debilidades y mejorar la calidad de las clases de inglés en las escuelas primarias de México.

# Introduction: Why is it important to learn English?

Nowadays we live in a globalized world where the nations are uniting through different economic blocks, from free trade zones to economic unions. Consequently, they start to not only share money or merchandise but the culture as well. For example, the Mercosur is an economic region mostly composed by Latin American countries which, besides having Spanish language in common, they share costumes, religion, and traditions (Felter & Renwick, 2019).

However, not all the economic partnerships take the geographical distance as a reference, as there exist other countries which could be potential associates in different parts of the world with different economies. For example, we have the case of developing countries such as the Philippines or Indonesia which are in the south of Asia, and they are not neighbors of European nations. Nevertheless, the European rich countries know that they can take advantage of the economic problems these countries have and obtain a cheaper workforce than the one they would pay if they produced them in their own countries. There is only a barrier that impedes the successful cost-saving that they can obtain with this strategy: The language.

Either in terrible circumstances like the one described previously or in more diplomatic matters such as a free trade agreement, the associates need to communicate, and as we know, not all the countries speak the same language. Garcia (2018) highlights that the increasing amount of people who have initial contact or familiarization with English permits it to act as a language for a wide variety of purposes, bringing about further consolidation of English as a global lingua franca; defined by Kirkpatrick (2011) as a “common language between people who do not share a mother tongue”.

Similarly, in Mexico, English proficiency can be seen as a route to upward economic mobility (Borjian, 2015). The extraordinary economic partnership between the US and Mexico has motivated (and at times forced) many Mexicans to learn English to advance economically in both micro and macroeconomic level; from the poor young Mexican guy who prefers to migrate to the USA to the big companies who take advantage of free agreements and export their products and services.

Additionally, globalization means more information, which is shared and is accessible to everyone in the world thanks to the internet and technology. However, as different languages are spoken around the world, most of the information published is in English because of the influence of commercial trading and political relationships the USA, Canada, Australia, and other English-speaking countries have achieved (Neeley, 2012). Consequently, many Mexicans are interested in learning it, to have access not only to information but to better jobs with a higher income.

Nowadays, speaking a foreign language means earning more money (Padilla González, 2014), as a result, according to a survey made by the Embassy of France in 2010 from all the Mexicans interviewed, 9% of them had declared to speak a second language. From this 9%, 86% said they can speak in English against 2% of them who speak French and as time passes by, the demand increases (Silva, 2011).

In sum, the influence of commercial trading and political relationships amongst North, Centre, and South America accentuates the need to establish a lingua franca or common tongue as a medium for international communication. Consequently, educational systems in Spanish-speaking countries have commenced, in recent decades, to adopt ELT as part of their curricula (Garcia *et al*, 2018) and Mexico is not the exception. The purpose of this paper is to make a brief description of how English teaching is addressed in Mexico. I have divided it into three parts: In the first one I aim to describe how English is expected to be taught according to the government policies, the second part has the purpose of being an overview of what is happening on public schools in Mexico regarding the English learning and finally,

I share my proposal, a tool which may help English teachers improve their practices despite the weaknesses Mexican Educative system may have.

This essay is supported by documentary research, which is used to familiarize with the problem studied, as well as detecting possible scenarios and strategies. For Roberto Hernandez Sampieri (2010) documentary research consists of “detect, obtain and consult bibliography and other materials which come from other knowledge and/or information moderately and selectively collected from any reality so that they can be useful for study”.

To this end, I have consulted various sources, most of them in digital formats, such as digital books, electronic magazines, research reports, databases, electronic newspapers, and university research projects. The consultation and analysis of these sources have helped me to understand and contextualize the research problem to propose a possible solution that I set out in the last part.

## Part 1: How is English expected to be taught in elementary schools in Mexico?

In this part, I aim to provide a brief historical overview of the different English programs the Mexican Education Ministry has launched to incentivize and regulate English language teaching in public elementary schools. After that, I will comment briefly on the structure of the current program as well as its theoretical and conceptual foundation and its content organization according to the official documents so the reader can have a general outlook of how English is expected to be taught in public primary schools.

As we know, speaking in English, more than a skill, has become a competitive advantage that someone could have. In other words, speaking English increases the possibility of getting a better job or even a promotion in the job you currently have. Besides, learning English allows you to try different fields in your matter. For example, if you are a journalist, you can write your article in both, English and Spanish, and increase the number of readers who might read your article. If you study something related to health (like medicine, dentistry, chemistry, etc.) your career becomes easier as you won't be struggling with scientific texts which are written in English.

Being aware of how important the English language is, either for educational, labor, economic or political reason, Mexicans are not only interested in learning it but also their children. Unfortunately, English has long been highly regarded among the middle and upper classes of Mexican society, and parents with economic means can send children to private bilingual and immersion schools with teachers who are highly proficient in English (Borjian, 2015).

Public schooling, on the other hand, has a long time been excluded from learning a foreign language. It was just until the children started secondary school that they could learn English at schools. To clarify my point, I will first explain how the



educative system in Mexico is and then the historical overview of different English Language Teaching (hereinafter ELT) strategies our government had implemented.

First, there are two education systems in Mexico, one managed by each state and the other by the federation, both governed through the National Ministry of Public Education (SEP) (García-García, Romero-Contreras, & Silva-Maceda, 2018).

Furthermore, basic education in Mexico consists of four levels: Kindergarten, elementary school, secondary and high school (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016). Kindergarten is divided in three years and is the obligatory course the children of 3 to 6 years old must take. In kindergarten, children learn how to read and to write in their mother tongue as well as basic concepts such as colors, days of the week, numbers, etc. Once they finish, Mexican children spend 6 years of their life (ideally) in elementary school where they learn to read, to write, calculus, and cultural basic matters such as Mexico's history and geography (Ley General de Educación, 2019). After that, students must complete three years in secondary school. There, students from 12 to 14 years old will study different skills, values and social ease which help them to continue their studies at university or start their work-life. In addition, they are introduced from the first time to the English language. Later, students from 15 to 17 years old start High School to learn the basic knowledge before joining university and continue studying English language (Gobierno de México, 2017).

The English Language curriculum comprises general topics, including those specified in the *Marco curricular común* (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) which seeks to provide global perspectives where the level of competence and communicative development are determined (Cambridge Assesment, 2020). Furthermore, it generates three reference levels identified with the letter A (basic user), B (independent user) and C (competent user). According to the Plan de Estudios 2011, it is expected that students finish basic education with an independent user level (Ramírez Pérez, 2020).

Finally, there is higher education. High schools are administered by the federal government, state governments, and autonomous institutions, which are mostly

large public universities (Monroy, 2019). Higher education is divided into undergraduate education, graduate education, and job training. It encompasses the following types of institutions: universities, technology institutes, normal schools (teacher training), and job or occupational training (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016).

The importance of describing our educational system is simple: To differentiate the age which our children start learning another language. Whether in public school the students have access to their English course once they are in secondary level (at 12 years old), children from private schools start learning the language once they start their studies in kindergarten (at 3 years old) having eight extra years to learn English. However, we cannot be certain if those eight years they really are learning the language or just passing the subject because they must. That matter will not be addressed in this paper, instead I am explaining how is English expected to be taught and how it is actually taught in public elementary schools, to do so, I will first describe how English teaching started in our country.

First of all, according to Ramirez-Romero & Vargas-Gil (2019), there is a divergence in the date when English has started to be taught in Mexico, however, they mention that the most remote notion was back in in 1867 with the foundation of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria [National Preparatory School] in which its original curriculum included grammar and languages (Cardoso, 2009). But it was until 1923 that the Mexican Ministry of Education (SEP—according to its name in Spanish) restructured the educational program making English language a mandatory subject in the middle school curriculum.

In the past 15 years, many state governments in Mexico have initiated local programs to introduce English at the primary school level (Petron, 2008). When the government realized that learning English will mean that the Mexican population would progress in educational matters, they decided to make it an obligatory subject that each Mexican student needed to take in elementary school (Padilla & Espinoza, 2015). Nevertheless, the learning process was reduced to the presentation of the formal aspect of the language or even a simple sentence translation. In other words,

the main language methodologies used to teach were the grammar-translation methodology and the audio-lingual.

According to Ramírez Pérez (2020), audio lingual approach stems from behaviorism models as it uses the “stimulus – answer” as a tool to generate good habits in students. This approach is mainly based on drilling exercises in which the teacher provides examples on how a given structure works and, after practicing the exercise several times, students need to replace one of the words in order to use it through the examples and only replacing the missing element.

Grammar- Translation methodology, on the other hand, is the easiest method for the English teacher to achieve their target language through the importance of vocabulary and grammar rules (Milawati, 2019). However, there is a poorly one-way classroom interaction. According to Karakas (2019) the initiation of interaction between students rarely happens as the Grammar Translation Method is a strictly teacher-centered method and students are not involved in any pair work, discussion or group works. Students work individually. Therefore, they seldom converse with others.

The purpose of a language is communication and with a one-way interaction it is difficult to succeed in the initial objective of teaching Mexican students to speak in English. Being aware of that, the government decided to improve the program with a more communicative vision (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2011).

A communicative approach emphasizes the importance of language functions rather than focusing only on grammar and vocabulary. One of its principles, according to Ramírez Pérez (2020), is to train students so that they are able to use language properly in different contexts with different purposes. It is also applied under the principle that the more a student is exposed to different and diverse opportunities to use the language, the bigger their knowledge and skill development will be.

As a result, different Mexican states decided to create, manage, and launch their English programs where they would decide the syllabus, textbooks, methodologies,

content, number of hours devoted to EFL, funding, and other elements needed in their implementation. According to Ramirez (2019), most state programs had a relatively short lifespan that lasted less than a decade. Besides Alcántar Díaz, Navarro Téllez, & Moreno Villalbazo (2014) affirm that in most cases, English was taught only in a handful of schools. I consider it could be due to each state's income. Whether in states such as Mexico City, Nuevo Leon, or Jalisco their PIB is one of the highest in Mexico, translated in major infrastructure, there are states like Guerrero, Chiapas, or Oaxaca, which are marginalized areas virtually neglected, that they are struggling first to have schools and its infrastructure and then they focus on the educational content.

Hence, this big discrepancy has motivated the national educational authorities to create a program where all the primary schools in Mexico would be involved, a program that standardizes the contents that would be taught as well as the resources needed, a program which regulates both, human and technological resources, a program that allows each Mexican kid to have access to the English language from elementary school and not until secondary school. Due to all these needs, *English Enciclomedia* was born in 2005.

### **English Enciclomedia**

As reported by the Mexican Education Ministry (SEP) in 2006 this program first will be piloted in 13 states, whose main feature was the digitalization of primary school textbooks and the installation of a computer, an electronic blackboard, a projector, and special software to work with digital textbooks in many 5th and 6th grade classrooms nationwide. (Ramírez-Romero & Vargas-Gil, 2019).

Despite this program sounded at the forefront of technological advances it had two big holes which the government didn't consider when it was implemented. First, the context: Mexico is a developing country, defined by the Cambridge dictionary as "a country with little industrial and economic activity and where people generally have low incomes" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020), so how a country, where most of the population has a low income, could take part in such an ambitious technological

program like *Enciclomedia*, if just 53% of the population has internet access because of its higher costs? (INEGI, 2020). Some others live in villages where the telephone and internet networks don't work as efficiently as in the main cities because of the lack of infrastructure.

Additionally, the complexity of implementing the English program throughout the country and the lack of specialized human resources to cover all the schools in the Mexican Educational System were significant difficulties. *Enciclomedia* tried to address these problems by allowing both, teachers, and students, to learn English at the same time, even if that meant that the only support and feedback source that students would have, were the materials of the program which also neglected or minimized the role of specialized EFL teachers.

Consequently, after six years since its first piloting and without being implemented nationwide, the program was canceled in 2011 (Ramírez-Romero & Vargas-Gil, 2019). Yet, as stated by Silva (2011) mandatory English teaching, even if that doesn't mean teaching in English, is a recurring promise among politicians. Hence, a new program had to be created, and this time this new program should consider the Mexican real context as well as the teacher's preparation. And it was when a new program was born: the PNIEB (in Spanish Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica).

### **The PNIEB**

According to the own Education Ministry, neither of the previously developed State programs from 1993 achieved the objective, due to the lack of promotion and implementation they had as well as the confusion provoked by the lack of clarity to teachers and principals on different matters (Padilla & Espinoza, 2015). Moreover, the objectives were not well defined either, it wasn't mentioned the language level teachers needed to teach the subject nor the one that students were going to obtain once they finished basic education. As a result, without a clear variable, it was harder to evaluate if it had worked.

The PNIEB (Programa Nacional del Inglés en Educación Básica in Spanish) was created to amend those errors while homogenizing the different programs each State had by standardizing the English contents, resources, and regulation in a national program that now, not only will cover elementary and secondary schools, but kindergarten as well, making English accessible to every Mexican child from 3 years old or older.

The purpose of the program was to develop plurilingual and pluricultural competence in Mexican students in public schools to successfully face the communicative challenges of a globalized world (García-García, Romero-Contreras, & Silva-Maceda, 2018). Therefore, the English Foreign Language curriculum proposal adopts an approach focused on social practices of the language (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017, p. 170).

In order to develop the plurilingual and pluricultural competence, the program was divided into two stages and four phases; Stage I will be taught in kindergarten and the first 2 years of elementary and Stage 2 from the third grade of elementary until the end of secondary.

As described for the PNIEB syllabus, Stage I aims to sensitize students to English by promoting involvement in social practices with the target language to build a foundation for later learning (García-García, Romero-Contreras, & Silva-Maceda, 2018). Stage II, on the other hand, seeks to promote constructive teaching of English as a foreign language and occurs in Phases II, III, and IV. These phases are divided according to the number of hours required to switch from one level to another according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), an international standard for describing language ability. It is described on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for those who have mastered a language (Cambridge Assessment, 2020). In this way, to progress from one level of the CEFR, according to Sara H in Cambridge English Support Site (2020), It takes 90-100 learning hours for level A1, 180-200 learning hours for level A2, and 350-400 learning hours for level B1.

The PNIEB's syllabus mentions that, during this phase, students obtain the required competencies to not only use English inside a classroom but outside it as well, thanks to different activities with the language based on social practices of the language in different social learning environments (Ramírez-Romero & Vargas-Gil, 2019). I summarize its contents on the following chart:

### Organization of the PNIEB program structure

	STAGE 1	STAGE 2		
	Phase I	Phase II (A1)	Phase III (A2)	Phase IV (B1)
<b>Hours needed</b>	300 hours	200 hours	200 hours	360 hours
<b>Timing Distribution</b>	3 sessions a week from 50 minutes each.	3 sessions a week from 60 minutes each.	3 sessions a week from 60 minutes each.	3 sessions a week from 60 minutes each.
<b>School Grade</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade (Kindergarten) 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade of elementary school	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> grade of elementary school.	5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> grade of elementary school	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , and 3 <sup>rd</sup> years of secondary school.
<b>Objective</b>	To sensitize students about the existence of another language different from their mother tongue while developing specific competencies of routine and well-known social practices through the interaction among themselves and oral and written texts from different social ambiances.	To get the needed knowledge to understand and use the English language for understanding, recognizing, and using common expressions through the development of specific competencies linked to text production and interpretation.	Its objective is to prepare students with sufficient specific English competencies particular to social interaction that will enable them to use English in everyday communicative activities.	To consolidate the students' proficiency in English in basic communicative situations and develop specific competencies particular to social practices of the language within a range of communicative situations.

Fig. 1 Organization of the PNIEB program structure. Source: Author's own creation

As far as we can see, the PNIEB aims at getting a level B1 by the end of secondary school, which is acceptable. However, they never created an official evaluating instrument to verify if the students were reaching the goal (Mendoza, 2015). In addition, the PNIEB states that the basic skill for a potential English teacher at public schools is based on the Common European Framework. In the preschool, the teacher must have one English competence higher than that of the student (García-García, Romero-Contreras, & Silva-Maceda, 2018). In other words, to teach a student in Phase I, the teacher must have achieved level A1, to teach in Phase II the teacher must have a level A2 and so forth, which wasn't accomplished efficiently due to the lack of English teachers to develop the task. Studies revised such as Education First (2013) agree that recruiting and training English teachers with the necessary characteristics is one of the main obstacles for implementing the English language program.

Despite the government efforts, the PINEB never became a nationwide program judging by the percentage of students, grades, and regions and shifts it covered. Ramirez- Romero & Vargas-Gil (2019) state that the program coverage was unequal in geographical and demographic terms. It mainly focused on state capitals or major cities, neglecting smaller populations and marginalized areas. Additionally, according to CONEVAL (2013), the PINEB covered only 12.57% of public schools and 25% of students in basic education in the country. To me, the failure of this program might be a consequence of the reduced budget destined to education regardless of the deceiving results Mexican schools have on international evaluations, for example.

Even though the limitations and its short life (being replaced in 2013 by the current program), the PNIEB was the first program in designing a nationwide official English framework which made English an official subject in elementary schools. Additionally, Ramirez-Romero & Sayer (2016) enhance the greater students' enrollment; nationwide hiring of a greater number of trained EFL teachers than in previous years, and the distribution of government-financed English textbooks to



most students enrolled in the program. In other words, although the PNIEB did not achieve all the objectives for which it was designed, it was the real pioneer in making English language learning accessible to a major number of Mexican students than in previous years with previous programs.

### **The Proni**

By the end of 2012, a new president from a different political party was elected. The new president held a distinct educational agenda, and thus by 2015 the federal government launched the *Programa Nacional de Inglés* (PRONI in its Spanish acronym). The Proni was not different from the PNIEB at all, in fact it is addressed as PNIEB because it kept the same curriculum with no changes whatsoever. As a matter of fact, the only changes were administrative and budgetary (Ramírez-Romero & Vargas-Gil, 2019). The PRONI is the current program that regulates English teaching in public schooling (DOF, 2021).

The program structure is basically the same as the PNIEB's, English must be taught in 4 cycles which, the first cycle is the introduction to the English language by making the students aware that there exists a language which is different than the one they speak, as for the other cycles, as I explained before, they try to reach a level from the Common European Framework each. Besides, each level requires a specific level of hours to be achieved, that its why, the program states have assigned a specific amount of time in which each cycle shall be developed. This timing was according to the one stated on the Common European Framework. From this perspective, the total number of hours comprising Cycles 1 (300 h) and 2 (200 h) equal the number required to reach the A1 level at the end of Cycle 2 (500 h).

As for the theoretical foundation the PRONI, once again, is quite the same as the PNIEB basing its content and learning objectives on social practices because, according to the Ministry of Education: "Social practices of the language are patterns or ways of interaction, which, in addition to the production and interpretation of spoken and written texts, include several activities linked to them. Each practice has

a specific communicative purpose and a history linked to a particular cultural situation” (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017, p. 170).

According to Chomsky (2014), language should be studied more as a competence than as a structure, thus emerging the concept of communicative competence as opposed to the concept of linguistic competence. This communicative competence will then address the study of the language in use, and not as a decontextualized system, that is, not to learn morphology, but rather the more pragmatic aspects of the language.

Since 1993’s curricular reform for basic education, plans and syllabuses have aimed to students to develop competences to study, to live and to keep learning outside school (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017, p. 104). Furthermore, in the 2018-2019 school year, were implemented the Basic Education plans and syllabuses, published in 2017 (Rivera & Cordero, 2018) which establish the following principles so that teachers can transform their practice and fully fulfill their role in the educational process by implementing the objectives of the program (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017, p. 119):

1. Put the student and his learning at the center of the educational process
2. Consider the student's prior knowledge.
3. Offer accompaniment to learning
4. Know the interests of the students
5. Stimulate the intrinsic motivation of the student
6. Recognize the social nature of knowledge
7. Promote situated learning
8. Understand assessment as a process related to learning planning
9. Model learning
10. Value informal learning
11. Promote discipline
12. Encourage a culture of learning
13. Appreciate diversity as a source of wealth for learning
14. Use discipline to support learning

These principles follow the social constructivism trend in which individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live (Kim, 2010). In other words, meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities. On the last part of these paper, I am proposing how implement those principles by following this theory and making emphasis on young learners.

Once explained the theoretical foundations, I will describe the content organization; Ramirez-Romero and Vargas-Gil (2019) mention that the content encompasses three types of knowledge: using the language, knowing about the language, and learning through language, which are aspects of language that help to preserve the formal and social functions of language. Every time a teacher starts planning their lesson, they shall consider these three aspects. For example, a teacher has planned to use a short story on the English course for some reading practice, that will mean that on the *Using the language* section the teacher can start with some warm-up such as describing the photos related to the story and, in that way, students will start to use the language either on just words or complex inferences.

Next, *knowing the language* is the linguistic part, where the teacher can identify the words, students know and perhaps, create a repertoire of the words they do not know but are necessary for this social practice of the language. Finally, on *being through the language* the teacher can use language as a means of sharing knowledge. In other words, if the chosen story is about science and technology, students will not only have learned new words and structures, but also some knowledge related to science and technology. The three types of knowledge have to be developed in one of the three different environments: the community/familial, literary/ludic, and academic (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017, p. 174) which change from a difficulty degree according to the cycle they are addressed.

Finally, the teacher profile. This is a complex matter because, according to authors such as García-García, Romero-Contreras, & Silva-Maceda (2018) general classroom teachers without specialization in ELT may be a potential positive alternative to implementing ELT by becoming second language facilitators. I am not

100% against this idea, however, we first need to know what an English Language teacher is and his role according to the current language regulation in Mexico.

### **The English Teacher Profile**

In the following paragraphs I am providing a quick outlook of what an English teacher job normally consists of and compare it with the SEP teacher profile. My purpose here is to highlight one of the strongest weakness this program has, to improve the teaching quality.

To begin with, for this paper purposes, two teacher definitions will be highlighted: a teacher as a general concept and a language teacher who is specialized in, as his name states, the language.

When I looked for “teacher” different dictionaries I went from “the one who teaches” definition to others which mentions different activities such as someone whose job is to cause to know something, to cause to know-how, to guide the studies of, to impart the knowledge of, and to instruct by precept, example, or experience. None of these definitions convinced me at all and I decided to define it from my own teaching experience: A teacher is a person who introduces new content to someone and helps them learning and understanding it by providing some guidance. When we talk of an English language teacher, we refer to the professional who, having known the language, is in charge of letting their students digest the language as well as listen, speak, repeat, comprehend, read, write and express their feelings and ideas in the target language by providing some pedagogic strategies.

Furthermore, Urzúa (2011) denotes that, teachers have different roles in and outside the classroom: besides being an educator, a teacher is also a cheerleader, a guide, and a supervisor. Also, to the learning field, a teacher has three different roles according to Nunan (1989): he acts as a facilitator of the communicative process, he acts as a participant, and he acts as an observer and as an apprentice. It seems like we expect him to be a superman full of virtues, skills, characteristics, knowledge,

and values accordant to the institution he works by and the society he lives in (Nunan, 1989).

However, according to SEP curricula, you don't have to be a professional to teach the language. If you happen to know the English language either because you lived on la language speaking country or learn it on a language center, you have the chance of teaching English in an elementary school (Ramírez-Romero, 2013); the only condition is that your level must be higher than the level you are teaching. In other words, if you are teaching in cycle 2, where students are seeking A1 level, you must already have that level, similarly, if you plan to teach on the secondary school where they are working towards a B1, then you need to have achieved this level already (British Council, 2015).

The Ministry of Education has devised two profiles for potential English teachers, each of which specifies a proficiency level that teachers must obtain to teach English in public schools (British Council, 2015). These levels are based on the Common European Framework as outlined above. They are described as basic and ideal. The basic one is the one I have just described, where the teacher has to have attained one level higher than that of the student. The following figure makes it easier to understand.

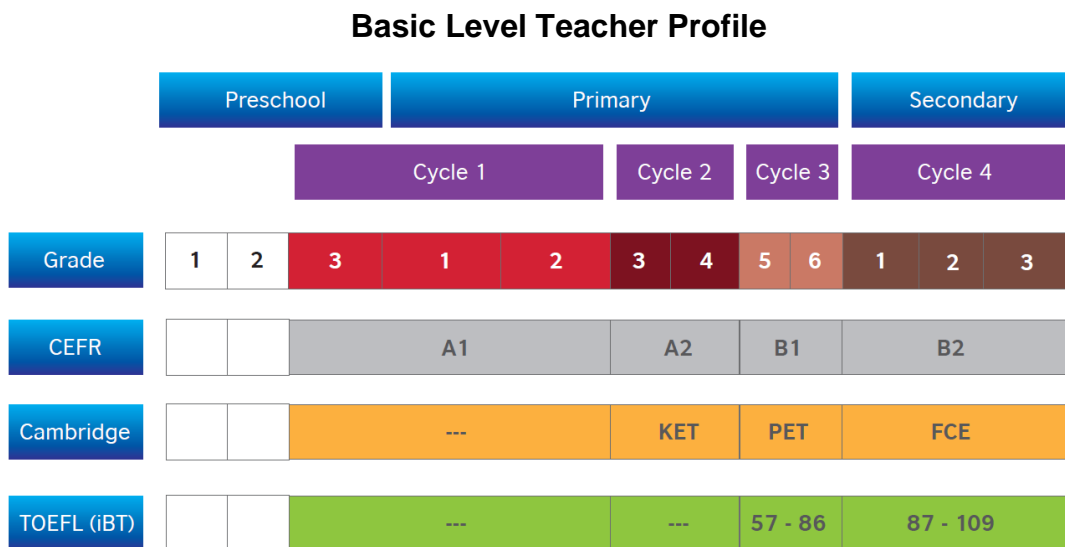


Figure 2 Basic level teacher profile. Figure took from (British Council, 2015, p.15)

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On the other hand, we have the ideal level; here the teacher must have attained two levels above that in which they are instructing the students. For example, to teach a student in Cycle 1 to attain level A1, the teacher should have attained level A2. There is no available data that shows the number of teachers that fit either the Basic or Ideal profiles (British Council, 2015).

### Ideal Level Teacher Profile

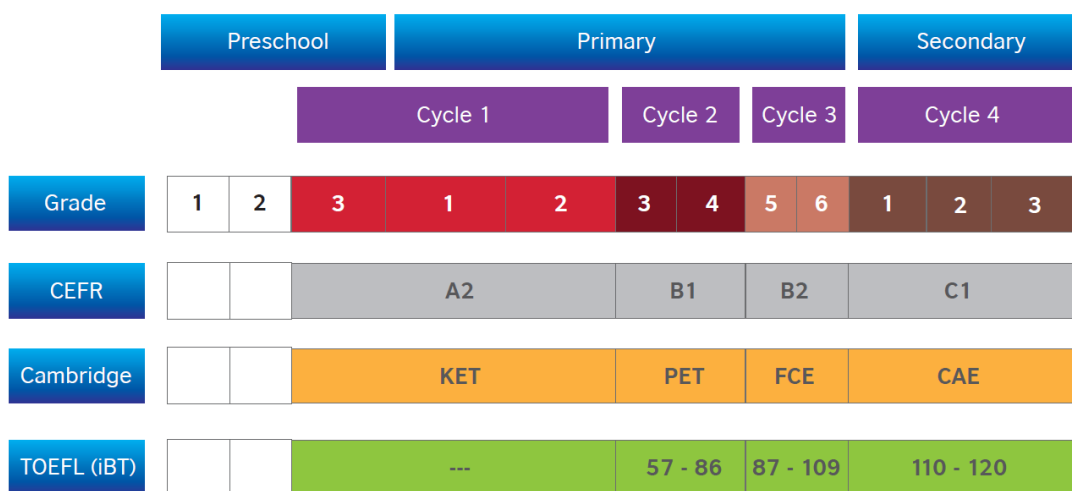


Fig 3 Ideal Level Teacher Profile Figure taken from (British Council, 2015, p.15)

Having reached the level but not having an official paper to prove it was a common problem, especially for those teachers who had learnt English when they lived abroad (Ramírez-Romero, 2013). Consequently, the ministry of education had created a series of national standards for foreign languages called the Certificado Nacional de Nivel de Inglés (CENNI), which following the same standards as the Cambridge certifications, measures the English level using the scale of the common European Framework to show the equivalences between both groups of standards, as shown in Figure 4 (British Council, 2015).

### Cenni's alignment with international standards

	Breakthrough				Waystage			Threshold			Vantage			Effective Operational Proficiency			Mastery			
CEFR	A1				A2			B1			B2			C1			C2			
Cenni	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20

Fig. 4 Alignment with international standards. Source: Author's own creation

The Cenni evaluates English similarly to the European certifications (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2019). The process to get a Cenni certificate is the following:

1. First, it is essential that the teacher has a B2 level or higher international certificate (Mejoranza, 2021). In case of not having a certificate, there are several institutions which offer them across the country.
2. Once the certificate is obtained, what the teacher has to do is filling a request form in Cenni's official website.
3. After that, teachers shall take the previous request format as well as their language certificate and several personal documents such as their ID and birth certificate to Cenni's office so that they could validate the teacher's information and emit the CENNI certificate (Moheno, 2019).
4. Finally, the candidate's level is measured and set on a specific band. It is composed of 20 bands which are equivalent to the levels from the Common European Framework (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2019).

It is important to note that, according to the band you have achieved, scholarships to professionalize abroad are offered to motivate teacher's participation, so it is expected that those incentives affect the quality of teaching in a positive way (Ramírez, Pérez, & Lara, 2017).

Besides the language knowledge, there are some other abilities an ELT teacher needs to have. Although the Proni program contemplates a profile for English teachers that requires that potential candidates should demonstrate an English proficiency that would allow them to serve as a model of speech and writing in this language for students (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017) is not the only

knowledge an English teacher needs to have. They need to have a sound knowledge of children and adolescents' development to understand their needs, interests, and abilities as well as the difficulties students face when learning a language other than their mother tongue (Ramírez-Romero & Vargas-Gil, 2019).

Just as importantly, English teachers should know how to teach a foreign language (Ramírez-Romero & Vargas-Gil, 2019). Nevertheless, studies like the one addressed Education First (2013) agree that recruiting and training English teachers with the necessary characteristics is one of the main obstacles for implementing the English language program. Mexicanos Primero (2015), which is an NGO, states that there is one English teacher for every 419 students; two out of three teachers work in primary level, seven out of 10 in secondary level; and less than one out of 200 works in an indigenous school regardless of level. Only one out of seven schools, in general, have an English teacher: one out of 20 preschools, one out of 10 elementary schools, and one out of 100 indigenous schools (García-García, Romero-Contreras, & Silva-Maceda, 2018).

The main cause of the lack of teachers is simple: inadequate funding and administrative obstacles (Monroy, 2019). Even if there exist professionals who have most, or all, the skills required to develop the program and make it successful, there is not enough money for their wages. As a consequence, we have schools where English is not taught, others where the general classroom teachers are the ones who teach and some others where there is an English teacher but is not taken as seriously as the other teachers for the school authorities (Ramírez-Romero, 2013).

Finally, having learnt the National English program theoretical foundation, its goals and the teacher profile needed to meet them, I will take them as a reference on the last part of this paper, where I describe a proposal to enhance the current methodology, making easier to reach the objectives of the current English teaching program.



## Part 2: What is happening?

**The Program Implementation** In this section I am presenting how the National English Program has been implemented since its pilot phase until today, differentiating its implementation in urban and rural cities. Then, I offer a comment on how the teaching practice is, the teacher's motivation, the methods they employ, and how the pedagogic process is. I conclude this section with a discussion of three external factors that do not depend on the teacher but interfere with the quality of teaching: infrastructure, handling discipline, and evaluation.

Right now, Mexico feels like it's divided in two due to the high social and economic differences each city has. Whereas Monterrey, Guadalajara or Mexico City are renowned, have a high GDP and most of the company's headquarters are placed there; in poor states such as Guerrero, Oaxaca, or Chiapas the circumstances are different (CONEVAL, 2015); there is not a prestigious university or a quality hospital to go. Neither the services such as water nor electricity are as regular as in the main cities (Albo & Ordaz, 2011). From my point of view, these causes, mostly economic, are not only the reason why people want to move out to the main cities but the main reason why the government does nothing. I mean, if you prefer to leave your city rather than asking your government to improve the services, they will barely do something; especially because poverty is their marketing.

As Machiavellian as it might sound, the Mexican government tends to use poverty as its ally rather than as a problem that they should eradicate (Leon, n.d.)<sup>1</sup>. If there aren't poor people anymore, to whom are they going to offer their social programs? They prefer to keep us poor to continue manipulating us but at the same time to show an image that Mexico is economically progressing (Velázquez, 2012 p.25). That is why we have a huge gap between the main cities and the rural cities. The

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<sup>1</sup> (León B. C.)

first are the evidence of what Mexico could be if we continue working, paying our taxes, and incentivizing foreign investment. The second cities, on the other hand, encompass most of the cities in our country, evidencing what Mexico is really like; not having enough infrastructure, crime, lower wages, and salaries and so on and, unfortunately, what hasn't changed despite the government promises to make our life's better.

I am making this huge contrast because in English learning happens the same. Mexico is a geographically, ethnically, and linguistically diverse country that comprises 32 states. As a matter of fact, more than 60 languages are spoken mostly by indigenous ethnic groups in the south, a region historically neglected by the central government (Monroy, 2019) so it is not a surprise that within these underfunded rural regions educational participation rate is extremely low. Literacy rates in the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca, home to the largest percentages of indigenous people in Mexico, are more than 10 times lower than in Mexico City or the northern state of Nuevo León (Monroy, 2019).

When the states started piloting their English programs, they did it in the main cities (Ramírez-Romero, 2013). The causes might be different, probably they did it because of the distance; it is faster, cheaper, and easier to measure on a school that's near you, rather than other that is miles away. However, the same happened with the PNIEB (British Council, 2015). It was piloted just on schools in the main cities and what the surrounding schools just heard were rumors that it might expand to the whole state, but that never happened (García-García, Romero-Contreras, & Silva-Maceda, 2018). The literature revised shows that at the early stages of the English program implementation, schools were chosen as pilot schools, while others adopted the program having parents pay for the program and other schools chose not to implement it (Mexicanos Primero, 2015).

However, although the schools in the main cities had the privilege of being where the programs were developed, they were also the affected ones of a big failure. As on the state's program, there was not a clear evaluation parameter, schools did not

know what contents they needed to teach, much less that there existed English levels to reach. Authors, such as Ramirez, Pamplon & Cota (2012) confirm it by reporting that the teachers involved in the teaching-learning process do not have a completely clear knowledge about the program.

English Enciclomedia was also a chaos. Teachers were aware they do not know the language and despite that, they were enrolled in the program hoping that, with the marvelous technology they had in their hands, they would learn English at the same time as the students and nothing could go wrong because the platform offered everything: explanations, media resources, and examples (Ramírez-Romero & Vargas-Gil, 2019). However, they never took into consideration the linguistic skills students had.

As a result, when the evaluation arrived, the results were far from the expected when the national English program was designed. According to Mexicanos Primero (2015), just 3% of students who finish secondary school have enough knowledge and skills required for the B1 level that is stated on the program and what is even more worrying, 79% of the students have a lack of knowledge in the English knowledge. To my mind, one of the main causes is because the instruction may be very limited. As I mention before, some teachers know how to teach but they do not have English proficiency at all, limiting their lessons to just vocabulary and simple phrases (Borjian, 2015). This author reaffirms it by stating that the lack of communicatively proficient English teachers in Mexico is due to several factors, including the type of English training given at the university level.

Prospective teachers need special training and skills, not simply a good general education (National Research Council, 2001). In other words, teachers are not know-it-alls, however it is believed that if the programs do not work successfully or children do not learn as expected is because of teachers.

On the one hand, teachers' capacity to pose questions, select tasks, evaluate their pupil's understanding, and to make curricular decisions all depend on how they themselves understand the subject matter (McDiarmid, Ball, & Anderson, 1989), on

the other hand, we have teachers whose English is enough or even higher than the required for the level they are teaching, however, they might address difficulties at the moment of their lessons because they are not professional teachers in the first place.

Improving teacher's knowledge and strategies makes certain that student achievement will be improved and thus, well-qualified teachers and high-quality teaching can close the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers (King & Newmann, 2000). To improve the teacher's knowledge an efficient teaching training program must be developed. On the last part of this paper, I am proposing one alternative, not without first making a succinct analysis of teacher's needs and external factors which interfere on English language teaching on elementary school in Mexico described along these lines.

### **Teachers Motivation**

Being a teacher is not everybody's dream. In Mexico, teenagers have the chance to decide which their BA is going to be as well as the school where they are studying it (Ley General de Educación, 2019). What they do not decide is if they are going to find a job once they finish their studies. Nowadays most Mexicans do not have a job in their professional field not only because of the lack of employment but also the wages (BIT, 2012; Malacara, 2020). Most of the employers offer miserable wages or salaries under the pretext of graduates not having enough experience in their field.

Unfortunately, they are right, at the moment of studying university, just a few students start looking for a job on their field and a lot of them wait until they finish to do so. As a result, they have to face the working world without job experience reducing the chances of finding the job they had expected (StudyMoose, 2016).

However, despite not finding a job on their field, Pompa (2016) mentions that young professionals either become entrepreneurs and create their own company (which is good because most of Mexico GDP comes from small businesses (OECD, 2019)) or

others start looking for jobs in different fields which, for them, might not require a lot of specialization.

Consequently, we have both; teachers who decided to study their BA in education, languages teaching, pedagogy, or something similar who enjoy doing their job, can understand the kids and teenagers, know how to work with them and making them learn while keeping discipline and a nice work environment and teachers who are teaching because they could not find a better job and who might be frustrated, affecting the quality of their class.

This has a huge impact on the students learning process. Those who are working with professional teachers not only will have a more significant class but also teachers more committed to their learning. For example, Padilla González (2014) in her study “La práctica docente del profesor de inglés en secundaria. Un estudio de casos en escuelas públicas” shares that one of the results she found was the interest teachers have on their students learning process:

[...] se identificaron, por un lado, dos casos con antecedentes de inmersión a la docencia por inquietud y gusto por la enseñanza desde la infancia y, por otro, dos de ellos que la tomaron como alternativa o solución a necesidades económicas. Respecto a los dos primeros, se identificó ellos expectativa de aprendizaje derivada de su labor, trato amable y dispuesto, orientación humanística y comprometida en su práctica. Los dos casos contrarios registraron actitudes poco flexibles o indiferentes ante los estudiantes (Padilla González, 2014, p.p.1-18)

Teachers' motivation affects students by reducing their motivation and, as a result, their attitude towards the English language (Borjian, 2015; Padilla González, 2014).

Gholami (2012) refers that the attitude from a student towards the target language, its speakers, and the learning context, play an important role in the success or failure of language learning. Once students lose motivation for learning English or are not interested in learning it anymore, it gets harder for them to acquire, speak, or even understand the language (UNESCO, 2018).

For this reason, teachers hired must not only be proficient in the language they are teaching but in pedagogic skills as well. In agreement with Shulman (1987), quality teachers would possess the following: content knowledge, which is the teachers' content background in the subject they teach, and pedagogical skills, which embrace the principles and strategies of classroom management and organization (Amusan, 2016). If Mexico wants to have quality teachers, they shall hire professionals who have both: English and pedagogic knowledge. At the same time, teachers create their teaching practice according to their personality, motivation, resources, and particular meanings toward their labor, printing a personal style that might affect the accomplishment or nonfulfillment of his labor (Padilla González, 2014).

To sum up, an important factor in the English linguistic competence achievement expected on the student is the teacher's acting, their conceptions, and actions in and outside the classroom as well as the teaching approach which has repercussions on the students' way of learning (Padilla González, 2014). On the following lines, I am presenting the current pedagogic process, so the reader understands how English is being taught in public schools as well as some challenges that teachers need to face if they are willing to improve their teaching practice.

### **The pedagogic process**

As I have stated before, a key element for learning a new language is the source where you are learning it. To me, the principal source is the English teacher because he is not only in charge of sharing new knowledge with the students but also planning lessons so they could listen, organize, categorize, label, describe, compare, repeat, comment, explain, read, analyze and write what they are reviewing by using different examples, strategies or resources. In many primary schools, each class has a teacher who stays with them most of the week and will teach them the whole curriculum. Teachers are expected to know multiple disciplines (Amusan, 2016) therefore, they are the main language source because of the compromise they have to their job, which is to make students speak and understand the English language.

However, every scenario is different, I mean not all schools work the same way or have the same resources. I have previously stated that schools in the main cities usually receive more budget than those in a rural context. Hence, it is required that the teacher, or whoever wants to work on the teaching field, has enough flexibility towards adaptation to each situation that might be presented in their teaching life, and which require a constant preparation (Urzúa, 2011).

In addition, we shall consider who our public is going to be. Harmer (2007) mentions that the learners' age is an important factor in teachers' decisions about how and what to teach because it is necessary to make adaptations. Sometimes we find resources on the internet or different books which may not be for children but adults. Consequently, we cannot use the original text or video because it would be neither interesting nor attaching to our public at all. Alcántar & Montes (2013) confirm it on their study's results when they said that children did not enjoy the audio story and radio reading because they thought the readings were complicated and they hadn't understood them.

Furthermore, not only age is a differentiator but the students themselves. Barbaro (2012) mentions that each group is different, not merely in their interest but on the value attributed to their formation, so it is highly necessary to contextualize both, our students, and our materials. This situation must state a situation that could make the learners feel like they need to know the English language as well as the competence that is being taught (HA, 2015).

Nowadays there are teachers whose practice consist in explaining the students scenically contents related to their subject, as a result, they organize their whole course according to a set of topics previously selected, then they explain those to their students who have to make notes about it and who are evaluated through exams to measure their learning (Pabón, 1999). This methodology is known as the "traditional method" which many authors consider old-fashioned or that does not fulfill the current necessities that our students have. However, Pabón (1999) also highlights that there is not a pure pedagogical model, because teachers organize

them by taking just some significant elements of each one as well as adding their ideas and I could not agree more, each teacher has their personality, techniques and they combine them with the different teaching methodologies that exist. Nevertheless, teachers' labor is not just reduced to methodologies, resource adaptation, or being the source of knowledge, they also are subjects of pedagogy.

Pedagogy refers to the “interactions between teachers, students, and the learning environment and the learning tasks.” (UNESCO, 2018). This broad term includes how teachers and students relate together as well as the instructional approaches implemented in the classroom. Consequently, if we want to change the educative practice to improve it and make the National English program work, we must first, analyze the implicit conceptions on it as well as concert issues constantly planted on it (Pabón, 1999). The issues that I am addressing in this paper are all classroom-related because they are more affordable and easier to address, and we do not need all the stakeholders involved.

In the following lines, I am analyzing how an English class is given on public elementary schools, from the lesson planning to the evaluation phase with the purpose of highlighting both: the strengths and weaknesses our current system has so the reader understands the difficult task being English teacher is as well as how the current teachers managed to make the National English Program work despite not understanding it at all.

### **Teaching Methods**

For so long time there have existed different methodologies and approaches to teach the English language. It is relevant to mention them because these pedagogical approaches have an influence on the way of planning, organizing, developing, and assessing the curriculum on its different components: objectives, contents, sequence, methods, didactic resources, and assessment (Pabón, 1999).



Nonetheless, not all the teaching approaches are the same. Some of them focus on teaching grammatical structures, some others on situations, or some others want you to learn the second language in the same way that you learn your mother language. In fact, up to recently, the English teaching methods were based on a language's system analysis (grammar, lexicon) but they fairly used the language in a situation and when they are attached to improve the accent (audiovisual methods), they are not interested in the message's sense (Yaïche, 2009). Conversely, the principle adopted today for learning English is the communicative approach.

The communicative approach takes into account the sensitivity of the communicative situation. Emphasis is placed on language as a communication tool, both in speaking and writing with a priority towards the spoken language. Yaïche (2009) argues that for each of these aspects, two axes are considered: the one of the comprehension and the one of the expression. The communicative approach is the newest tendency for learning English and that is the reason why our government has decided that this is the method teachers have to use at the moment of their lessons.

However, the reality is different, Borjian (2015) reports on his study that 21% of the respondents noted that the teaching of grammar skills rather than an emphasis on communicative competence continues to be the main focus in Mexican schools. Alcántar and Montes (2013) confirm it when they stated that the obtained learning on English lessons is mainly centered on vocabulary and isolated phrases and words which is worrying not only because they are not following what is stated in the program, but also because learning a new language is not just learning isolated words, a language is much more than lexicon. Besides, a lack of practicality is provoked making it hard to expand towards a much more communicative or significant language (Alcántar & Montes, 2013).

As we know, each teacher creates his/her class according to his experiences, his personality, and his knowledge (Padilla González, 2014), which is why it could be hard to change his/her whole teaching method to a new one that is been imposed nowadays. But the labor of the teacher encompasses flexibility as well. We all know that not all our students learn the same way (Wagdi, 2018) making it the main reason

teachers should be motivated to improve our teaching techniques. Furthermore, there are those international examinations in which Mexico has not the best place and teachers been usually blamed for that (Amusan, 2016). Those could be enough reasons for improving their teaching practice. Padilla Gonzalez (2014) mentions that teachers have the disposition to change and adapt to the new program government has launched. So, it can start to be done by adapting our teaching to our public.

Teaching young learners might be more challenging than teaching adults because of the way they learn (Harmer, 2007). According to Alcántar & Montes (2013), the main problem students said they had is related to the teaching methodologies employed, which for them, are boring and monotonous and they would have preferred to participate in activities which allowed them to speak and practice their English as well as having more ludic lessons. However, the activities that teachers usually plan are presentations, short conversations, teacher speech, and reading. Therefore, I propose to mix them. I mean, if it is planned that students make a presentation about a topic, but students enjoy more singing, as Alcántar & Montes (2013) reported, then why not creating a song about what they are presenting instead of just stand up in front of the class saying something. In the following lines, I am giving a brief description of the activities employed as well as the strategies and interactions inside the classroom.

## **Curriculum**

Before a teacher starts preparing a class, it is imperative to know how the class should be directed, the contents that shall be addressed, what students need to achieve at the end of the school year as well as the assessment to measure if the objectives have been achieved, in one word: a curriculum (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1993).

Despite the cycle each student is addressing or their school year, the curriculum proposed by the Ministry of Education (SEP) starts explaining the achievements the current program has reached, highlighting the one of introducing English language

to kindergarten and elementary school students. After that, it is described how the PRONI works, its division in 4 cycles as well as the reference it took from international standards such as the Common European Reference Framework and its level descriptors. Subsequently, each program begins to differ as it is stated the objective of the cycle the program is designed for. In other words, if you are reading the curriculum for English class in secondary school, the objective described explains the purpose of teaching English language in cycle 4, the ones of elementary school will say the purpose for the previous cycles.

Finally, the contents their communicative purposes, didactic orientation and language social practice activities are described followed by their connection to what is stated on the Common European Reference Framework as well as some tips so teachers could profit each element of the activities proposed.

The program has stated that each lesson has to last 50 minutes (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017), Despite that, authors such as Alcántar & Montes (2013) have argued that their main problem teachers have when they plan their lessons and the activities for the English class is time management: class time is not enough for the implementation of the activities. Instructional time is one of the most challenging constraints teachers face in trying to achieve curricular goals. (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000).

Consequently, it is essential that teachers design an agenda on the topics they are presenting through the course, estimating the amount of time they may require for each lesson. For example, the program has one activity which is reading and following an instructive to build an object and, there is another activity where students need to write questions to gather information about a product from the countryside. Perhaps for a group it will take more time a task like the first one because kids might be really energetic or hard to control. Conversely, perhaps it is a calm group but student's struggle with written assignments. Therefore, the teacher needs to consider their public and their skills. If he has an energetic group, for example, and the teacher is sure that it would take more time for an activity like the

first one and less for an activity like the second, he could make balance between what is stated in the curriculum.

## **Lesson Planning**

We cannot arrive to a destination without knowing the path; we cannot start-up a new business without knowing what, where, and to whom we are selling to; we cannot teach without knowing what exactly we are going to teach. The English language is something abstract, it is not like a procedure you can chop, but you can dose it. Our government had come up with a national curriculum that has to be addressed in every public school in Mexico, however, teachers are free to choose how are they teaching that content. Rockwell (1985) affirms that, despite the official program, each teacher brings to his classroom what he considers is worth to be taught and not mentioning what, to him, should not be taught.

So, before giving our lesson, a teacher needs to know first how is he going to deliver that lesson. In a lesson plan, according to (Padilla González, 2014) are encompassed the following elements: the curriculum, its approach, some theories which serve as a background of teachers' acting, and the techniques developed in his classroom. I would like to add timing as well because according to Wagdy (2018) in a lesson plan has to be stated the duration of each activity.

Unfortunately, timing is not something teachers take into account at the moment of planning their lessons, they just limit themselves on fulfilling a form that is given to them where they shall justify which topic is been taught that week as well as the resources and competencies they are working with (León & Amador, 2013). But lesson planning is much more than fulfilling a form, lesson planning is preparation. It allows us to identify, besides the topic we are working with, the possible questions students might make so we can address them successfully in class (Wagdi, 2018).

Additionally, lesson planning is like a doctor's prescription where he indicates what you need to take and for how long. Teachers, either on a set school forms or just on a note to themselves, they measure how much of speaking will be used, how much

of book activities, how much time they could take even on the littlest things as taking attendance (Jensen, 2014). By having a lesson plan, they have a record where they document if the topic planned for that day had been too hard for students and took much more time to explain than the one expected, or vice versa, it might have been simple for students, and they had extra time for new different activities and games.

A lesson plan is also a business plan, which is where companies identify internal or external situations that can contribute to or prevent them from reaching their venture's goals (Alonso-Vazquez, 2018). In a classroom happens the same, a lesson plan helps to identify if using a specific resource or technique was a success or a total failure, in order to not repeat the same mistake.

Finally, a lesson plan could be also a backup plan and not some instructions that you need to follow rigorously. What happens if the activity planned was delightful and children are motivated, using the structure taught them, but the teacher needs to cut it because, according to the plan, is time to switch the activity? Amusan (2016) mentions that most teachers schedule and allocate the appropriate amount of time for learning, but few teachers ensure that their pupils are engaged and actively occupied with activities geared towards the learning of the subject during the allocated time.

In conclusion, although a lesson plan could be reduced to a form that teachers have to fulfill weekly, they can also take advantage of it by using it as a time-measurement, quality activity measurement, or distribution of topics measurement without being so rigid at the moment of following it as well as allowing creativity also being a part of their class.

## **Activities**

Wagdi (2018) on his study mentions that a class is composed of three different phases: The warm-up, the techniques & procedures, and the assessment.

The purpose of the warm-up is to prepare the learners and insert them into the lesson. According to Dixon (2016) warming up activity is "a little activity ... [which]

activates background knowledge, intrigues students, and gives students access to all that they know." In other words, it shall help students connect their familiar environment to the English language and what is revised in class. Techniques & procedures, on the other hand, are the space where students learn. It could be a focus on any aspect of the language, such as grammar or vocabulary and pronunciation. Finally, we have the assessment or activate phase whose purpose is the production. Robertson (2020) addresses that telling students about a language is not enough to help them learn it, they must have a chance to produce it, so they are able to develop their use of English. In an activated stage, students are given tasks that require them to use not only the language they are studying that day but also another language that they have learnt.

So, as each part has different objectives, teachers have to use different activities to develop them. According to Padilla (2014), research, dialogues, debates, filling activities, and presentations made by students are some of the activities used in an English class. Even some teachers have a wide variety of activities such as role-plays, dialogues, performances, project development, translating exercises, or create games where students set the rules (Padilla González, 2014). However, most activities are typically based on book exercises (e.g., listening and speaking role-plays or textbook readings) or worksheets. Some pair and group work takes place during peer editing sessions during which students typically speak in Spanish. Teachers will occasionally show an English language movie as part of a lesson (Graham, 2006).

## **Strategies**

A strategy is the pattern of objectives, purposes, or goals, and major policies and plans for achieving these goals (Learned, Andrews, Christensen, & Guth, 1969). Inside the classroom teachers should use a wide variety of instructional methods, experiences, assignments, and materials to ensure that learners are achieving all sorts of cognitive objectives. The current English Program mentions that classes must be divided into three different sections: using the language, knowing about the

language, and learning through language (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017). Thus, teachers need to use a speech strategy to teach their lessons, they also adapt the academic text and organize the new information to learn (Padilla González, 2014). In addition, as the program is not rigid at all, some teachers also address the previous knowledge, contextualized projects, discursive strategies, academic text designing, and provide feedback (Padilla González, 2014).

This latest grabbed my attention because, despite having big groups, there are some teachers who handle giving feedback, which is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Hedge (2000) argues that being stimulated to produce, forces learners to cope with their lack of knowledge by struggling to make themselves being understood by speaking slowly or repeating and clarifying their ideas through paraphrasing.

Classwork and homework assignments typically include textbook readings or exercises, quizzes based on readings, listening & speaking pragmatics pair/group exercises which means that class is largely teacher centered based on the idea of the teacher presenting material, students practicing, and then being evaluated (Graham, 2006).

## **Interaction**

The purpose of a language is to communicate something. Humans use it to share their feelings, emotions, thoughts (Chomsky, 2014). So, for this to work, there are always three key elements: the sender, the receiver, and the message, if one of those is missing, the communication is incomplete. Thus, the focus of learning a language is to communicate by providing opportunities to experiment and try to use the language; as well as developing both, accuracy and fluency, and to link the different skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) (Griffith & Lim, 2010).

Our government has introduced the English language to public school's classrooms so that young Mexicans become skilled at it and, when they graduate, they could

communicate in a foreign language. To achieve that objective, interaction is necessary; it can't be learned by itself. Humans learn by confronting a reality which is partly embodied in the thought and action of others, people do not learn by themselves, they learn to confront real-life (HA, 2015)). In other words, not only the teacher has to be the one who will be active in communication, but the students must also participate in their own learning process.

Moreover, Brown (2007) says that in the era of communicative language teaching, interaction is the heart of communication; it is what communication is all about. By interacting, students are able to express themselves using what they have on the language and, at the same time, the importance on this subject rises because they will have applied the class contents in a real context. To handle effective interaction Gebhard, 1998 (cited in Hanun (2017)) proposes to take into account these 5 factors:

1. Reduce the central position of the teacher
2. Appreciate the uniqueness of individuals
3. Provide chances for students to express themselves in meaningful ways
4. Give opportunities for students to negotiate meaning with each other and the teacher
5. Give students choices as to what they want to say, to whom they want to say it, and how they want to say it

Nonetheless, the reality is that ESL classes are large (35-50 students), they last for 45-50 minutes, and follow a prescribed syllabus. Interactions in classrooms occur through simulations, readings, audiotapes, or CDs (Griffith & Lim, 2010) which is quite reduced if we are following a communicative methodology.

## **Infrastructure**

Buildings, classrooms, laboratories, and equipment are part of the education infrastructure. Although most of the time classes occur inside a classroom there are other facilities such as the libraries, where learners get the opportunity to conduct



their studies or research as the resource materials are found there. In addition, there are fields where extra-curricular activities take place (Adede, 2012).

Despite being an external factor, it has an impact on student's learning process because it implies their environment (Teixeira, Amoroso, & James, 2017). Nevertheless, the government might not think the same because the budget destined to it is not enough to have quality spaces in which children could learn. Ramírez-Romero & Sayer's (2016) study "*The teaching of English in public primary schools in Mexico: More heat than light?*" summarize serious problems of inequality that exist within primary schools in Mexico:

For instance, during the 2013-2014 school year, 26% of students received their books almost three months or more after the first day of school and 37% never received them at all. The infrastructure of the school buildings themselves varies significantly: 17% of students took classes in schools that did not have restrooms for students; 26% of schools had five or more infrastructure problems that put children's security at risk, such as broken windows and non-working electrical and plumbing, as well as low-quality infrastructure in stairs, guardrails, roofs, walls, and ground floors. 84% of all primary schools in Mexico have at least one of these problems. Likewise, more than 20% of the students, and a similar number of teachers, did not have desks or chairs in good condition. The report found that class time is also more likely to be disrupted in poorer schools: 23% of schools experienced some sort of teachers' rotation, 23% of schools suspended classes for nonofficial reasons, and only 75% of class time was devoted to teaching and learning activities. In the case of rural schools, the situation is even worse in almost all of the aspects the report measured (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016, p.p. 1-25).

When I read this report, I was concerned and appreciated more the job teachers do despite all these conditions. It is hard to believe that there are schools which do not have safe conditions for students to learn and the government is not interested at all. However, those difficulties can be addressed with quality content (Barrett, Treves, Shmis, Ambasz, & Ustinova, 2019, p. 8). I mean, if teachers provide lessons which motivate students, making them interact among themselves and feel like they are part of something, the lack of facilities should not be a problem because, in the end, the main objective will be achieved: pupils communicate in a foreign language.

## **Discipline**

Authors such as Hermida (2012) arguments that in all the aspects of our life we tend to repeat models that we have not reflected on yet and we are not even conscious of them. That is to say, that as we were educated, in the same way, we tend to educate.

One of the biggest challenges teachers cope with is the need to adapt to different generations. Pupils are not the same age as us, they think differently, and consequently, they learn differently. If the central goal of foreign language learning, in oral or written, is communication (Hanum, 2017); my invitation is to try not to teach in the same way we were taught, at least not all the time. It is a complex task because we have to allow students express themselves without losing the control of the class, which leads me to another important factor: discipline

Classroom discipline refers to a set of teacher actions that constitute organizational and management processes aimed at establishing classroom order (routines, norms, procedures, etc.). Discipline, in turn, refers to the actions that the teacher undertakes to end indiscipline and to restore order (Lopes & Oliveira, 2017). Classroom discipline interferes not only with the student's learning process but on the achievement of the teaching objectives set for each class (Geiger, 2000).

Rockwell explains that teacher-student relationship is not voluntary, this means that neither of the two parts has previous ties, but the teacher must create those ties, which not only ensure compliance by the students but generate in them an effort and interest in learning (Rockwell, 1985). In addition to this, the teacher must maintain control of the group, give instructions; and awaken and maintain the interest of the students.

To keep discipline, schools have previously set a set of rules that must be followed by both: teachers and students. Padilla (2014) mentions that teachers also create their own set of rules which are adjusted to the students' needs. Nevertheless, rules alone will not stop misbehavior unless they are integrated within a positive and warm classroom atmosphere. Teachers who care for and respect their students create an

environment that maximizes learning (Geiger, 2000). The proper balance between warmth and discipline is often hard to find especially by novice teachers (Johnson, 1994). Inside the classroom, we could have students who refuse to engage in schoolwork and do not accept the rules of school life and the constraints of learning. For some of these students, the school can nevertheless be of interest, for example, to be with friends and specially to have a good time (Bonnéry, 2003)

Sometimes it is hard for teachers to control and they would like to be trained in student discipline and management, as well as the design of teaching-learning strategies (Alcántar & Montes, 2013) because the most commonly used disciplinary techniques are the shh, shh, shh, stop, ignoring, and repeating directions, which means teachers do not seem aware of or refuse to acknowledge, students' basic needs to talk and interact with each other (Geiger, 2000). This author also addresses that "disruptive behavior" talking will persist as long as teachers continue to do most of the talking and are unwilling to change their teaching methods. Consequently, if teachers want to keep discipline, they have to, first, modify the interaction pattern they have in the classroom.

### **Assessment**

According to SEP (2017), assessing the pupil's English knowledge must have the following characteristics: First, it shall focus on student performance rather than on their knowledge alone, second, it has to be a source where students progress can be identified concerning the expected learning; finally, reinforce achievement and focus compensatory actions for correcting and preventing student deficiencies so that it is possible to offer interventions and resources needed for students to attain expected school achievement and complete basic education successfully (Jimenez, 2010).

Also, it has been established in Agreement number 494 (DOF, 2009, 7 September) the learning assessment component as part of the didactic project work. This assessment encompasses a set of information which affirms that students learn from their experiences in the classroom. It then makes it possible to make a judgment on

the student's progress as well as on the effectiveness of the activities and learning materials (Ministère de l'Éducation,, 2000).

The instruments most commonly used to assess student learning are written tests, especially multiple-choice questionnaires, and oral exams (usually grammar-based) and, in accordance with these tests, they receive an evaluation of passing or failing with the requisite awards or penalties (Griffith & Lim, 2010). García, Mejía, and Meza (2009) report that teachers often complement their assessments through observations, written work – summaries, class notes, presentations, essays, information search and laboratory reports – class participation, behavior or discipline, written assignments, work or task neatness, teamwork, attendance and/or willingness to work. The weight of these elements varies depending on the teacher or the contents revised. The teacher must assess in a trimonthly period. By the end of the period grades are written on an assessment card or grade registry, which shows the students' academic achievement after each period and at the end of the school year (Jimenez, 2010). Finally, teachers in turn are evaluated based on how well their students perform on these tests and are labeled as good or bad teachers (Griffith & Lim, 2010).

Having analyzed how English is taught in Mexican public-school classrooms, several challenges that need to be addressed were found such as the non-existent foundation of knowledge in most of the students, the divergence in the students' levels of English, short time to address plenty of contents as well as the need for teacher preparation and updating. Also, the isolated work of the teacher due to the low commitment of parents and educational authorities (Padilla González, 2014). Thus, I decided to write a proposal with recommendations to both: students and teachers on how to improve the teaching practice as well as learning beyond the classroom.

Finally, having reviewed different aspects which interfere with the students' learning process, I am focusing on those related to activities and strategies because, in my opinion, those are the easiest to change and could have a significant positive impact

that not only will the student's interest in the English subject boost, but also they will be really useful to make students communicate in the target language and not just understand it on a written text.

## Part 3: Proposal of a teacher training program

Despite there exist different factors needed to be overcome for achieving the National English Program goals, on this paper I am only focusing on one of the core elements for English Foreign language teaching to happen: Teachers.

As mentioned before, being an English teacher is not an easy task. It is a demanding profession due to the different types of activities that the teacher has to implement (Bhat, 2013). Rodríguez (2011) insists that a teacher not only is the person in front of the classroom sharing knowledge with the learners, but he or she is also the one who knows how to lead the class dynamically, how to deal with the behavior of the learners in a classroom and how to manage the different situations that occur during the teaching-learning process.

On the other hand, King & Newman (2000) state that teachers are who have the most direct contact with students; they have the chance to control the climate of learning as well as what is taught. Improving teacher's knowledge and strategies ensures that student academic achievement will be improved and thus, well-qualified teachers and high-quality teaching can close the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers (National Research Council, 2001).

The program has already described the English teacher profile for elementary schools, however as the program had launched quite fast, not all the teachers fulfill the profile to 100%. Research has been made and essentially there are three different teacher profiles: Teachers graduated for a BA in universities, normalistas teachers and teachers with a different background, but no matter the teacher's previous formation, all of them still need to keep improving either in language content matter or pedagogic content matter. In this last part, I am proposing a tailor-made teacher training because not all the teachers have the same strengths, knowledge, or needs.

In addition, as Pecheone and Whittaker (2016) mention "Great teachers aren't born; they are taught." A good teacher is always evolving and is always learning. Gutiérrez

Vazquez (2008) affirms it by saying that when a teacher is not anymore willing to learn, he's finished both as a teacher and as a person.

If our government acknowledge their concern on the quality of education, they should consider adopting policies carefully as well as practices that encourage the most qualified individuals to prepare for, enter, and remain in English teaching. The government even reaffirms it on their report *Los Docentes en México* when they say that teachers are a fundamental component on National Educative System and without doubt, the most important factor to improve students learning (INEE, *Los Docentes en México: Informe 2015*, 2015, p. 17).

Training is a motivational factor that helps both: employees and companies to increase their competitiveness (Bhat, 2013). Human resources are the differentiator between a good company and a great company and the same applies to the educative sector: teachers are the difference between a good school and a great school which is why they need to be trained frequently; training enables teachers to learn new work concepts, refresh their skills, improve their work attitude, and boost productivity (Cole 2002) (cited on Bhat, 2013).

As education policies are constantly changing, training could be a valuable ally because of employees who receive regular training are more likely to accept change and come up with new ideas (Bhat, 2013). Thanks to training, employees become proficient in their jobs and able to give better results.

Moreover, student generations change regularly and the best way to meet their needs as well as having an efficient approach to them is if teachers know how to do so. Nowadays education demands more efficiency, accuracy, and effectiveness in less time and cost, which can be achieved only through the design, and deployment of excellent training programs to the employees. Teachers need to embrace continuous learning and need to update and upgrade their skills and knowledge keeping in mind the dynamics in technological, environmental, and social (Bhatt, 2020).

My proposal is directed to teacher training because, on the one hand, most of the teachers need training to perform their job duties or at least to increase the quality and quantity of their work; on the other hand, skilled and efficient manpower is the most important success factor in achieving the goal of organizations (Karia & Ahmad, 2000). Personally, I think an efficient training program will increase teacher competitiveness, and consequently, the quality of education will be improved making it easier to achieve the objectives of the National English Program. As a matter of fact, training was considered by the government as well: “To make the purposes of this Plan a reality, it is essential to strengthen the professional status of teachers in service and to build initial training that guarantees the good performance of those who join the teaching profession” (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017, p. 118) subsequently, I am describing the training developed.

### **The current teacher training program**

The inauguration of the PNIEB represents a historic opportunity to give all Mexican children a real opportunity to learn English (Sayer, Mercau, & Blanco, 2013). However, access to English acquisition still depends on the quality of the teachers in the program, and the capacity and approach of pre-service and in-service. Teacher preparation programs must be adapted to fit the needs of the new dynamic of ELT that the PNIEB presents.

Historically, states have the legislative authority, moral and ethical responsibility to set standards for a professional practice that significantly affects the public welfare (Pecheone & Whittaker, 2016). However, the information about teachers in Mexico is scarce, quite dispersed and it is not systematized at all.

Basic education teachers' formation has primordially been provided through courses, most of them offered by the 534 Teacher centers and its 40 extensions (INEE, Los Docentes en México: Informe 2015, 2015, p. 159). In this report, it can also be learnt that for this formation to happen, despite reaching a high proportion of teachers, has a destined budget —\$363.91 per teacher yearly— is way too much lower from what is needed.



Furthermore, the report highlights that the formation was given on inadequate conditions. In other words, the formation is given to an average of 267 schools, nevertheless just around half of the teacher centers have media-equipped classrooms, libraries, or even regular classrooms with no more than 10 staff persons.

Therefore, if teachers are, as stated on the government report, a key element on the educative system and who play the main role in the accomplishment of quality education for everyone; it is worth that they have access to a high-quality initial and continuous training which could help teachers as well as give them education strategies on how to develop an adequate class in spite of the lack of equipment.

According to the PNIEB program, the general purpose is to teach students the social practices of the language to satisfy their communication needs and to develop a series of learning strategies with a product as a final step (Salas & Sánchez, 2013). To do so, the national Ministry of Education (SEP) has determined a minimum acceptable profile for teachers, including a base level of English proficiency; however, it is the job of state coordinators to hire and provide in-service professional training (INEE, 2019). Unfortunately, this program was not perfect at all, on the next section, I am portraying the weaknesses they had in order to take them as the bottlenecks that I need to weight on my proposal.

### **Current training program weaknesses**

As I mentioned before when the PNIEB program started lots of teachers were going to be required because now, instead of addressing a few local schools, every elementary school in Mexico would take part on the program and, English teachers were needed. However, the teacher candidates came with either pedagogical knowledge or subject area knowledge but rarely with both. In other words, they were either good teachers with fervent teaching skills and methodology or they had strong English skills (Collins & Pérez, 2013). As a result, the policymakers decided to create a teacher training program where they had to provide methodologies for the teachers to be able to create socio-culturally authentic and natural learning environments that

the PNIEB curriculum demands within the context of each individual primary school (Collins & Pérez, 2013).

The national PNIEB office has provided some initial training for PNIEB teachers and supervisors (first done by trainers from the Tecnológico de Monterrey, and then during 2010-2012 through the ITESO in Guadalajara). Unfortunately, the Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad (IMCO) (2015, p. 20) mentions that in many states, as there was not a previous program, the PNIEB and coordinators and supervisors had to develop ad hoc a training program, often with very limited resources. As a consequence, some teachers felt that they had to figure it out on their own because they literally were sent to the war without weapons as it is addressed on Lengeling, and others (2013) study; or what is even worse, not every school had a formal English teaching training program as it was planned and there was a lack of seriousness and commitment by the coordinators despite the fact that most teachers on this study agreed they needed support (Sayer, Mercau, & Blanco, 2013).

Once teachers are employed by a school system, they receive more training in the form of professional development (PD). Ideally, PD is designed to be ongoing, relevant, and collaborative with an opportunity for feedback or reflection (Kelly, 2020). However, the reality is different, according to Sayer, Mercau, and Blanco (2013) teachers end up more confused than they were in the beginning. This because of not-well adapted teacher training programs. Most (if not all) the SLA research studied in Mexican Foreign Language Teacher Training (FLTT) programs have developed in English speaking countries and it is sometimes hard to find its immediate application in Mexican contexts (Quezada, 2013) which is why is needed to develop a carefully-designed and sustained program of on-going teacher training that responds to the professional development needs of their teachers.

### **The need for teacher training**

It is not surprising that the policies are directed to the student learning process rather than teacher learning. Students are the ones with the urgent need of learning English

and teachers are expected to know the language. However, the implementation of the PNIEB presents a tremendous demand for new classroom teachers, which is exceeding the available pool of qualified candidates (Collins & Pérez, 2013). Therefore, there is an urgent need to focus on teacher training and to organize teacher training efficiently in order to maximize the effects and make wise use of limited resources.

As stated before, teacher training was carried out, nevertheless, they have used the “one size fits all” approach which wasn't enough to successfully achieve the program objectives. Therefore, given that this approach does not seem adequate, I suggest training programs should take a differentiated approach, and be tailored to respond to their specific linguistic, pedagogical, and educational needs. Also, teachers do not only learn from what they are taught during their academic preparation and continuing education courses but also from their experiences lived during their teaching practices (Rodríguez, 2011) so this knowledge has to be taken into account at the moment of designing a training program.

Finally, to implement the PNIEB, administrators have focused on developing at least three areas: developing the curriculum, developing the materials, and developing teachers. Whereas the curriculum is developed by the national ministry and textbooks by publishers working with ministry guidelines, teacher training is the responsibility of local actors at the state level (IMCO, 2015, p. 21) so the following recommendations are addressed to them.

### **Contents**

Teacher learning programs could be confusing, Sayer, Mercau, and Blanco (2013) reported on their study *PNIEB Teachers' Profiles and Professional Development: A Needs Analysis* that most of its contents are taken from second language acquisition theories applied to foreign countries but they have been different to implement in Mexico. The following quote I took it from their study confirms that the contents reviewed on training must not be the most appropriate:

hasta marzo del 2011 me enviaron a un curso de capacitación que no son muy buenos, porque no me esclarecieron mis dudas, sino por el contrario creo que regresé más confundida, eso de tomar en cuenta los diversos environments y todos los demás aspectos era nuevo para mí (Sayer, Mercau, and Blanco, 2013, p.p. 1-16).

Shulman (1986) showed that what teachers should know to be able to do their jobs efficiently. To do so, they need to have three different kinds of knowledge: Content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and curricular knowledge.

Content knowledge refers to the subject area knowledge that the teacher possesses and how this knowledge is organized. Frequently this type of knowledge is referred to as linguistic competence and is broken down into knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse (Shulman, 1986). Pedagogical content knowledge, on the other hand, combines subject area knowledge with teaching skills or the knowledge of how to teach. Finally, curricular knowledge is the understanding of how the subject area fits with the educational program in which it is taught.

To define which contents needed to be addressed in teacher training, we first need to know the subjects to whom this training it is going to be delivered. In marketing, when it is intended to sell a new product, it is necessary that first, they define who the buyer is going to be and then direct all the advertisements and marketing research towards this market niche. If they do not define to whom they are selling, their sales might not be as high as they would be if they had addressed their product correctly. Something similar happens to training programs, the objective of the training is to improve performance (Bhat, 2013) to do so, we need first to know who our public is, which are their strengths as well as their weaknesses and, with that information, define the contents that need to be known to overcome these weaknesses as well as taking advantage of those strengths.

Likewise, it is worthy to take into account the communicative approach, as is the approach in which the syllabus and the whole program are based on. Accordingly, the contents taught must be directed to teaching following this approach by using

this same approach to do so. In this last part I am first, describing the current human capital and then I am concluding by selected topics that need to be taught according to the current program and the communicative approach.

### **Current English teacher profile**

According to Sayer, Mercau, and Blanco (2013), there are three main profiles of PNIEB teachers: (1) university-trained teachers who are graduates of a BA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (BA-TEFL or equivalent, usually called *Licenciatura en enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras*) from an autonomous public or private university, (2) normalistas who are graduates of the Normal School program to train secondary (equivalent of grades 7-9) public school English teachers, and (3) others who have English proficiency and a degree in a field outside of ELT. On the following lines, I am describing the three teacher profiles and their current needs to clarify which contents are going to be required to be taught on training programs.

#### *Profile 1: University BA-TEFL graduate*

In Mexico, there are different states where a teaching language degree is offered, for example Veracruz, Mexico City, Quintana Roo, Tamaulipas, Jalisco, or the State of Mexico (*Carreras y Licenciaturas en Licenciatura en Idiomas*, 2020). As a result, most of the current English teachers in elementary schools in Mexico have had this formation according to Sayer, Mercau, and Blanco (2013).

The main advantage university-trained teachers have is their level of English. Most BA-TEFL graduates have an equivalent of B2 level (about 550 TOEFL) or higher (UAQ, 2020; UAEH, 2020; UAEMex, 2020) which derives from curriculums mainly centered on English language and metalanguage. I have revised different study programs from these universities and students not only learn the English language but also develop a linguistic competence by studying phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse which translate to a competitive advantage that their normalistas peers do not have.

A second strength identified amongst university-trained teachers is their knowledge of contemporary approaches to teaching English as a foreign language, in particular, using communicative language teaching methodology. Those skills are really useful because the PNIEB program is based on a sociocultural approach that emphasizes social practices of language and represents a shift in thinking; Sayer, Mercau and Blanco (2013) confirm it by stating that for teachers with a strong foundation in communicative language teaching, with its emphasis on interaction and contextualized, meaningful opportunities to use the language, the socio-cultural focus of the PNIEB program does not represent a radical change of thinking. Briefly, the PNIEB program strongly mentions that the approach that teachers must use is communicative (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017) which is not a problem for BA-TEFL graduates because they know how to use this approach and can provide communicative lessons easily.

### Training needs

Despite the high knowledge of the English language, graduates from universities have little or no course content that prepares them for working with children in public primary school settings (Sayer, Mercau, & Blanco, 2013). When they first started teaching, they believed that the knowledge obtained from their teaching preparation was enough for teaching in real contexts (Rodríguez, 2011). However, the reality was different.

The second challenging area for BA-TEFL teachers is that they do not know how to work with children with special needs or children from rural areas which is why some techniques related to these cases must be taught. Finally, it should be noted that although high English proficiency and training in communicative language teaching methods were identified as two strengths of this group, teachers must have further training in these areas which not only keeps teachers updated on their matter but also this training will help them to excel it.

Having known the profile's weakness and strengths, I propose that coordinators segment their training so as to offer specific sessions for each of the three profiles;

this first profile, for instance, requires sessions which help teachers to work with big groups, classroom management and working with kids with special needs. I recommend, thus, offering these courses specifically to them so they can clarify their questions as well as learn new techniques to improve the quality of their class. Additionally, I recommend English language courses for the three profiles, but these courses have to be according to the language level of teachers. Some of them may need some vocabulary practice, some others pronunciation skills or grammar. Specifically, this profile has the advantage of knowing the metalanguage so, this last one could be optional. However, I strongly recommend them to enroll so they could polish their English language and practice their communicative skills with their colleagues.

### *Profile 2: Normalista*

The second PNIEB teacher profile found was the Normalista teachers. They receive this name because they have studied at “Escuelas normales” which are institutions in charge of teacher formation, however, there is no training program specifically for teaching English in primary schools (SEP, Secretaria de Educación Pública, 2018). Consequently, the PNIEB Normalista teachers have a formation on how to work with teenagers from the secondary level and they are not specialized in how to work with children.

Teachers with this profile have a huge advantage that BA-TEFL graduates do not have: pedagogic knowledge. The Normalista program is tightly connected to the public school system, and the curriculum is almost entirely geared towards public classrooms, graduates who are well equipped to confront the realities of public schools, and generally do not have the same classroom management and behavioral issues that other teachers face (Padilla González, 2014).

Also, they have usually studied courses in child psychology and development in addition to working with children with special needs (SEP, Secretaria de Educación Pública, 2018), which means they know which kind of problems children may have as well as how to help them get through them.

### Training needs

In contrast, the training needs they have been fully related to content knowledge; in comparison with their BA-TELF peers, normalistas do not have courses on English metalinguistic as rigorous as their BA-TELF colleagues, nor English proficiency. Sayer, Mercau, and Blanco (2013) report that most normal programs are weekend programs and students do not study English as a subject. The second training priority could be related to improving their teaching methodology. Having a constant training will help them become proficient in their jobs and as well as become able to give better results.

Once again, I recall the importance of segmenting the training, because while the BA-TELF Graduates need some pedagogic training, Normalistas need more English language training. It would be unnecessary to make them take sessions of how to work with big groups, for example, if they already know how to. For them would be more useful learning how to work with young learners (from 6 to 12 years old) because their specialization field is teenagers from secondary.

Additionally, they need to take English language training more than the other two profiles, because they do not have much foundation on it. The contents they should review on their training shall be more directed to the language and its phonetics, syntax, pragmatics, and discourse which not only will help them improve their level of English, but also to understand it, and thus, making easier for them to explain it to their students. Furthermore, they need to take a specific course which help them to adapt their lessons to the communicative approach. All these sessions need to be an example of how teaching English with the communicative approach so teachers could take them as a reference at the moment of planning and teaching to their groups.

### Profile 3: Another background

This last profile corresponds to teachers who do not have a previous teaching formation at all, they seem to be hired because of their good English language proficiency, and most have a certificate (such as the institutional TOEFL or any of



the Cambridge international tests). Many have a methodology short teacher training course known in Mexico as a “teacher’s certificate” (Sayer, Mercau, & Blanco, 2013).

### Training needs

Needless to say, their main strength is their proficiency in English which leads us to their most evident need: teaching formation, they lack preparation in English as a foreign language teaching methodology.

Like the first profile, the main advantage is a high language level and poor classroom management skills. I recommend, then, offering some sessions on how to work with children and children with special needs, in addition to a specific course for this segment about how to teach at all, because despite having the knowledge, not always is easier to transmit, explain and exemplify it. I strongly recommend a specific course for this segment on how to teach with the communicative approach because is the one required in the program. They could also take English language training sessions, as the other two profiles, to improve and update their knowledge as the other profiles.

In sum, even if most teachers require both content and pedagogic knowledge, they do not need it in the same amount. Teacher coordinators should identify which kind of teachers they have in their team and design training programs with a differentiated approach. This will both maximize the benefits of training for busy teachers and be the most cost-effective for under-resourced programs (Sayer, Mercau, & Blanco, 2013).

Finally, the contents that need to be addressed have to provide effective PNIEB teachers. Sayer, Mercau and Blanco (2013) argue that an effective PNIEB teacher will need three things: (1) a decent level of English proficiency, in particular oral language proficiency, (2) knowledge of effective teaching methods, including communicative and sociocultural approaches, and (3) the knowledge and disposition for working with children (with various capacities and needs) in public school settings so the contents addressed on training programs must be related to these needs.

## **Public: Teaching Children**

After analyzing the three different teacher profiles elementary schools have, another aspect that grabbed my attention was that, for English teachers, working with children is difficult. They consider that children behave in their classes; however, the children are not motivated to learn English (Rodríguez, 2011).

Student's lack of motivation could be derived from not enjoying their learning process, Castro (2013) mentions on her study *A pedagogical evaluation of textbooks used in Mexico's National English Program in Basic Education* that textbooks used on the learning process are not the most appropriate and are not standardized with the PNIEB content program at all. Fuller (1969) argues that students learn what they want to learn but they face difficulties with learning material that is not interesting for them. Another factor which affects their motivation might be related to the importance. Children may not have clear why they are learning the English language or what is the purpose of this subject in their life.

Either reason, lack of motivation is worrying because, according to Fuller (1969), "The motivation of the learner is generally conceded to influence his learning". Working with children requires the development of the teachers' imagination and creativeness, which are two difficult factors to develop and achieve in a class. It requires experience in working with kids, the use of the correct methodology, and the search for activities, games, and adequate material for kids (Rodríguez, 2011).

Castro (2013) proposes that for children to be motivated, teachers need to implement activities that are learner-centered. Here are six aspects she recommends considering at the moment of teaching English to children.

**1. Children can grasp meaning:** *Children "can understand what is being said to them even before they understand the individual words...it is part of human communication" (Halliwel, 1992, p. 3) (cited in Castro, 2013).*

**2. Children are creative in the use of limited language resources:** *Children make up words, grammatical forms, and concepts using their existing knowledge in order to find other ways of conveying meaning.*

**3. Children have the instinct for play and fun:** *Through their sense of fun and play, the children bring life to the language.*

**4. The role of imagination in children:** *Language teaching should be concerned with real life. However, imagination and fantasy cannot be left out in the search of reality in the classroom and textbooks.*

**5. Children learn when they are doing something that has an authentic purpose:** *One of the meanings of authenticity in the language is that there should be a reason for producing language that goes beyond practice. This means that the activity itself has to have an authentic function just as in the real world. For instance, language is used for clarifying, requesting, apologizing, criticizing convincing, explaining, inviting, praising, slandering, motivating, etc.*

**6. Children learn when they are involved in determining what and how they will learn:** *The main reasons why children should be taken into account when deciding what to learn and how to do it is because of interest and engagement increase. Students become more independent and responsible for their learning. (Castro Juárez, 2013, p.p. 1-21).*

By taking into consideration these aspects, teachers will improve the quality of their lessons because the class would be designed for young learners which have specific characteristics and ways for learning. As I mentioned before and affirmed by Gilmour (2016) it is easier and more profitable for children to learn on a class that is designed for them. Conversely, expecting them to pay attention for extended periods in a teacher-centered lesson only leads to frustration and behavioral issues (Gilmour, 2016). Being taught how to use the student-centered lessons with the communicative approach on an English lesson shall be the third matter addressed on teacher training and if it is possible with examples. In other words, when teachers are on training, a professional shall teach them how to include activities for children by exemplifying with themselves, so it be clearer for teachers how to do so.

Finally, the current syllabus sets out several pedagogic principles which guide obligatory education. These principles follow constructivist thinking which is rooted in several aspects of Piaget and Vygotsky's cognitive theories. From Piaget, we learn actively, create schemes, assimilate, and accommodate all forms of science, etc. From Vygotsky, we get social constructivism, group work, internships, and so on

(Suhendi & Purwarno, 2018). This means that the teacher will give the main idea then the students will get the details. On the following chart I am describing the first 6 principles as well as its relationship with this theory and a brief strategy that could be followed in teaching young learners.

### **Proposal of addressing the PNIEB's pedagogical principles on teacher training**

<b>PRONI's Pedagogical Principle</b>	<b>Relationship with the cognitive learning theory</b>	<b>Strategy of implementation with young learners and communicative approach</b>
<p><b>Put the student and his learning at the center of the educational process</b></p>	<p>In student centered classrooms, teachers avoid transmissions of knowledge directly. Students are provided opportunities to learn through trying "to make sense of what they are learning by relating it to prior knowledge and by discussing it with others" (Brophy, 1999).</p>	<p>As elementary school groups are around 30-45 students, it might be hard to listen to each student participate in a 50-minute session. Therefore, teachers should use teamwork as its best ally. For example, he could give students a puzzle, so they solve it in teams, or perhaps a board game and they need to play and comment it using only the target language. This type of exercise allows not only to enhance students' communication skills but also to experiment with the peer-learning approach, which is useful in strengthening relationships among students (Sanako Blog, 2021).</p> <p>Another popular activity is role playing. So perhaps the teacher could provide some parts and students decide the setting or the situation. They shall work in teams to create the story (15 to 20 minutes of class) and finally present it to their classmates during the second half of the class. Again, every activity needs to be done in the target language and it is essential that teachers supervise it and, at the same time help students with vocabulary questions they may have (the classic "How do you say _____ in English").</p> <p>During teacher training sessions could be shown how to implement teamwork by profiting as much as time as possible.</p>

<p><b>Take in consideration students' previous knowledge</b></p>	<p>This concept highlighted by Jean Piaget, taken up by Gaston Bachelard (1993) is based on the fact that any individual, even very young, does not need to have studied a subject to get an idea of it and to explain the world which it surrounds, he uses the explanatory models he has.</p>	<p>I recommend here that teachers make students justify their answers. For example, if they are working on their textbook, it should be useful that students try to explain why they choose one option instead of another. This justification could be mentioned at the moment of checking their answers. Teacher training, thus, has to give teachers the strategies for the self-assessment, so students could be able to identify their mistakes taking the previous knowledge as a reference.</p>
<p><b>Offer accompaniment to learning</b></p>	<p>For Henri Wallon (1999), the child is indeed a fundamentally social being, evolving in a given environment and in a given situation. His experience is built in an environment that is both physical and social. He develops his intelligence through the interactions he has with the adults around him and guide him. In the absence of such a relationship, the child may suffer from problems with reasoning, motivation, and attachment.</p>	<p>It might sound contradictive making the class student-centered and offering companion. However, the main weakness in communicative approach is error correction and lack of feedback. Both require a different person and not just the student himself. They need a teacher.</p> <p>The role of the English language teacher in the classroom is to support and encourage students to enhance their communication skills but does not act as a classroom controller who manages or directs everything inside the classroom (Dalala, 2019).</p> <p>He should work as a helper to give guidance and advice when is needed (Wei, 2010). Adopting such a role in the classroom would actively empower students' language learning and give them confidence in themselves.</p> <p>Nevertheless, as the communicative approach lacks error correction and there is not a concrete way to give feedback, teacher training has to give them strategies on both: how to be a class facilitator rather than a controller and how to give adequate error correction and feedback in a way that works even if they're teaching following the communicative approach.</p>
		<p>Every time that we register on a new social media account such as Pinterest, they always ask us about our preferences while signing up. It is advisable then</p>

<p><b>Knowing the students' interests</b></p>	<p>According to Piaget's theory, if the contents approached in a discipline are not adapted to the child's way of thinking, he will not be able to grasp them and appropriate them because he will not yet have mental operations adequate (Vanthier, 2009).</p>	<p>that teachers do the same in their lessons. On the first day they could provide a checklist of different topics that could be interesting for students so they can check, and even add their own options about their favorite topics. Also, a teacher training session could be used to explain how to adapt these topics to the contents that shall be reviewed according to the syllabus.</p>
<p><b>Stimulate the intrinsic motivation of the student</b></p>	<p>According to Vanthier (2009) the intrinsic motivation provided by the pleasure of carrying out a task and of perceiving oneself as a being capable of thinking, gift of growing up, are sure and effective means to introduce a dynamic.</p>	<p>The best way to motivate students is by showing them that they can do whatever they pursue. By and large it is believed that we need to offer a recompense to students, so they work but the reality is different. To encourage this intrinsic motivation, learning activities must be presented with the constant concern of helping young learners to identify what they are learning. I recommend teachers not to be overbearing all the time, instead, occasionally ask your students how to do something, so they can explain, understand, and find sense to all these activities they are required to do.</p>
<p><b>Knowing the social nature of knowledge</b></p>	<p>Social interaction is irreplaceable in the construction of knowledge. For this reason, it is essential to foster collaboration and foster environments in which group work is central (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017, p. 120). For L.S Vygotsky (1985), language is a social communication tool which serves to establish relationships between individuals. In other words, it is the interaction between the child and a stimulating and caring environment that is the engine of language acquisition. You do not learn to develop your language on your own, language learning is anchored in</p>	<p>A language can not only be learnt by reading the textbook and listening to the teacher. Traditionally, a language was just introduced by lessons entirely based on textbooks and teacher talking. Nowadays, it must be put in place so that students can really profit it. To do so, teachers have to be creative enough to design activities in which students can interact with each other. Once again, teacher training needs to address the adaptation of the current materials so they could be a matter of interaction. For example, if my topic is "clothing" students could work in teams of three and one of them looks for a photo and describe the clothes the people are wearing, and his partners have to look at the photos all over their book to find it. In this way, we are adapting the textbook making it a communicative resource as well as a tool that helps students to practice their speaking. Teacher training</p>

	communication situations constructed by the child's privileged partners.	could provide ideas such as this one to implement on different topics.
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Fig. 5 Pedagogical principles and its addressing on teacher training. Source: Author's own creation

## Recommendations and conclusions

A program could not meet its objectives easily if it is experiencing issues on its value chain. However, this is the reason why the actors involved with it are important. There are four main intermediaries on students' learning process: teacher, parents, authorities, and students themselves. Whether students are the ones to whom this program is addressed, teachers and authorities have most of the responsibility for it to happen, the other half corresponds to parents and students themselves. At the moment of the learning process, there are both internal and external factors that either help or difficult it. Throughout this paper I have listed the main elements that intervene in the learning process, however the most important is the teacher.

Teachers are the first contact that students have with the English language, and it depends on them that either student loves the language or totally hate it. Offering dynamic English sessions would incentivize students to keep learning the English language. Nevertheless, the reality is different, whether there are many factors which convey on making English hard to be learnt, most of them could be countered by a good English teaching practice.

Sadly, teachers can't know it all, and if they think so, they should think about that again. Teachers, besides being professional guides and experts, they are employees and it's the job of their employer to make them try their best, especially on a noble task as teaching to children. Teachers, thus need to continue their formation in order to get updated on new techniques and improve the current skills they already have in both, language level and pedagogic skills and the best way to do it is through training programs.

What I recommend in this paper is that courses offered on these training programs shall be specifically tailored to the needs of teachers to maximize their benefits and use the limited resources more wisely. For example, those teachers who struggle working with large groups will benefit from workshops focusing on this kind of matter or methodology courses, but this course would not be necessary for a teacher who has no problem with. They, on the other hand, could take a session for working with young learners or whichever matter they have not exceeded yet.

The literature review indicated most teachers feel they need help with classroom management and upgrade their English level so, these shall be the main content on these training programs. However, we would also note that the training should be supported by the administration. Teachers need to be given the time and resources to participate in training

Moreover, whereas it is believed that the responsibility for the learning process is the teachers', authorities have an impact as well, they are the ones who create the policies which have to be adequate to the current Mexican context, also they need to provide their team (the teachers) the necessary tools to achieve the objectives. If not, the program would be a failure. By facilitating teachers to take part in training programs will increase both teacher productivity and motivation. Working to create a bilingual education requires that teachers, authorities, and parents work hand in hand, so authorities have to make sure that teachers are not left alone trying to reach this objective, on the contrary, they need to help them by providing physical, intellectual and money resources needed.

According to Rodríguez (2007) (cited on Mijangos-Guzzardo, 2008), "in recent years the people of Mexico have had the perception that the nation's educational system is expensive, dysfunctional and very corrupt". Flores-Crespo (2007) states that considerable interrelated problems continue to plague the educational system, keeping real change from happening but I am still an optimist. If we can change the system from the core (our students and teachers) this problem will disappear on an ongoing basis.



Moreover, our current government has the objective of strengthen public schools of preschool, elementary school, general and technical secondary schools targeted and / or selected by the Local Educative Authority to teach a foreign language (English), by establishing technical and pedagogical conditions, benefiting public schools of Basic organization education, multi-grade, indigenous, regular or full-time schedule (DOF, Diario Oficial de la federación, 2019). Nonetheless, despite having too much work to do to meet this objective as well as the darker side of all the deficiencies English on public elementary schools may have, I also realized that there are several bright ideas brought forth and implemented by creative and well-equipped teachers. By having them on our side and updating their knowledge as much as possible, there really will be a significant change in English teaching in elementary schools in Mexico.

#### *Directions for Further Research*

Despite the great amount of research on our current English teaching policies, there seems to be ample need for research on various features of foreign language education in terms of how it could be improved in the short term. On this project I briefly described the teacher training as a solution, however, more research could be made according to the type of contents that have to be addressed on these programs as well as an adequate duration for them.

To further illustrate, a particular research initiative could examine which are the contents that are addressed on the current training programs and compare if they are having a positive impact on English teachers' lessons as well as the students' learning. This is particularly relevant in the light of meeting the program objectives. A study of this nature may contribute to validate my proposal that if these programs are tailored to teacher's needs; it would cause a significant change in how students learn English as well as their motivation.

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